“What’s best for me and mine, and what’s fair for everyone else.” The father of my second life told me to keep those words close. Even back in my first one, I’d been a zero or one hundred kinda girl — those words defined my life, this time around.

Probably for the best, really. My father’s name was Arthur Weasley, and I was born in a universe where the Boy Who Lived wasn’t guaranteed to win. Looks like I had to pick up the slack, yeah?
Chapter 1

Oh god, I’m actually doing this. I wrote 35 chapters of the first draft in about a month and a half, then gave up. Then, my AMAZING friend Aster read it and told me that if I didn’t continue, she’d cry. Basically. So… here’s the rewrite! Here we go… Time for my take on the infamous HP SIOC genre…

WARNINGS! female SIOC, language, mature content, violence and gore, OOC, AU, very cliché content, HELLA self-indulgent, etc. Spelling and grammar errors literally everywhere. All that good stuff.

10.15.19 NOTE: this fic is also currently being translated to Portuguese

... 

Blindness.

Ice flooding my throat, choking out everything that was — because, honestly, I didn’t even realize I was warm before until it was suddenly gone — and surrounding me, sharp and biting. Intense pain, my bones felt like they were being crushed, and a humming all around me that intensified. I didn’t even realize that it was there, just like the warmth, until it was too much. Everything was too much...

(It hurts!)

I screamed.

Are my senses stupidly slow or something today? I thought, because I didn’t realize until I was screaming that someone else was, too.

And the humming, and low murmuring, assaulted my ears as tears did the same to my eyes. I couldn’t open my eyes for some reason, and it made me scream more because apparently I couldn’t control myself properly, either.

(It hurts!)

Noise.

The screaming of the other stopped, so it was only me. But that stopped, too, when I heard something soothing. It wasn’t as pretty as the humming around me — soft and quiet and, really, barely there — but it was familiar, and with how fucking weird this all was, I craved something familiar. So I quieted down, clamping down some internal urge to keep wailing my head off, and
was instantly rewarded with warmth all around me. A different kind of warmth, I think, but it was as close to the before that I would probably ever get, so I let out a sigh of content that I felt all the way down to my bones.

Okay, this is better. It hurts like a bitch, but this is much better...

Something grazed my cheek — large and rough-textured — and I frowned, wishing I could see.

I didn’t like not-seeing. Considering the last thing I remember seeing with my own eyes as my death, I really didn’t like whatever the fuck this was.

Purgatory? Because if this was hell, I’d think that the intense pain would be more… long-lasting. And if this was heaven, I wouldn’t be in pain in the first place, right? And… Well, I honestly didn’t know any other terms for other religions’ ideas of the afterlife. Valhalla was out, since even I knew that that place was for warriors, and it wasn’t extremely warrior-like to be killed in some stupid-fuck car accident. Nirvana? No, it couldn’t have been… Nirvana was for enlightened people or something, and I was anything but enlightened. I couldn’t even get through high school without anti-depression medication, there was no way I was “enlightened”. OH! Wait, there was one more! Limbo was a thing, right? In some religion, it was like…

Fuck, I didn’t even know.

Dying sucks. I thought, sighing. But at least the music’s nice.

It was to that strange humming — all sorts of soft songs, unrecognizable, layered on top of each other and blending strangely but not badly — that I began to drift off, into whatever version of sleep there was after one died.

...  

Black and white blurs.

My eyes opened and that’s all I could see. The world was made of blobs of grey and black, white shining in my eyes sometimes and making me cringe. I didn’t experience any more intense bouts of pain or cold anymore, though, so maybe I passed some sort of test? And the music had gotten easier to hear, and sometimes I could pinpoint where its source was; different humming got louder depending on where it drifted by, usually all of it above me or sometimes besides me. If the humming was an indication of some sort of after-life ghostie-angel-thing, then I was learning to recognize them (there were four I knew very well, three of them much stronger than the fourth). And there was always one present, enough that I sometimes forgot about it — that’s how soft and subtle the humming was, but being dead, I could only really spend my time listening for it.

Warmth and cool alternated, touching me randomly; really, this entire after-life shit was random. Random fucking humming, random sensations of touch, random shapes dancing across my eyes — not that I had any physical body anymore, right? — and random… Well, a random after-life. This wasn’t what I learned in those fucking religion classes I’d been forced to take as a kid.

It might disappoint some people, if they knew that no version of the after-life was quite correct, I thought pityingly.

But as much as a dead person could sleep and be awake, the random, what-the-fuck-is-this-crap-
that I can’t explain shit only began when I was sleeping.

All the more familiar stuff, I guess, started up when I went to “sleep”.

(It was sad that I thought the “dreams” were more normal than the “awakeness”)

I’d… see things.

Color, for one. Strangers, sometimes. Different things. Like I was watching a T.V. that couldn’t decided what channel to stay on, a T.V. that sharpened and distorted and fogged at random intervals, blurring things from me but showing me visions of… something — of everything — at the whim of something as capricious as the weather.

I saw a girl with pale skin and hair the color of blood. She ran through fields with overgrown grass, hands running along the soft fibers of yellowing-green, laughter like bells. Woodland surrounded her field, a blurry building towering in the background. A creek ran through the woods near, shining with twilight.

Then I saw the deep blue sea, a pod of gigantic shapes — Whales, I recognized — traveling together. Their rumbling and high-pitched whines melded together like songs, and I watched as their tunes changed: newcalfdangerlovelovehomehelp-

Dark-colored swallowtail butterflies — hundreds of them — swarmed a figure, and I could only see a flash of dark crimson hair before the vision blurred. Then there was a towering mountain, mocking the figures below it, white teeth ripping at fur jackets and shivering frames. The snow was unforgiving, and it buried everything. And then green sprouted from the frozen earth, roots grew, weak stem to young bark to ringed, ringed tree that towered and didn’t mock. Rain in the desert, wind in the valley, a stumbling woman on the sidewalk being helped up with good-natured laughter.

A woman held a baby awkwardly (She’s not used to it, she can’t be.) and her dark blonde hair fell over her eyes, the background blurred, the baby blue-eyed. She sniffled, the baby smiled, and the more the child laughed the more the woman cried.

Green lights flashed and people died. Their bodies went still, eyes wide with surprise and skin cooling to the touch as time passed. Sometimes people cried over them, sometimes they were buried emotionlessly.

Roses bloomed over months and months, red and yellow and white and pink and all sorts of colors, dark stems and pale thorns of warning.

The sailboat was a dot of red and white in the blue. The whales nudged the boat, the companion in the water, and the boy and his father with their bright orange vests laughed at the sight. Their song was welcoming: hellocuriouswhowhodanger?nonogoodyeshellohello!

Shadows with masks of bone towered over the night, laughing maliciously. There was death in their footsteps. The moon made their masks glow, and the stars shivered as they were somehow flying through the sky with them-

Blink.

And then the “awakeness” took over, and I was seeing shapeless forms of grey and black with flashes of white.

Maybe these black and white blurs were the dreams, and the visions of color were the
wakefulness? Because, honestly, it would make more sense — afterlife-wise — for me to be seeing the world, for me to be a spectator of the world, as some sort of divine… punishment? Wasn’t there a theory that all energy returns to the earth? Maybe that’s where I was?

But I didn’t feel a part of the world. I felt like I was watching it, like I was dreaming of it.

And there were these urges, these instincts, deep in my mind, trying to tell me how to act. How to flinch against the cool (Cry.) and how to welcome the taste of warmth (Drink.) and how to treat the humming that was never present when the color was (Ignore.) It seemed I’d be moving according to those instincts when the black and white blurs came, and I was more free in the dreams.

So I allowed myself to sink into the very depths of myself, and dream on in color.

(Where am I?)

(And what am I doing?)

(Sleep.)

…

Oh.

Well.

Hm.

Well… I was starting to have suspicions that I wasn’t quite… dead.

Color seeped into the black and white very slowly. I couldn’t make out complex shapes, but the color really helped. The humming grew louder, though I could make it recede to the background if I tried hard enough. I started to realize that I could feel things, textures, pain, heat and cool, and on different parts of myself, like… like I had a body. And when I started to entertain the idea that I was inside a body and maybe wasn’t quite as dead as I remember, I started to realize I could feel a fluttering in my chest, the rise and fall of my breast, scratchy fabric against skin (?), the musty air cool in my body and warm as it left again — flashes of dark, blinking, a prodding in my arm, touching, proprioception — there was something below what I was seeing, a neck, a body, arms and legs and hands and feet.

I have a body.

That’s… not what I was expecting.

