

Buckbeak's Birthday

by sinbad

Friendship story between Sirius and Buckbeak.

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Authors Notes: I do not own Harry Potter. I make no money from this story. This story was written by my mother and me and is posted to celebrate my children's birthdays. Thank you to my beta Charmed Force who takes my flights of fancy and makes them legible.

"I understand, Sirius, that it is a human custom to observe the anniversary of one's birth by eating special foods and accepting good wishes and gifts from friends."

Sirius Black smiled at his traveling companion. The young male Hippogriff, formerly known as Buckbeak, was now called "Witherwings". "That's true, Witherwings. I take it today is your birthday? Would you like me to bake you a birthday cake? How many candles should it have?"

"Hippogriffs don't pay much attention to such things. One's dam may remember the date, but nobody else cares not even the one having a birthday. But if my calculations are correct, tomorrow is my birthday. You can keep the cake, Sirius. And no feathered creature likes candles. But it would be pleasant to sleep on a comfortable cushion again. And a nice, juicy calf or lamb would be a fine way to celebrate. Truly, I am tired of fish and rabbits. I am a First Strike Scout of the Death's Head Mountain clan, not a feline familiar. And it takes a lot of energy to fly around with a big human lummo on my back."

Sirius chuckled at the resigned sigh from the Hippogriff, then sighed himself. Witherwings had a valid point. Although he could subsist on grains, he really needed extra protein to give him energy for his extended flying. As a man, Sirius was perfectly content with a vegetarian diet. But as a canine, he craved raw, bloody meat and crunchy bones. Frowning, he again wondered about the possibility of he and Witherwings working together to bring down large game. Teamwork came naturally to Sirius, both as man and canine. Witherwings, however, was strictly a solitary hunter and had little tolerance for the habits of other species. Their unlikely partnership survived only because of their mutual peril and dislike of Lucius Malfoy.

Sirius' face darkened as he considered survival in general. They had fled far and fast, taking only some inadequate food provisions with them. They had supplemented the journey rations with whatever they could find or catch, but they were in a chancy position. Concerned, Sirius studied his companion. The Hippogriff was way too thin, and his feathers no longer had a healthy sheen. Sirius remembered Witherwings was taking longer and longer rests between flights.

The two friends reclined on a grassy knoll, facing the little farm market town in the valley below. Behind them were the foothills of a jagged mountain range. Watching the wistful Hippogriff idly groom himself, it occurred to Sirius he had many questions about his formidable friend, and now might be a good time to finally get some answers.

"Witherwings or should I say Buckbeak how did you come to be in the care of Hagrid? Why did you never let anyone know you're perfectly capable of speaking human language, even if you have a rather strange accent? You could have made your escape without my help, so why did you rescue me? You know my story, but I have no idea how it is you come to be here now."

Witherwings turned to Sirius, his huge golden eyes glowing in the dusk. "Ah, my friend, that's a long story. But I'll tell you, if you really want to know."

Two summers ago, I was a young, half-trained Scout. I ran afoul of an evil wizard named Rhadaman. For pleasure and profit, he trapped many creatures, both magical and muggle, and tortured and killed most of them. Others, once their spirit was broken (he called it "tamed" or "trained") he sold to other, like minded humans.

I was scouting in the lower slopes of Death's Head Mountain when I heard the scream of a distressed fox. I investigated and found the poor creature caught in a steel trap, her fore paw clamped tight in metal teeth. She was a young vixen, and her terrified kits were huddled under a nearby bush. I had heard of this abominable practice and knew that once the owner of the trap found her, she would be killed, her kits orphaned and helpless, left to die.

The steel trap was no match for my talons. I freed the vixen, but while she made her escape, I decided to finish destroying the trap and check the area for any more horrors. Engrossed in my investigations, I never heard that foul sneak come up behind me. Suddenly I was stunned, unable to move or even call for help. I learned later it is called the Stunning Spell. That's a good name for it, as I was truly stupefied.

When I finally came to full consciousness again, I found myself bound with chains of steel and spell. Rhadaman gloated openly at me. He said I was a rare prize and many wizards would pay well to have a Hippogriff enslaved to obey.

Rhadaman started "training" me right away. He starved and tortured me, trying to break my spirit. But that loathsome man never succeeded. I was weak, sick, and suffered the effects of injuries inflicted on every part of my body. My wing feathers had been pulled out, my equine body whipped and burned, my talons clipped to the quick. I had been held captive in a cage so small I couldn't even stretch my wings and, the worst indignity of all, I was hooded like a brainless falcon. But my hatred kept me strong, and I lived in hope that I would someday disembowel that foul-smelling, disgusting son of a diseased ape.

