

Henri "Hurricane" Dawson: The Soldier Who Can't Stop Moving

Introduction: A Name Earned in Fire

They didn't call him Hurricane in Harlem. That name came later, somewhere in the mud of the Argonne, when a corporal with a Lewis Gun and a talent for holding the line earned himself a nickname the way soldiers always do through the men who watched him do it. Henri Dawson carries that name now the way he carries everything else from the war: close, and without much choice in the matter.

Henri is a Corporal in the 369th Infantry Regiment, the Harlem Hellfighters and a Lewis Gunner, part of a machine gun team built for mobility and aggression. But the war didn't just make him a soldier. Somewhere in the trenches, between the worst humanity had to offer, he glimpsed something else too - a hint of a wider, stranger world hiding just past the edge of the map. He came home changed twice over, and he hasn't found a reason to stand still since.

The Family Behind the Man

Ezekiel: The Porter Who Rode the Rails

Henri's father, Ezekiel Dawson, was one of the first Black railroad men in the brotherhood a Pullman Porter who spent long hours on the trains, bringing home stories of a world beyond 135th Street. Ezekiel taught his son duty, discipline, and pride, but also something quieter and more dangerous: a healthy distrust of the people in charge. *"A man's worth ain't in his pocket, son. It's in his backbone,"* he'd say a lesson Henri never quite let go of, in the trenches or after.

Ruth: The Voice That Carried Faith

His mother, Ruth Dawson, was a seamstress and church choir leader, the emotional anchor of the family. She sewed uniforms for the coloured troops during the war, humming spirituals over the machine, telling Henri, *"You fight for a country that don't love you back. But you fight anyway."* It was Ruth who gave Henri his faith, his music, and his sense that a story sung, sewn, or simply lived was worth telling properly.

Josephine: The Sister Who Kept Him Grounded

Five years younger, Josephine "Jo" Dawson is Henri's fierce, book-smart little sister, and arguably his moral compass. While Henri was overseas, Jo was fighting her own battle becoming one of the first Black women to attend City College of New York. Her letters kept him grounded through the worst of it, and she's the reason he says he came back alive at all. Now a schoolteacher in Harlem, she gets postcards from every strange corner of the world Henri passes through, along with a running argument neither of them will ever quite finish: *"You ain't still chasing ghosts, Henri. You survived the war. Now come home."*

Henri's World: War, Love, and the Road Beyond

Why He Enlisted

Henri signed up in 1917, at twenty years old, for three reasons that all still make sense to him. First, to prove something after a lifetime of hearing that "coloured men ain't fit to fight," the all-Black 369th, with its own Black officers, was his chance to answer that in person. Second, for Jo a Pullman Porter's wages weren't enough to send a sister to college, and Army pay, meagre as it was, would help close the gap. And third, plainly: adventure. Harlem was home, but the world was bigger than 135th Street, and Henri had itchy feet even before the war gave him somewhere to point them. The irony, of course, is that he got far more than he bargained for. The Argonne Forest showed him a world stranger than anything he'd imagined signing up for.

Love & Loss: Maeve

Henri was engaged once, to Maeve O'Connor, an Irish-American nurse he met in France. She patched up his wounds — the ones that showed, and the ones that didn't — and never once flinched from his nightmares. Then, weeks before the armistice, Maeve died in the 1918 flu pandemic. Henri still wears her locket around his neck, a photograph of the two of them in Paris tucked inside. Her death hardened something in him. He doesn't talk about love anymore, but he keeps moving instead — as though stopping is the one thing he genuinely can't survive. Jo has her own read on it, delivered without much mercy: *"You ain't fooling nobody, Henri. You just scared to stay still."*

The Guide's Life

These days, Henri guides not for the money, though he won't turn it down, but because he owes it to the men who never made it home to see anything past the Western Front. He's haunted, not broken, and the memory of his brothers-in-arms is what pushes him to make the world a little safer and a little brighter, even if it's only for a handful of people at a time. He's recklessly curious by nature, drawn to jazz clubs and ancient ruins and cursed artefacts with the same appetite, and the war left him with tactics, instincts, and an unshakeable read on people exactly the kind of guide you want standing next to you when things go wrong.

Conflict and Growth: Chapters in Henri's Story

The Argonne Forest

The war was supposed to be the worst thing Henri would ever face. Instead, somewhere in the smoke and the wire, he saw something that didn't belong to any war he understood — the first sign that the world held horrors that had nothing to do with Germany or trenches at all. He came home with medals and a machine gun he wasn't supposed to keep, but the real souvenir was the certainty that the mud hides more than bodies.

Maeve's Locket

The locket is the one thing Henri never puts down. It isn't sentiment so much as ballast proof that once, briefly, he had something worth staying still for. He doesn't open it often. He doesn't need to.

The Jazz Club Dream

Underneath the guiding, the guns, and the restlessness, Henri carries a quieter plan he's not ready to admit to yet: one day, he wants to open a jazz club back in Harlem, somewhere Jo can teach kids and veterans alike can come to find some peace. It's the one future he lets himself picture he just doesn't believe he's earned the right to stop moving long enough to build it.

The Man Who Can't Stop Fighting

Henri is more than a corporal with a Lewis Gun. He's a man caught between two wars the one that ended in 1918, and the one he never quite stopped fighting inside himself. He's duty and recklessness in the same breath, faith and grief in the same locket, a soldier who came home and found he couldn't sit still, and a guide who's genuinely searching for something even he can't name yet.

Henri knows the best stories, like the worst horrors, are usually hiding in plain sight in a father's calloused hands, a mother's spirituals, a sister's unanswered letters, a locket that never gets opened, a gun he was never supposed to keep. He's not fighting for medals anymore. He's fighting, quietly, for the men who didn't get to come home and for the chance that somewhere out past the next jungle clearing or the next lost city, he'll finally find something worth standing still for.



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