And after a few… actually, I don’t know how time is passing, but after a long period of internal debate (How the fucking fuck did I not realize I was alive. Well, I saw myself die, so- But you feel pain! And the religion nuts say hell hurts, so of course I didn’t think anything of it-) I realized that the reason it took me this embarrassingly long to realize I was inside a body was because it didn’t feel the same as before my death. For one thing, I couldn’t. Fucking. Move. Well, I couldn’t rightly move when I was dying either, so I was okay with that… But I felt… different.

I remembered very clearly what it was like in my last body, and it wasn’t like this. Blurred blobs of
color, familiar voices that I couldn’t understand, humming in my ears — soothing and gentle and barely-there. An awareness of my body, an ease in detection of my physical self, the instincts that were currently locked in some foreign piece of mental space so I could think without having urges to squirm or cry. Why did I want to cry so badly?

Wait.

Was I a fucking…

Was I a baby.

Fuck.

No, no, no… Think about this… Just because you can’t see or hear properly, are oddly restricted in movement by what suspiciously feels like cloth, and have urges to cry and… excrete without abandon doesn’t mean you’re a baby…!

(Who did I think I was kidding?)

I was a motherfucking baby again, wasn’t I?

I felt my eyes blink rapidly as I thought back to the first instance of icy air and pain. Where I was trying to figure out which afterlife I’d landed myself in after my untimely death… I’d said Nirvana. Nirvana was Buddhist, I think, and Buddhism was really big on the whole idea of…

Reincarnation.

Oh, fuck me. Whyyyyy…

I’m not sure how much time passed before I started screaming, definitely calling whoever was taking care of the baby-me in to calm me the shit down. It made sense, all of a sudden, the strange feeling of being airborne, then being pressed to something warm, with a muttering, familiar voice and one of the strange humming-songs whispering around me. I was being held as I sobbed and cried in abject hysteria.

At least those damn instincts that always wanted me to goddamn cry would be happy.

…

Wait a second…

Was I reborn or am I living my own childhood out again?

If I was reborn, was it just me being born again or did I hijack an infant’s body?

(Were the instincts the infant’s, and I was just… taking over?)

Goddammit.

You know what? Fuck it.

Fuck everything.

If there was anyone that didn’t deserve to be reincarnated with their memories, it was me. Unless I was redoing my childhood. I still didn’t really deserve that, though. I literally did NOTHING with my life. I hadn’t been around long enough to, right?
And it’s not that I was an overwhelmingly bad person, or a ridiculously good person… I was average, I think. I drew a lot, I wrote a lot, I swore too much, I did well in school, I hung out with friends, I was an underage drinker, I was a middle child, I was just… Normal. And then I’d died in some bullshit car accident.

And now I was here?

Well. It’s not like I was gonna waste the chance if it was reincarnation. And if I was redoing my life, then hell yeah I had a lot of mistakes under my belt. It’d be nice to make up for them, whatever the case was.

Even though being a baby sucked.

However…

Those baby-instincts. I’m fairly sure they’re what’s been driving the action of my newly-realized infant body. While I space out behind them, sometimes listening to that strange ever-present humming and sometimes dreaming in weird, colorful dreams… well, I was here, but I wasn’t really here. Meaning, I was acting like a real baby because of these instincts, while I retained my adult intelligence and old memories.

SWEET.

Legit, this is the best. Best deal I’ve ever taken, unknowingly or not. I could just hang out until my body was developed enough to actually see and hear things! And, really, even when I pushed the instincts down to look at what was what, they’d still be there — a fallback, of sorts. Wherever I was, I was still an infant… meaning these were necessary, meaning I was golden in the ‘do-not-incite-suspicions’ department.

(Obviously, I wasn’t going to be going around yelling, ‘HEY I’M A REINCARNATION LOL!’)

Even so… It wasn’t quite normal, was it? The being born again, the strange humming in my ears that’d never been present in my last life, the vivid dreams. The dreams were from perspectives I’d never seen before, either; and they were so normal (I had some crazy dreams in life, before). It was surreal, and a little beautiful, too. Sometimes.

Sometimes, the instincts saw what I did, and they’d react for me. The dreams of shadows, of death — my adult mind handled it well, but the instincts were snapping my body awake and having it wail and scream. I tried to contain myself, not wanting to bring trouble to my caretakers, but it was difficult.

It was… getting less difficult, though.

As time passed. I couldn’t mark its passage that well, but I knew that color was seeping into my vision, just as the blobs of shapes were sharpening into real objects. And my hearing was beginning to pick up on lower and lower sounds, discerning tones and voices from each other. Sometimes the humming was useful, allowing me to recognize people. Sometimes I’d see sharpened strings of color, floating by like they were underwater or crackling across the air like it was thunder; it would be a blink, and that’s it, but sometimes they lingered in the corners of my eyes. Taunting me, making me wonder what kind of freaky body I’d been put into.

(It was growing less and less likely that I was going to be reliving my life.)

As my senses sharpened into something normal for a human, the instincts faded. And the humming and colors flared up, and the dreams grew more sporadic, more random, more… like how it was to
be a baby. Like things were randomly blurred, noises were randomly made incomprehensible, images flickered and distorted like a far-off object on a hot day.

And finally, one day my eyes blinked open from a dream, and I felt whole and aware.

... 

A ceiling of planked wood, walls the color of cream and crowned in white, a deeply fuzzy carpet, sort of a faded red color. There were muffled noises above, playful and fun but far away (I flinched when there was a loud BANG! but with no other sounds forthcoming and the continuation of muffled play, I figured it was a normal occurrence); there was humming, always humming, and laughter somewhere outside the large windows drawn with curtains. The air itself seemed to shimmer and sing, but in a way that was in the corners of my eyes and I thought I might be hallucinating it, if I weren’t so used to it being there. Pale, smooth bars blocking my sight of the rest of the room, and someone (?) beside me.

Someone… a familiar hum. And that color, that sort of deep, pretty maroon; it seemed more concentrated than before, spiderweb-like strings gently crackling in and out of sight, its source right beside me.

Another… another baby?

I blinked in awe.

I’m a twin? COOL!

The baby next to me was a girl, I thought, by the pale pink she was dressed in; it was an identical color to mine, actually, which meant I was also a girl (thank God, because I really didn’t want to try my hand at being a male even if I was a bit too boyish for my old-mother’s taste). She was adorable, and I was surprised she was sleeping through the muffled THUD-CLANK-BANG! upstairs somewhere, her little breaths making that gentle maroon color pulse with each rise of her chest.

My observations of my twin sister were broken when the door to our room opened, and sound poured in unfiltered:

“Check on the girls, won’t you, Arthur? I’ve got the twins- er- well- Fred and George to sort out, I don’t know what they’re doing upstairs, but it’s probably nothing good!” called a woman’s voice (Familiar.), heavy with a British accent.

Was I in England?

The door creaked close, then, and the sounds became muffled. I blinked at the flickers of deep, deep blue across the room; the strings seemed to just be floating off the main body of color, strings an electric tone compared to that soft and fading central glow, which bounded closer to the crib. The strings of blue were much larger and longer and stronger than my twin’s little maroon, or my own little… violet? Some sort of warm purple, which rose weakly to meet the blue. They touched fleetingly, and I was hit with a sense of extreme adorationlovehappinessawelovelovelove out of nowhere, enough to make me jolt and blink rapidly again.

My eyes met blue ones.
They were set in a long, smooth face topped with rust-red hair. Freckles splattered cross high cheekbones and a crooked nose, underneath black-framed glasses. He was just a bit younger than middle-age, but still handsome — in a sort of clumsy way, I think. I drank in his appearance, not knowing who he was but understanding that this was the first time I’d physically seen someone properly in this world.

I didn’t need the infant-instincts to tell me to smile.

“Hello, luv. Awake, are you?” the man said, a pleasant baritone voicing another British accent.

(I was probably in England, right?)

His hands reached down, huge to my little eyes. My world tilted as I was picked up, surprising me and eliciting a happy squeak from my limited range of vocal expression; I felt the rumbling of his chuckles as he pressed me to his chest, and my world shifted with every step he took, though I could tell he was trying to walk steadily for me. He sat down somewhere, the perspective of the room was all different now, and I was cradled in his arms comfortably, warmly, with his face smiling down at me with so much love it made me twinge a bit in grief, knowing I hadn’t been able to give someone that kind of look before I’d died.

(But I wasn’t going to think of that, right? Bad idea, to linger on the past.)