Finally, the Great Winged One smiled on me. My so-called "owner" complained of my stupidity and stubbornness in the Hogshead while Hagrid was present. Hagrid paid an exorbitant price for me out of the kindness of his heart and took me to his home, and treated me like a friend.

It was Hagrid who named me Buckbeak. A stupid name with no meaning I can fathom, but it pleased Hagrid, so I answered to it. Before we escaped, Dumbledore gave me the name Witherwings. He said I needed a new identity and this name described me better. I agree. Even now, sometimes I wonder whether my wings will take me next.

Getting back to my rescue: Hagrid knew I could understand his words and was capable of speaking. He explained that I was his guest until I was strong enough to go home again. He asked me to pretend I was no more than a dumb animal, as it would be a lot easier for him to protect me from curious or malicious persons if I was perceived as his property. After the humiliation and pain I had already suffered, I was not particularly disturbed to be considered a lower life form. I agreed and gave him my word of honor.

So began some very happy days. At first, all I did was eat and sleep. But gradually all the hurts healed, helped along by a few spells by kindly old Dumbledore. I'll never forget the day I spread my wings again and flew, galloping over the clouds.

I continued my role of magical but unintelligent beast. Hagrid and I knew that soon I would be able to fly home again. How my heart sang at the thought of rejoining my clan! I remembered the beauty of my mountain home, the smell of the cold, clean air of the high reaches, the peace and tranquility of my own little aerie, the glory of flying wingtip formation with the other scouts. I daydreamed about the joy of my sire and dam when again they saw me. I loved Hagrid and was grateful to him, but I couldn't wait to regain my strength so I could leave. Hagrid understood my heart. I hope the Great Winged One smiles on him and blesses him, as he is a good friend to all creatures.

Alas, it seems my fate is never to be happy for long. I was ready to leave and, indeed, would have already gone if Hagrid hadn't asked me to do him a small favor. He was so proud of being a teacher of young wizards and witches and so eager to show off a Hippogriff, a creature these young ones had never before seen. How could I refuse? I owed him so much, and this was such a small favor.

And so came that ill-omened day. I rather liked young Harry Potter, who was polite in spite of his fear. That lad should have been born a Hippogriff. It took him only a few seconds to relax, then really enjoy our little test flight. I could feel his body adjust to the air currents and balance to help me fly better.

But then Draco Malfoy approached. His smell reminded me of that evil wizard who abused me. I didn't like him, and I didn't like his attitude. He's an arrogant, cruel hearted beast, Sirius. He's a coward and a bully, and I regret I didn't snap off the head of that intolerably impertinent little reptile. Mark my words, someday the whole wizarding world will wish I had made an end of him.

For Hagrid's sake, I merely rebuffed him. But the brat set up such a howl, you would have thought I'd half killed him."

I remember those fools from the Ministry. True to my word, I did not condescend to speak to them. I let Hagrid speak for me, keeping to my role of dumb brute. I think now it would have been better if I had spoken in my own defense."

Witherwings' eyes clouded, and he paused for a few moments. Sirius could see his friend was confused and troubled.

"Sirius, that day we took flight. I still have nightmares about a tall man wearing a black hood and carrying an ax. Sirius, how is it possible I remember him beheading me? Here I am, alive and well, but somehow I remember him cutting off my head. I can see Hagrid weeping. And somehow I know there's a human girl involved in this, that she's the one who saved my life. It doesn't make sense, but I can't dismiss it. Do you have any ideas?"

Sirius rubbed his forehead. "I think little Hermione Granger was fiddling with time. I think she and my godson, Harry Potter, saved us both. I don't know exactly what jiggery pokery they pulled, but I'm pretty sure we both owe them our gratitude."

"Changing time lines is a dangerous thing, Sirius. But I don't think we should complain about it in this case."

"That answers some questions, Witherwings, but not all. Why did you consent to carry me away?"

"That's easy. Dumbledore asked me to bring you along."

Witherwings yawned and stretched his wings, then curled up comfortably. "I think we've gone as far as we can for now. We'll sleep until the moon is high, then fly again. My home is only a day's flight away. I should be able to make it with a rest period in the middle of the day. We'll be very hungry and tired when we arrive, but my clan will provide us with food and shelter. In a few days, I'll be able to hunt for myself again. Then I'll fly you to the other side of the mountains. Surely you'll find a safe haven there."

"That sounds like a good plan to me, my fine feathered friend. We haven't had much of a supper, but let's get a good night's sleep at least. Tomorrow will be busy for both of us."

Witherwings tucked his head under a wing and promptly fell asleep. Sirius leaned back against a tree trunk and thought about birthday wishes and the nature of friendship.