I was being rocked oh-so-gently, and it was lulling me to sleep with how safe I felt… But I stubbornly kept my eyes open, blinking rapidly in my effort. I had subsisted of six hours of sleep per night before the whole death thing, so it was irritating to think that I’d have to sleep all the time now…

My father (and I knew without a doubt he was my father) laughed at my wandering eyes.

“You look very awake today, my Lys,” he whispered lovingly, “Your mother will kill me. I’m sure this is the first time you’ve smiled.”

Another grin hit my lips then; I knew how important the first smile was to parents. I’d been the receiver of my nephew’s first smile, actually, and it had pissed off my cousin and her husband something silly. That, of course, was a lifetime ago.

His large, calloused finger grazed against my cheek gently; I was surprised that I had the dexterity to grab at it. My father looked surprised, too, and humored me — his smile was crooked and I loved it (and dearly hoped I got some of his genes, since he was a very handsome man). I resisted the urge to (Gnaw.) on his fingers valiantly — fucking baby-instincts, dammit — not wanting to tear my eyes away from the this first clear memory of my new father.

“My Guinevere Lysandra Weasley,” my father murmured lovingly, “So awake and aware now… You’re going to do just fine in this world, luv. You and Ginevra are perfect.” He smiled, then. “My perfect girls.”

Warmth filled my chest at his words, for some reason. So, despite the glaring implications, I couldn’t help but smile.

...
GLARING IMPLICATIONS?

What the bloody FUCK was I thinking? Why the motherfucking FUCK was I in the bloody Harry Potter universe?


Christ.

Fucking Christ.

Wait.

Harry Potter universe.

Oh God, oh God, oh God, oh God… I chanted in my head, staring at the night-darkened ceiling of the sleeping house.

I was torn between screaming about the sheer awesomeness of it, and crying in horror at the implications of my existence. Obviously, there was no Guinevere Weasley in the books. So, I didn’t hijack a baby; it was the… I dunno, the baby instincts that made me so attached to the red-haired couple that often invaded my room to hold us. Molly Weasley, whose voice was (uncharacteristically) gentle and Arthur Weasley, who was so awed by the existence of twin daughters (so soon after twin sons) that he nearly teared up today when he saw us.

Damn, it was so cute to see a grown man that happy, I always wanted to laugh — I don’t think I was quite developed enough to do so — when he came in to check on us. It had the added effect of making my father even more giddy at the sight of one of his daughters always smiling when he was in eyesight, which just led to more happy, cushy feelings. A positive feedback loop of smiling, except one of us shouldn’t exist, and I wasn’t sure who.

The book character or the reincarnation that shouldn’t exist in the book? What on bloody earth was I… How did I… Why the fucking hell was this even possible?

Reincarnation was one thing.

Reincarnation into a FICTIONAL BOOK/MOVIE SERIES?

NO NO NO NO NO-

Suffice to say, I screamed.

A lot.

Like, the windows shattered.

Literally.

And that confirmed it, of course; accidental fucking magic. I was an infant witch of a Pureblood family, a character that shouldn’t have existed. My magic thrashed where I could not, reacting to my panic and horror and confusion and fading sense of self, because I should not be alive right now.

There was a deep violet at the edges of my vision, erratic and bristling; it roared with power and
distorted the natural ambiance of the room, and especially the quiet slumber of the soft maroon beside me. The humming was menacing, almost *screaming* — copying me, reflecting me, I don’t know.

(The colors and humming. Was that *magic??*?)

The thin, faint violet twine shot out from its source (me), strong and twisting around itself, forming itself into something powerful and shaking. It seeped into the air, it sunk into the glass of the windows and then the glass *CRACK*ed and shattered, and if that wasn’t enough, the wood of the panes began to *splinter*, and I was screaming in terror as my twin — my sister — *fuCKING GINNY WEASLEY* — did the same, crying and wailing as my magic was out of control, suffocating her own colors.

**HOLY SHIT YOU’RE GONNA KILL YOUR SISTER STOP STOP STOP-!**

But I couldn’t get a handle on this fucking magic shit, it just got *WORSE*. I frantically tried to yell at it to stop, tried to sit up or something to protect Ginny from this stupid uncontrollable shit, but it wasn’t working and then-

**SLAM!**

“*Protego!*”

“Boys, go back to your rooms, I mean it, do NOT follow us!”

“*Propulso! Protego!*”

“*Reducio! Depulso! Depulso!*”

“What on earth- Arthur, is it Guinevere or Ginevra?”

“*Depulso!* I don’t know, Molly, I think it’s Guinevere-*“ Then my world tilted again, more quickly and harshly than before, I was suddenly surrounded in the warm soothing of my father’s blue colors and gentle humming, hugged to his chest. “*Shhh, Guinevere, shhhh, luv. Come now, my little Guinevere Lysandra, what’s wrong? Shhhh, my little queen, shhhhh… My Lys, don’t worry, Daddy’s here, Mummy, too, shhh…”*

I should have been mortified, knowing that just the presence of my father and such ridiculously gentle words managed to calm me (and my magic) down. I wrestled with my frenzying magic, shoving it down — being metaphysical for so long helped lots, I think — and getting its crazed roar down to the normal, if a bit grudging, hum. The tears that sprung up courtesy of my baby-instincts dried and the cries descended to hiccups, and I was worried for Ginny, but mostly relieved that it was over and I was safe and my dad was here-

“Well, that’s *got* to break the record for earliest case of accidental magic.” said my father lightly.

My mother — Molly Weasley, no doubt, though I don’t remember her clearly as *my* memories technically only started today when I woke up — let out a watery chuckle, but she didn’t sound very… well, cheered up, I suppose.

“That’s the fourteenth time she’s woken up screaming, Arthur,” said Molly Weasley’s voice, wobbling a little, “Arthur, dear, this is her first bout of accidental magic — she’s going to do more, now! What if- What if she hurts herself next time? Arthur, we might need to request a bind on her magical core!”
Arthur Weasley scoffed. “No child of mine is going to have their magic bound, Molly. Little Lys just needs to be watched a little more closely, is all. She’s a smiler, this one.”

“Lys?? I thought we agreed she’d be called Gwen!”

“Er… Well… I called her Lys, and she stopped crying, and-“

“And??”

“Well, she smiled when I called her that before-“

“You said yourself she was a smiler!”

“Er- Well- See- With a- er- Gin and a Gwen, I thought she’d be confused-“

“She’ll be right confused if we’re calling her by two different names, won’t she?”

“But Lys-“

At this point, I took it upon myself to gurgle out a somewhat-laugh at Arthur’s guilty face. It was a mixture of amusement and relief that my parents weren't absolutely pissed that I trashed my room. Plus, I somehow wiggled out of the prospect of a block on my magic core, which didn’t sound very nice… If it was what I thought it was, I really didn’t think the idea of that; especially since I was apparently looking at magic when I saw these strange little colors and heard those soft little humming songs.

Arthur — father — smiled winningly at me. “See? She likes the name!”

“Oh, hush, you! And give Lys over so I can put Charlie on watch; we’ve got to repair the room.”

It wasn’t until later, when I was snuggled down in my and Ginny’s newly repaired crib (it had also been a victim of my magic) that I calmly decided to take this one step at a time. There were variables upon variables that I had to study and look at, but for now... well, I couldn’t do much until I could actually walk now, could I?

Still, I reached inside myself and poked and prodded at something tangible but metaphysical, until the humming purple at the edge of my vision slowly crawled over to Ginny’s maroon and soothingly sung an apology. It was almost instinct, but there was no word to describe it. Love? Apology? Closeness? Sister? Sorry? Something like that, something I just knew I could do to soothe the sister I’d scared and almost injured.

When Ginny smiled at me and clutched at my clothes with her chubby fingers, I knew I was forgiven. Her eyes were wide and hazel and innocent, free of any lingering fear with our tendrils of violet and maroon magics twisted together.

And I thought that maybe this wasn’t all that bad.

…

*There was a glass jar in his small hand — he looked determined — little light of the moon. The forest was dark — trees cast menacing shadows — the fireflies were out tonight — the boy beamed as he was bathed in their warm glow. He ran through the grass — dew drops — and tried to keep a*
little piece of their light with him.

(Stop.)

The snake slithered through — the dry, scaling shining — chips of obsidian. Her tongue flickered out — fear and glee in the air. Shadows towered over her — they were afraid — she wanted to laugh. Colors dead — distorted — fading...

(Stop.)

“Lys!”

I blinked my eyes, trying to process the fact that, yes, I was awake. It was happening more and more often, that I’d start daydreaming. I always dreamed of strange things at night, and though the accidental magic occurred a few more times when I had particularly horrifying dreams — Thank God I’m a realized reincarnation, otherwise the shit I see would really fuck child-me up… — it was slowly getting under control.

As I learned to wrangle my purple-tinged magic into submission more quickly, learned to work with it, it seemed to grow. And when it grew, well… so did the dreams. They were, after all, spilling into my wakefulness.

Ginny was grinning at me, a tiny little three-year-old. She was pale as cream and dotted with freckles, hair like fire and drawn into pigtails, our mother’s hazel-brown eyes set in her face. She preferred wearing bright, warm colors, and was waving her red mittens in my face.

I smiled at her faintly, recognizing the patterns of excitement in her magic (swirling around her, sliding on her skin, drifting into the air) and connecting it to the eagerness in her eyes. I was getting quite good at recognizing the moods of my many siblings and my parents — magic seemed to show a lot more than just power, after all, and once I put that together with facial and bodily expression, well…

(It would be a useful skill, later, to read body language like this.)

My sister and I were three, and as much as it pained me to admit, we were not identical.

“Braid hair, Lys? Please?” my sister begged, smiling though she tried to project her usual puppy-dog eyes at me.

Conniving little thing, she was — she knew that our parents and eldest brothers were weak to that look. She was in the process of learning that I was not… I was generally just weak to her, so with a smile and a nod, she was sitting in front of me — wiggling all over the place, dammit — and letting me undo her pigtails and comb her hair into a neatness a bit more suitable for braiding.

I wasn’t sure where everyone else was, exactly; it was cold outside, so everyone was probably inside somewhere. Bill and Charlie were at Hogwarts already, Percy was probably reading in his room, the twins were probably playing a prank on him since Ron had been nearly terrified to death when they turned his teddy bear into a spider a bit ago; Dad was at work, Mum was probably in the kitchen — her favorite haunt — with Ron…

Normally, Ginny’d be with her, but Ginny had been a lot more conscientious lately in regards to me, so she was working on trying to get me to play with her more. Or, at least, do things for her since she knew I usually did more things better than she did.

“Is Mummy gon’ make hot chocolate today?” she asked.
“I dunno.” I replied, concentrating on my fingers; being only three, it was a bit hard to have nimble fingers for braiding.

And, as a general rule, I tried not to talk a lot. I wasn’t good at the British accent really, and I wasn’t good at dumbing myself down. I’d get carried away and start spouting complete and grammar-perfect sentences — which was a telling sign of something wrong, for sure. I already worried my parents and eldest brothers with how I’d been able to perform accidental magic so early, along with the nightmares.

“I wan’ her to! It’s really tasty!”

“Mm.”

“I wan’ Bill to come home, too. An’ Charlie!”

“My too.”

My twin chattered on as I very carefully did her hair. I’d glance up every now and then to look — with fondness — at our intertwining magic. Her maroon had become more of a wine-red, blending with our mother’s candy-apple crimson, and mine had become something a bit more indigo, as I spent a lot of time with our father’s deep blue. And, for whatever reason, my magic was growing more rapidly than her’s was; it was even bigger than Ron’s dawn-colored magic, though not as large as the twins’ — that is, Fred and George’s.

My and my twin’s differences, of course, went beyond our magic.

Fred and George were identical, but Ginny and I were fraternal. Obviously so. (Which meant no switching around pranks, sadly…) It had surprised me, the first time I’d looked at a mirror in this world. Ginny was pale and freckly and autumn-fire; she was all bright colors. I seemed to be a lot… well, toned down — my colors were cooler-toned than hers. My skin wasn’t her ivory, but rather, almost beige; I had much less freckles, only some light ones splattered on my cheekbones and down my nose; I was a bit smaller and slighter than her, and I could tell already that I’d be a lot shorter; my hair was textured differently, thick and heavy and wavy, and instead of carrot-colored, it was a darker copper-orange.

I had managed to bring some of my features from my last life into this one, it seemed. It was like I was a blend of Ginny and my old self; her pale, obviously Caucasian features melded together with my old honey-colored skin, dark hair, petite stature… The only thing I had that I think was completely free of past-life interference were dad’s blue eyes.

(Lucky me! I liked blue eyes.)

“All done.” I announced, admiring my work. Not bad, for a three-year-old.

Ginny hopped up, beaming. “Thanks, Lyssie!”

“You’re welcome, Ginny.” I said gently, not surprised when she took my hand and started dragging me down the stairs to our mother. Like always, really.

Ginny was just… brighter, I think. More enthusiastic about things, outwardly. She was a little bratty; it delighted her that Molly and Arthur catered to us so quickly (because we were the daughters, because I had nightmares and very powerful magic, because blah blah blah…) and she took full advantage of it. She was obsessed with Harry Potter paraphernalia — way more than I’d have thought — and she blew up quickly, her temper obviously inherited from Molly. The only ones who’d calm her down were Molly or me, and I was cheating with my indigo magic being so
familiar to her.

On the other side, I was quieter and let her take the lead — *How the hell was I supposed to be a child again?* — and where Gin mostly ignored everyone but Molly, Arthur, the exuberant twins, and me (recently), I liked to follow *everyone* around.

What?

It’s a magical fucking household, I was curious, dammit!

And if I wasn’t following people around, trying to learn everything about the *magical world* (I died a little inside when I thought about going to Hogwarts and getting wand and being a fucking *WITCH*), I was usually sitting somewhere with a book nicked from Percy, reading… Or pretending to read as another daydream hit me.

Like I said, the daydreams got worse. More frequent.

*Shining powder, glowing softly — mixed into the base solvent — soft green — then blue, like the ocean, deep and pretty and unnatural in such a small quantity. More of the shining powder, gently added in pinches and pieces — blue crimsons into a deep violet color. Black flowers — crushed and melted and milked — into a amber-reflective liquid turns it turquoise — color fades as the fire heats it.*

*Sharp, deep brown powder — not like the shining prior — makes the potion turn shades of fire, more un-shining powder turns it turquoise again, it stubbornly clings to its violet color as the fire caresses — silvery substance — light and feathery — pinks — reds — purples again — shining powder, it greys, tries to become fire again — it’s just pearl-white when the brown powder quells its color down.*

*Draught of Peace, written sharply on the board in spidery handwriting. It is not as beautiful as the woman’s feather and ink-borne hand.*

( *Stop.* )

*Jets of light flew across the field — screams echoing and being buried by the sounds of destruction — the moon again — the inferno — shadows with their skull-like faces cackled. A bird of fire cried, sweeping over the battlefield, distorting the air around it. The stars winked madly — the sight of the bird. The song was silent, though it was there. The edges of the image were blurry.*

( *Stop.* )

“*Ring-a-round the rosie,*

*A pocket full of posies,*

*Ashes! Ashes!*

*We all fall down.*”

( *Stop.* )

*She sat at the writing desk serenely, eyes cast down at her letter — skirts gathered about her. The feather dipped in the ink — words were elegant and artful — writing to her sister, she missed her. A sigh from painted lips. The window opened into the garden — gazed outside in admiration. Her writing was beautiful — all feathers and ink.*
Sometimes… Well, honestly, sometimes I felt like I was dreaming about real things. And, really, with magic… It was possible, wasn’t it? Sometimes they’d teach me things. And sometimes I’d actually dream about something that hadn’t happened yet, like when Ginny almost fell down the stairs but I’d managed to catch her and fell instead-

“Lyssie? What’re you doing?”

(Damn displacing daydreams — they made me lose track of where I was, what I was doing, all that.)

I whipped around, thoughts going a mile a minute — Nighttime, alone, everyone’s asleep except whoever this is, stupid dreams dammit! — and guiltily hid a copy of Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them behind my back in a way that was completely convincing.

Enough that my fourteen-year-old brother Bill smiled at me indulgently. “Getting into Charlie’s books, Lyssie?”

“Mmm… No.” I said, blinking owlishly at my brother.

Bill was like Dad, built tall and lanky, all angles and edges. There was still a softness about him, of course, with age and with our mother’s genes, but he’d be a very tall, very handsome one — one day. (He, Percy, and Ron were more like our dad in physique; Charlie and the twins taking more after our Prewett lineage, more stockily built, though all my brothers would be pretty tall, fucking Europeans.) Bill’s hair was getting a bit long, and I knew he was doing it on purpose, and I was rather excited to see him when he got his fang-earring and whatnot.

(It was a little strange, seeing a barely-teenage Bill Weasley. Maybe a little less so since no one matched their movie counterpart completely; meaning I was evidently in a more bookverse-based world.)

“That’s a pretty high-level book, Lys,” said my eldest brother gently, “That’s for Hogwarts age, you know. I don’t really think you’re quite that old yet.”