The following morning, Witherwings awoke refreshed and eager to be on his way. He looked for Sirius and found to his surprise Sirius was nowhere in sight. Nor could Witherwings smell or hear any trace of him. Worried, Witherwings cast about, trying to find some clue. He noted that his friend's travelling cloak, money belt, and food bag were still lying under the tree. Witherwings walked to the small creek, thinking Sirius had gone for some fresh water. All he found were some rather large paw prints.

Now even more worried, Witherwings wondered what Sirius was doing. He had gone off in his dog shape, which meant he wanted to travel far and fast. But if Sirius was in such a hurry to go someplace, why didn't he ask Witherwings to fly him there? Sirius was fast as a dog, but couldn't hope to match the speed of a Hippogriff's flight.

This didn't make sense. If Sirius had gone to town for some reason, he would have brought both his cloak and money belt. Witherwings wondered if Sirius was off chasing rabbits, hoping to catch a good breakfast. Sirius was neither lucky nor skilful as a hunter in either shape, but there was a slightly better chance of getting some small game in his dog form. But he shouldn't have been so far away that no trace of him could be found. The morning was getting on, and they should already be on their way.

Witherwings took a deep breath, then went back to his bushy nest and lay down. He couldn't follow Sirius. It appeared Sirius had deliberately covered his tracks; only the Great Winged One knew why. Clearly, he intended to return. As a man, he would need the cloak and money belt and, in either form, the contents of the food bag.

Witherwings sighed, thought some more, then made a plan. He would wait at least until the following day for his friend to return. He would eat most of the food, leaving enough to refresh Sirius in case he returned hungry and empty-handed. He would drink deeply and sleep most of the day away, preparing himself for an extended flight. He would exercise patience and self-discipline, and stop fretting over unpleasant possibilities. If Sirius did not return with food by sunset, Witherwings would hunt or steal food, then start flying a circular pattern, trying to find his wayward partner. Further than that, he made no plans. He would hope for luck or inspiration.

Having resolved the situation to his own satisfaction, Witherwings ate most of the food, then went down to the creek and drank deeply. Satisfied, he went back to his nest, pulled some fresh branches in and then settled down for a long nap.

The setting sun was putting on a brilliant display when Witherwings woke. There still was no sign of Sirius. Hungry again, Witherwings eyed the food bag longingly, but decided to leave it. Perhaps some fish from the creek would tide him over.

Suddenly there was a loud roar of beating wings. Witherwings quickly scampered under cover of the trees. Looking anxiously upward, Witherwings was amazed to see a dozen Hippogriffs winging in, circling for descent. And what was even more astonishing was the sight of a grinning Sirius Black alighting from his own Scout Leader's back!

Sirius hugged his friend, and Scout Leader approached, angling his wings in a friendly greeting. "Moon Dancer, your sire and dam are on their way, bringing many things you will be glad to have, especially good food. We will eat and tell each other all that has passed since last we met. We all leave at dawn to return to our Death Head's Mountain. You're safe now, my young friend, and your human friend is welcome to stay with us as long as he wishes."

Witherwings, whose true name was Moon Dancer, bowed deeply in respect. "Scout Leader, my heart is too full for words. I thank you for the great honor you do me and for your kindness to my friend. How did you find us?"

"Your human friend ran in his dog shape all the way to the lower reaches, then howled loudly enough to crumble the bones of our ancestors until a scout flew down to investigate. Truly, he is brave and lucky. Cloud Feather would have made short work of him, but your friend can talk fast. He told us of your plight and begged us to come help. He humbly asked that your sire and dam and all the scouts come here. He said something very strange. He said this was a "surprise party".

Just then Moon Dancer's sire and dam landed. Moon Dancer's dam had a beautiful cushion strapped to her back, along with a huge food bag. Moon Dancer couldn't help but notice another huge food bag strapped to his sire's back. Overjoyed to see his parents, Moon Dancer ran to them, wings wide.

Hours later, under the light of a full moon, Moon Dancer lay in luxury on the soft cushion his dam had presented to him. The other Hippogriffs reclined comfortably on cushions or bushes. They would soon fall asleep.

Suddenly, Meadow Lark, Moon Dancer's dam, sat bolt upright. "Great Sky Father, I forgot! And your friend said it was so important I should say this! I was supposed to say it as soon as I landed, but I was so happy to see you, I forgot. Oh, oh, I'm so sorry if I ruined everything!"

Moon Dancer looked at her, puzzled. "What are you talking about, Mother?"

"Why, Sirius told me to say this: "Surprise! Happy Birthday!"