I smiled at the gentle teasing. Bill was a good older brother; a model older brother, really. I definitely wasn’t like him when I was fourteen. It was little wonder that Bill was Ginny’s absolute favorite older brother, with how gently he treated us and how fun he could make things. He emulated our dad, I think.

“I was gonna ask Dad to read.” I said, using my go-to Weasley. (Dad was kinda my favorite.)

Bill smiled. “Ah, I’m not good enough to read to you, Lys?”

My eyes lit up, and I could tell that Bill saw — which he smiled at, definitely pleased that he could get the most sheltered member of the family that happy that quickly. I was Ginny’s little sister, meaning I was the absolute youngest Weasley. Add that to my status as one of the few Weasley females, my tendency to stare into space (the daydreams), my quiet, intelligent nature — worse than Percy, sometimes — and my nightmares that everyone had quickly learned to quell through crawling under the covers with me (it was usually Ginny who performed this sibling duty, without complaint and with much enthusiasm)…

Well, yes, I was the most sheltered Weasley.

So Bill scooped me up in his arms, book and all, and I let the last remnants of childish instinct...
laugh quietly as he walked across, exiting Charlie and Percy’s shared room — both brothers were off with friends overnight, which was why I’d been rooting around their bookshelves this early in the morning (or late in the evening, depending on how you wanted to look at it) — and into his lone one (since Ron had decided he was old enough to sleep in the attic a few months ago, just to prove Fred and George wrong about the fact he was “an ickle baby”).

Bill flicked on his bedside lamp and I settled in his lap comfortably.

“Hm, are you sure you want to read this one, Lyssie? What about Ginny’s books?”

“No.” I said stubbornly, “This one.”

Bill sighed. “Alright, Lys. But if you don’t understand something, make sure you ask, okay? That’s how you learn. Even the demon twins- er, that is, Fred and George have to ask for help,” he said patiently.

(As there were two sets of twins in the house, Ginny and I were dubbed uncreatively ‘the girls’ while Fred and George were usually ‘the demon twins’ since, honestly, they were like little monsters on sugar-highs all the time.)

“Alright, then, Lys. Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them, by Newt Scamander…”

Right, then. Reason for the book thievery... Ginny’s Harry Potter picture books were not only grossly untrue, but boring. And picture books. I wanted to learn about spells and magical creatures and stuff. Not… how to tell colors apart, or whatever nonsense. I knew how to do that. In fact, I knew how to see everyone’s colors.

I was indigo, of course, though the edges were a bit darker than usual and the strings were like electric lavender. Dad was all these shades of blue, normally a nice royal tone with bits of violet and crimson swimming inside. Mum was bright, cheerful red; sometimes there were wine tones and her strings glittered like gold. Bill was cool-colored like Dad and I, him and Percy were purples and blues and violets. Charlie was primarily jungle green, with bits of gold in his electric green “strings” — the tendrils of magic that actually did stuff, I hypothesized. The twins were actually different, which was how I told them apart: Fred was a cool burgundy with bits of darkish lilac, while George was almost my color, with bits of playful plum. Ron was like an explosion of sunsets and sunrises, orange dominating golds and crimsons and pale off-whites. Ginny, of course, was maroon-red, flecks of gold.

Oh, and him.

Peter Pettigrew.

The rat-bastard that was currently owned by Percy was a pale, weak yellow; not nice dawn-yellow or wheat-gold, but almost mustard. It was barely there, which I attributed to the fact that he was a rat, and didn’t often use magic anymore, and there was a slow, crippled tension to the tendrils that made me almost sad when I saw it.

“Lyssie? Are you falling asleep?” whispered Bill.

I shook my head. “Augery tells rain. ’N their feathers can’t be quills,” I said dutifully.

Bill sucked in a tiny breath. I suppose it was strange, to see how easily I could summarize concepts beyond my age’s level of understanding. Well… That was a mistake on my part, then, but really, it’s hard to act stupid around people who watch you 24/7.
When I looked up, he was smiling (albeit, upside-down in my perspective). “You’re a smart one, aren’t you, Lys? But it is late, you know, and you really should go to sleep. Ginny might be missing her bunk-mate.”

*Oh, clever Bill! You know I spoil Ginny.*

(Probably something I’ll regret later, honestly.)

I nodded, and he closed the small, dog-eared book and took me up in his arms again, quietly padding out to the landing and down to the second floor, which consisted only of my and Ginny’s room. Inside, Ginny’s maroon-red almost *jumped* to tangle with mine — it was much too used to my presence to *not* do so — and when Bill tucked me into bed, Ginny’s little hands immediately clutched at my clothing.

He smiled at the sight. “No nightmares tonight, Lyssie?”

I grinned a little. “Ginny won’ let the bad dreams get me.”

“Goodnight, Lys.”

“G’night, Billy.”

*(Sleep.)*
Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

A/N: So, I have no fucking clue what the Burrow looks like, so I googled it. If anyone’s curious, it’s called ‘The burrow and the o’jays’ — that’s my floor plan model. In other news! This is already going a lot better, I think. More fun things’ll be happening in this chapter, a bit more world-building and main character exposition — I’m setting things up for Hogwarts and the main story, see.

WARNING! I was gonna wait, but I do believe I’ll be putting gore. Some Dark curses are quite messy.

The only thing I own is Lys, really; and I suppose any non-canon things, but essentially, Harry Potter® just doesn’t belong to me.

I really shouldn’t have been surprised. Things changed as I aged, and not necessarily in a very good way. Those instincts that I depended on faded; it made me terrified to do anything without watching Ginny first, to say anything without having her or Ron’s words as reference. Which made me very, very quiet. Which worried my parents and eldest siblings.

And the quiet, in turn, forced me to just keep reading and to just keep trying to control the daydreams. I was done with every single children’s book in the house — including the idiotic Harry Potter ones — and was starting to get into the first year Hogwarts textbooks, too interested in magic to fall back on my usual academic laziness.

(Interesting to note, however: this body and mind was a lot quicker than my last one, things just made sense, and I could remember and recall information much more easily. Like I said, sweetest deal I ever unknowingly took.)

The colors — the magic-seeing, or whatever the fuck it was — got stronger, too. I could feel the slightest interruptions in the humming, the songs of magic I think, and I started to grow more sensitive to the little twitches and twinges in the colors. The soft, colorful auras seemed to slink and slide over the skin of their owners, the tendrils reaching out to explore and sense and create...

In the case of Mum and Dad, it was the luminous little strings that did the actual magic, that sunk into things and made objects float and fly. I would actually flinch at mealtimes during school breaks, sometimes, because the colors were just everywhere and so fucking vivid. It gave me headaches, and my discomfort was only soothed by Ginny’s hand taking mine.

And the fucking dreams.
Goddamn.

There would be a sort of itch in my head, a nagging feeling. Like when you know there was something you forgot to do yesterday. And then it became a headache, building up stronger and stronger. Then it was a burn.

Normally I’d just let the daydreams come when the pain started, but sometimes I was with someone else or doing something, and I’d have to grit my teeth as my magic — which was growing larger and larger as I tried to press it down, as I tried to learn how to control it better in order to press it down — seemed to quiver; and when I’d finally get somewhere alone, I’d collapse into a fit of visions, seeing stupid, useless things for no reason.

The night-terrors got worse, too, in turn.

Green lights flashed over and over — black figures in white masks laughing as their wands twirled and the bodies fell. The Killing Curse, over and over and over and over — they got bored of that — their curses became more bloody, more violent. “Intrinsecus Novum!” — flesh split and organs burst out. “Dirumpo!” — limbs and appendages were severed messily. “Crucio!” — how they screamed when that jet of crimson sunk into their skin, frying their nerves one-by-one.

“Filthy Muggles, about to burst my bloody eardrums — Silencio!”

“Crucio!”

“Don’t have too much fun, Bella. The bloody Order might show up soon.”

“Let them come! I’ve wanted to kill my bloodtraitor cousin since I started Hogwarts!”

( Stop. )

She was sitting in a meadow filled with wildflowers — fingers were dark and quick, weaving stems and leaves and petals together. A small cut, made with her nail, and the stem slipped inside, she knotted it, she strengthened it with more and more stems — a crown was formed under her hands, and it was finished — she ran into a blurry distance — on a head of flaxen hair and she smiled at them, whoever it was — laughing.

( Stop. )

Trees and their leaves rustled overhead — wind playing in the branches. Four pale towers with dark, pointed roofs towered above the main complex, the dome-roof crowning the bronze and golden windows — sky fading into twilight, clouds like pale slivers in the sky — someone was in front of the building, dancing — exhausted and sweating — smiling all the more…

( Stop. )

“Ó, urramach Draoidheachd Màthair! Ó ionmhainneach fuil caraid dhomh! Tha mi a’ guidhe ort, Màthair mèinn, beannaich mise!”

The girl had dark crimson hair and a petite stature, kneeling in front of a circle of smooth river stones, strange characters drawn into their surfaces — something was shining by the moonlight. Four ash piles, embers glowing weakly, sat in a square formation — stones encircled a wreath of flowers.

Her voice didn’t wobble. “Faigh am bliadhna tabhach mèinn, agus cluinn mo cùis-thagraidh!”
The wreath burst into flames, but the flowers didn’t burn. In fact, it looked like they were growing fresher — rising and blooming and growing. The flames were bright, too-pale for it to be natural — a scent of magic in the air — distorted everything, shimmering air...

“Mo tagradh airson iochdalachd, cluinn—“

(Stop.)

The man was tall and lithe, hair the color of autumn-fire tied back to his nape — his wand twirled and sparked in his hands, power behind his voice — sounded like it was underwater — blue eyes hard with determination, then wide with shock — a shadow lunged at him, past his spells and defenses.

Teeth sunk into his neck, savaging the carotid. He yelled hoarsely, nails ripped into his face, his eyes-

A scream.

“BILL, NO! GREYBACK YOU BASTARD-!”

(Stop.)

(Fearfearfearfearfear)

STOP!

The boy liked to read and sit silently, thinking. His siblings were louder — he sighed — alone — he was the strangest of them. He held them in suspicion — wondering why he was always the odd one out — he was always trying so hard...

He pushed his glasses up, running a hand through bright red curls.

“I’m not coming back.”

And he wouldn’t, until the finale — the castle was broken — rubble and flames everywhere — smoke rising and reflecting the light — choking the stars — colors flew everywhere, screams and roars and guttural incantations — he held his wand in his hand, not knowing if he would be welcome — but then he was welcome — a brother who once teased him at his back-

An explosion — magic swirling — rubble falling — brother falling-

“NO! FRED, NO! NO!”

(Stop.)

No, Percy- Fred? Bill… My brothers- No, no no no, not them, not my brothers — Percy who read to me and was so, so excited every time I sat with him and asked him questions — Fred who was never without George, teasing and laughing and playing, messing with me and laughing when I got him back, when anyone got him back — Bill, the eldest, the caretaker and the role model and the one who’d tuck me and Ginny in when Mum and Dad were too tired…

My brothers, my precious family, no-

His eyes were glassy — face cold — still-smiling — Percy hunched over him, weeping, sobbing inconsolably. Fred’s corpse was cooling — Percy hated that satisfied smile on his face — he hated
it — he stood again — wand clutched in a white-knuckled grip and-

“AVADA KEDAVRA!”

—he snarled out the darkest curses he could, rage in every tiny movement of his body, every flick of his wrist, every flit of tear-stained blue eyes. Fred was abandoned behind him — so many brothers were just lying behind him — he was one of the last the last the last-

( Stop. )

No, not them- Not my brothers. They were so fucking HAPPY, all the time, they were so kind, they didn’t deserve that! This world was magical, this world was so, so, so much more than the world I’d originally been from, they belonged with that sort of wonder, with that sort of happiness, not this not this not this-

( Stop. )

Green light flooding the once-warm room — green eyes watching — mother died in front of him; the man was laughing, his voice laced with madness — the woman’s voice was echoing to please, please, please, God, someone, please, spare her baby-

“AVADA KEDAVRA!”

Stop!

No- Someone save them, someone stop this, someone-

And the Dark Lord laughed as they writhed before him — Ron, gangly and bleeding, screamed as the wands of white-masked monsters cut into him — brunettes on either side of him, one with greater torture wounds and hair like midnight — the other smaller and darker — blue eyes widened whenever her shrieks of painpainpainpain rang out.

“DON’T YOU BLOODY TOUCH HER!”

Laughter and laughter and more and more curses. “Itty bitty ickle Weasley, so alone in the world!” cackled a voice, “How many of your little litter mates have we killed, baby Weasley?”

“I’LL KILL YOU LESTRANGE!”

“Crucio!” A pause. “Hm? What’s this? Is baby Weasley crying? Oh, but it wouldn’t be right to call you ‘baby Weasley’ since you’re not really the ickle youngest, are you? Your little sisters… One of them still goes to Hogwarts, at least, yes?”

“TOUCH MY SISTERS AND I’LL KILL-“

( Stop. )

“GEORGE, NO!”

“His ear, George’s ear, it’s-“

“There’s too much blood, dammit, that bloody Snape, I’ll KILL HIM MYSELF-“

“He might not make it, look at the curse, he was hit by that fucking Malfoy, look, it’s spreading-“

“SOMEONE DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT!”
“There’s too much, it’s just like—“

(Stop.)

Men in white masks approached silently — figures ghosting along the night. They didn’t break formation — wands in their hands — eerily silent. One figure led them, his face uncovered — crimson eyes blazing in the shadows — smiling, surrounded by skeletons that followed and bowed, groveled and obeyed...

There is no good or evil, only power — and those too weak to seek it. There is no good or evil, only power — and those too weak to seek it. There is no good or evil, only power — and those too weak to seek it. There is no good or evil, only power — and those too weak to seek it. There is no good or evil, only power — and those too weak to seek it. There is no good or evil, only power — and those too weak to seek it. There is no good or evil, only power — and those too weak to seek it. There is no good or evil, only power — and those too weak to seek it. There is no good or evil, only power — and those too weak to seek it. There is no good or evil, only power — and those too weak to seek it. There is no good or evil, only power — and those too weak to seek it. There is no good or evil, only power — and those too weak to seek it. There is no good or evil, only power — and those too weak to seek it. There is no good or evil, only power — and those too weak to seek it. There is no good or evil, only power — and those too weak to seek it. There is no good or evil, only power — and those too weak to seek it. There is no good or evil, only power — and those too weak to seek it. There is no good or evil, only power — and those too weak to seek it. There is no good or evil, only power — and those too weak to seek it. There is no good or evil, only power — and those too weak to seek it. There is no good or evil, only power — and those too weak to seek it. There is no good or evil, only power — and those too weak to seek it. There is no-

(Stop.)

NO!

I woke up to my magic turning the room into a war zone.

Ginny was gone (Thank God, something inside me whispered) and the glass was shattered again, shards floating lazily in the air, spinning and catching moonlight, shimmering, blinding. The paint was peeling off the walls, the wood underneath splintering, crushed. Books lay open, tearing themselves apart, some of them melting into some unnamed sludge. My magic, the electric lines of indigo, was flitting and screaming, destroying everything.

And, despite all this, the only thing on my mind was-

(Fear.)

(Where am I?)

(What am I doing?)

(Where are my brothers? Are they okay? Or are they dead?)

“PROTEGO!”

My eyes snapped to the door, thrown open — the movement stirred my magic, indigo latching onto it and tearing it into pieces, making it explode, splinters embedding themselves into the walls, the floor, one of them in my arm. But I didn’t feel a thing, staring intently — almost blankly — at the figure that came in, wand out and trying to get to me...

Dad...

(I’m in the Burrow, my home.)

(I’m trying to wake up, trying to distinguish reality and dreams.)

(They’re probably awake, worrying for me, comforting Ginny. They are still alive, because I’m four-years-old and the war won’t start until I’m thirteen.)
Abruptly, my indigo magic seemed to surge back to me, leaving the glass and splinters and pages to drop to the floor, raining sharply on me and Dad, who managed to cast a *Protego* for himself. He looked frantic, and it made me *hurt*, knowing that he wouldn’t have to deal with any of this craziness if it weren’t for me.

Just another reason to love them more, and to hate myself for forgetting that they wouldn’t really have that happy of an ending.

Before it registered, I was flying across the room, shards of glass and splinters of the walls and furniture ripping the skin off my tiny feet, and Dad had barely any time to prepare himself as I rammed into him, throwing my arms around his neck and sobbing into his neck. He stiffened in shock — I hadn’t cried like this since I was an *infant*. (It was the least I could do, keep myself emotionally in-check, if I kept having these nightmares and bursts of accidental magic. I’d never let myself become swarmed with emotion, not enough to bawl like this…)

In fact, I really wasn’t ever too emotional of a person unless it involved literature; these emotions being pushed up from the deep, being splayed out across my body language, it was disconcerting, which didn’t help my panic.

“DADDY!” I wailed, too distressed to really be embarrassed that I was a *grown woman* sobbing into my second father’s chest.


“Don’t let Bill fight him! He- He’ll DIE!” *(That’s not right, he’s not supposed to die, what happened?)* “Don’t let Percy leave! Don’t let George get hurt, he can’t hear properly, and he’ll be alone- FRED! Don’t let Fred die- Where’s Fred? Where is he?? And Ron! She’s going to TORTURE HIM!”

I was shrieking and sobbing, suddenly trying to fight my way to my brothers, to *really* make sure they were okay… The fear was all-encompassing, I couldn’t think, I was just seeing Percy’s back and Bill’s savaged DEAD face and George’s blood all over foreign hands and Fred’s corpse and Ron’s screaming, desperate eyes, over and over and over and over and over-

“Lyssie, your brothers are fine—“

“NO! Where’s Percy? Where’s BILL? Where’s Fred? They’re going away, I NEED TO STOP THEM!” I screamed, knowing I wasn’t properly dumbing myself down or lisping like Ginny did right now.

I needed to stress the importance to keeping them safe, my brothers were *going to get hurt and that was completely unacceptable.*

(They weren’t my first family, but I loved them dearly and if anyone tried to take away these people, these *good people* who deserved so much more in a littlest sister and so much more in a wonderful world, *I would rip them to shreds with my bare hands.*)

“Shhhh, Lys, shhhhh…”

“NO NO NO! Greyback’s gonna get Bill and Percy’s gonna leave and George is gonna get cut up and Fred’s gonna DIE and Ron’s gonna get CRUCIO’ED, you can’t let them, Dad, you need to stop them, I need to protect them!” I was screaming hysterically — *That’s not supposed to happen, Bill’s supposed to live, George should be okay, Ron’s supposed to escape Malfoy Manor, WHY IS IT DIFFERENT?* — “You-Know-Who- Voldemort- Red eyes- Green light- DAD!”
Fred’s eyes were glassy, his face cold and still-smiling. Percy hunched over him, weeping, sobbing inconsolably. Bill splayed out on the ground, eyes empty and dead though his heart was beating — slowing with every rise of his chest — face covered in horrific wounds — neck throbbing with pain — gushing blood. George’s wounds — growing black with rot and the woman-who-was-not-Bellatrix-Lestrange was panicking — he was slipping through her fingers. Ron was in fleshy pieces, gritting his teeth against Crucio after Crucio, looking at the dark girl with wild brown curls with something desperate — loving — it HURT.

Stop, dammit STOP!

And then I burst into hysterical sobbing again, unsure of what was going on outside of my arms clutching my dad’s neck and the cold wetness that was seeping into his nightclothes. I was being moved, I think, and Dad was shushing me softly but distractedly.

Eventually, I squeezed my eyes shut and tried to think of better things, of happier things, but it was hard to do that when your child instinct was panicked and your magic was screaming and no one understood that bad things were going to happen, bad things were going to tear us apart. Only I got it.

And I had to go to sleep, knowing I’d see it over and over and over…

…

“Where’s Lyssie?” asked Ginny, looking worried with tears streaks all down her face.

Dad sighed. “In me and your Mum’s room, luv.”

Ginny squirmed in Bill’s lap, but he stopped her from getting up and going upstairs to her twin sister.

The entire Weasley clan, sans the youngest daughter, was gathered in the kitchen. Dad was sitting at the head of the table, as was his right — Mum was standing off to the side, eyes red-rimmed and glassy. Bill sat with Ginny, Charlie sat with an arm around a fretting Ron — another around Percy — the twins were together, in between Ron and Bill, looking uncharacteristically solemn.

“Now,” said Dad quietly, making everyone look at him at once, “we all know that Guinevere has nightmares.”

There were nods all around. Even Percy had comforted a nightmare-plagued little sister once or twice, though it was mostly the littler siblings that pitched in to help. It was as simple as crawling into their little sister’s bed — shaking her awake — staying with her as she fell asleep again, clutching at them even as her breaths evened out.

Dad sighed again. “I suppose I should have seen this coming… Your great-grandfather, Septimus Weasley, my grandfather… He was a type of Seer called a Clairvoyant. I believe that your little sister inherited the ability as well.”

Ron asked curiously, “Lys can see the future?”
Fred and George looked delighted at the prospect, identical grins on their faces. “D’you think she can win us a lottery or somethin’?”

Arthur Weasley waited for quiet, which came quickly with how grave he looked.

“Not just the future. She can probably See the past and present, too. My grandfather would See visions of all times, and he couldn’t control it. Now, you all remember that the war with You-Know-Who ended just before your sisters were born?”

(Stop.)

There is no good or evil, only power — and those too weak to seek it. There is no good or evil, only power — and those too weak to seek it. There is no good or evil, only power — and those too weak to seek-

Pale, elegant fingers on a wand of yew and phoenix feather. He cast a *Priori Incantaco* just for fun, just to see what power his wand was capable of…

Crucio Crucio Crucio Avada Kedavra Inbinsecus Novum Dirumpo Crucio Protego Crucio Carnificigo Cruor Infernemecia Animate Ignisarium Avada Kedavra Avada Kedavra Crucio Crucio Contego Confrigo Dirumpo Morsmordre Expulso-

“Ah, what wonderful work we have done together.”

The yew wood seemed to gleam in the weak candlelight.

(Stop.)

Nods, again — “I think that our Lys has been Seeing events from the war, while she sleeps, and that’s why she’s scared of sleeping alone.”

“She’s scared of sleeping at all,” murmured Bill as the littler ones erupted into whispers of horror — “I always see her sneaking around, late at night. I have to read her to sleep most nights, Dad, is… is this why?”

Dad looked at Bill very seriously. He studied his oldest son, then gave a small nod. “I’m sure this is part of it. I have no doubt, Bill, that… that Lyssie has Seen deaths. Among other things that You-Know-Who’s side was capable of.”

(Stop.)

Two men with hair like fire — stocky builds — crouched slightly like coiled tigers — back to back — blurred smiles on their faces, and a ring of shadows standing around with. The shadows pulsed with sickly magic — like oil, like grease — and they moved as one, converging on those bright flames — rabid beasts…

“Together, brother.” said one — “Together.” affirmed the other.

The two men — brothers — took down five of the many, many Death Eaters (there was nothing else they could be) and when they finally fell, their bodies were levitated above and strung up like gutted, skinned animals. The shadows cackled at the mess they left behind — they Apparated away from the scene loudly — arrogantly — victoriously.

Rot was setting into the bodies when a woman who was like the two — fire-haired, stockily-built— found their bodies, broken and strung up like shattered puppets, she let out a scream so horrified,
so desolate, that those around her flinched and tears slipped down — they had to turn away.

(Stop.)

Bill shivered, just a little. “Is… Is this also why Lys is so bloody smart? And quiet?”

“I don’t doubt it.”

Percy broke the room into silence again, though, with his own question — “Dad, what’s going to happen to Lys?”

Arthur Weasley seemed tired. “I wanted you all to know this, because I wanted you all to promise — I mean it, promise — not to tell anyone. To keep your sister’s secret. You see, it’s a very painful and rare ability; if anyone knew, she might be in danger.”

“Danger, how?” Percy pressed, brow furrowed.

The Weasley Paterfamilias sighed — “It’s a powerful ability, especially if a Clairvoyant can control it, even a little. People would love to know things about the past, to see what’s going on in the present, and to know what’s going to happen in the future.” — “Is the Ministry gonna lock Lyssie up?” Ginny asked fearfully — eyes wide.

Molly reared up in indignant, righteous anger. “I’d like to see them try!” my mother spat, “No, no, children, not that kind of danger—“

“They just might.” — “ARTHUR!”

“No, they have to know, Molly. Yes, Ginny, Lys might be taken away. Clairvoyants are rare, powerful, and there hasn’t been one in Western Europe since my grandfather; and even then, Septimus Weasley was a weak Clairvoyant that rarely Saw anything; and yet, he had to report to the Unspeakables at the Ministry every week.”

Charlie muttered, “Lys has bad dreams every night. Visions.”

Arthur nodded. “Your sister is exceptionally stronger than any Seer I’ve researched, and… I will be honest, that scares me. And her. I’m going to speak to her tomorrow, when she’s calmer, to explain, but I wanted you all to understand why you’ve had to sit with her while she’s been sleeping all these years—“

“Can I come with, Dad?”

“Ron?”

“When you talk to Lyssie. ‘Cos, you know, she’ll be scared. I calm her down best!”

Ginny got up off of Bill’s lap, glaring at Ron hotly. “Do not!”

“Do too!” Ron protested, glaring right back at Ginny.

“Do not!”

“Do too!”

“Do NOT!”

“CHILDREN!” thundered Molly Weasley. They all quieted, shrinking in on themselves. “This is
It was warm. I was cocooned in a quilt, curled up due to a lack of someone to hold onto during my sleep. (I was apparently quite the cuddler in this life.) My eyes didn’t really want to open, so I cracked them open only a little. Where was I? Light was trying to shine through the cloth, but I shut my eyes again. Clairvoyance explained so much and I wanted to know more, even risking the bloodier visions, because I could handle it. I needed to be able to handle it.

Arthur sighed and buried his head in his hands — only realized he wasn’t alone when Percy tugged at his sleeve — “Yes, Percy?” — “Is this why Lys can read so well?”

Arthur blinked in surprise. “Can she?”

Percy nodded. “She reads Charlie’s second-year books with me sometimes- She’s said she already read all the first-year stuff, like me. And I know she reads Mum’s cooking books. I said I wouldn’t tell, but maybe it’s ‘cos she’s a Calirvont?”

“Clairvoyant.”

“Yes, that. I mean… if she’s been Seer-ing all kinds of things since she was born, maybe she’s super smart ‘cos of it, Dad.”

Arthur Weasley smiled at his son. “Thank you for telling me, Percy.” — “Anything to help, Dad. Between all sets of twins, I think Lys is my favorite.”

(Stop.)

It’s time to wake up, I think. I knew it was, but I just felt so tired… It must’ve been the amount of magic I’d used last night. Or earlier. I’m not sure of the time. But I felt drowsy and exhausted, even though I knew that I should be up soon. Exhausted. Enough, thankfully, to numb whatever emotions the visions were trying to bring up in me. But I had to get up, to get answers, I had to piece things together, I had things to do… But I was so warm and comfortable…

Clairvoyance.

I realized that it explained bloody everything now. And it gave me a fucking great excuse to knowing what I knew from my past life — that is, all the Harry Potter series things.

Wait.

Why are things different?

Was I REALLY a Clairvoyant? Things I saw — specifically the parts with Ron, with George, with Bill — they were different from the Harry Potter series that I knew. More violent. More devastating. They didn’t happen, not the way I remembered; and I remembered a fucking SHIT-TON of things from the Harry Potter books.

I sighed to myself, and decided to do the cowardly thing… and put it away for later. Right now, what I knew for sure: Bill was going to be attacked and probably scarred for life if not killed, George was going to be mutilated, Percy was going to abandon us and come back only to witness his brother die, and Fred was, of course, going to fucking die. This much I knew would happen, this much I was sure of in its entirety.
This much, I was going to *fucking never accept*.

My hands balled into fists, enough that I felt my nails pierce my palms. I gritted my teeth tightly, feeling the creak in my jaw.

*I won’t allow it,* I thought to myself fiercely, *NONE of it. Not what should happen, and not what I saw that might happen.*

My eldest brother, my Bill. The one who read to me in the middle of the night, the one who gave crooked, bemused smiles whenever I said something a bit too smart for my age. He was going to be mauled by Fenrir Greyback, possibly *killed* by that savage werewolf? George was going to go half-deaf, separated from his twin and best friend? Percy was going to become so isolated that he’d run away from home, only to come back to a dead little brother and assign blame to himself? Fred was going to *die*, to be separated from George? Ron was going to be *tormented* at Death Eaters’ hands?

*FUCK THAT NOISE.*

(*Between all sets of twins, I think Lys is my favorite.*)

They loved me. They fucking loved me, they spoiled the hell out of me, they taught me everything they knew about the magical world. My brothers, my parents, my older sister… they adored me, even though I was near-silent and not outwardly emotion, even though I displayed frighteningly powerful accidental magic and had nightmares almost every night, even though I was an all-around pain in the ass with my endless questions, *even though I still deluded myself into thinking of them as fictional characters*…

They loved me, and there was nothing in this world now, not even my own newly-shattered delusions (defense mechanisms, idiocy, etc.), that would stop me from reciprocating *more* than in full, that would stop me from protecting *every single one of them* from whatever bloody destinies they had in store.

*This world is real, and I am living in it. These people are real, and they are mine.*

Mine to be loved by, mine to love, mine to laugh with, mine to comfort, mine to defend.

I shut my eyes again. Reality really *does* hurt, or so they say.

“Lys?”

I jolted. Then I poked my head out of my blanket burrito curiously, blinking one eye at my dad peeking into the room. I was on my parents’ bed, curled up in the center. Their room was soothing as always, smelling like them, warm and tastefully cheerful. Dad was halfway inside, looking at me with kindness in his eyes that I was sure I didn’t rightly deserve.

Mum was probably cooking downstairs already and it was Dad who opened the door and poked his head in. I couldn’t bring myself to smile, even as he tried his best; I was too focused on how I was a horrible fucking sister and my family was going to go to shit and I didn’t know how to help them without fucking everything up.

(What I knew was that I was GOING TO, not really HOW TO, though.)

“Hi, Dad.” I said quietly.

He walked in, followed, surprisingly, by Fred and George; they sat on the edges of the bed, and the
demon twins looked oddly solemn. I caught a flash of all my siblings sitting around the breakfast table, arguing on who was going to come to help Dad tell me that I was a Seer-Clairvoyant.

The vision of my siblings arguing like normal made me smile, just faintly. Fred and George took that as their cue to speak:

“Well, Lyssie, we’ve-“

“-got bad news for you.”

I blinked at them, faking confusion. Fred and George nodded at me.

“Look at her, Gred-“

“-she’s so naively hopeful, Forge-“

“-that makes it tough, but we’ve got a duty to uphold-“

“-we have to tell you, Lys.”

I smiled a little at their antics. They seemed encouraged by my smile, and went on:

“Lyssie, you see-“

“-you’ve contracted permanent Spattergroit-“

“-and you’re going to die tomorrow.”

While I loved the twins, I frowned. What the hell were they trying to do, comforting a little girl like that? I suppose my face took on an acceptable level of horror, because the twins broke out into identical grins and laughs.

“Just kidding!”

“Nothing like that, silly-

“-no, no, no, you aren’t going to die-“

“-you’re just a Seer, Lys!”

Ah. So they were going to trick me into thinking that my ability was not that bad by comparing it to a deadly affliction. Rather clever of them, actually. It would work, maybe. I didn’t know, so I just giggled at their silliness. They beamed at a job well-done, which had me turning to Dad, who was watching the whole thing with warm, blue eyes.

“A Seer, Dad?” I asked hesitantly.

He nodded, smiling softly.

“It’s from great-granddad, Lys!”

“Y’know, the one who was a seventh son of a seventh son?”

Dad gave the boys a stern look, but softened as he gazed at me. “Your dreams, Lys. I know you don’t like talking about them and you say you don’t remember them... but you do, don’t you?”

I glanced at Fred and George, who were sporting enormous, reassuring grins.
“I was scared.” I said, quite honestly, “I kept seeing things. Lots of things.” Then I reached over and pulled on Fred’s sleeve, holding it tightly. “Bad things. I didn’t want them to be real, but I think they are.”

*Empty eyes — last smile — “You’re joking, Perce!”*

I shivered at the memory. That wasn’t just one of my favorite characters, not anymore. That was my *goddamn brother*. My family. The kid that made me laugh as easily as breathing, who brought back strange trophies from the orchard (and woods beyond, where we were forbidden to go) to cheer up his too-serious little sister.

Dad nodded gravely. “They are. And it’s alright. Fred and Georgie here represent all your siblings — you’re perfectly safe with us. And you don’t have to hide your dreams if you don’t want to, not from any of us; we Weasley’s stick together.”

I teared up a little, admittedly. Damn child instincts. I thought it was only fear, but…

(Or, perhaps, I just didn’t want to admit I was a ginormous sap.)

“Thanks, Dad.” I said hoarsely, “Thanks Fred and George.”

The demon twins grinned. George turned to Dad triumphantly. “See, Dad? I bet Lys uses her Seer powers to tell which of us is which!”

*No, I actually use your colors... which... is something I should tell Dad. ‘Cos I’m not sure if that’s a Seer thing or not. Oh god, why is Guinevere Weasley such a pain?? This little girl would’ve been FUCKED if I hadn’t been a reincarnation…*

Dad smiled to humor them, I could tell. “Well, go on and brag to your brothers, then. I know you’re dying to tell them that Lys didn’t cry even a bit because you two were here, hm?”

“That’s right! C’mon, Fred- Bye, Lys! We’ll prank ya later!”

“Shuddup, you idiot, George, she didn’t need to know-“

The door shut.

I was four, so it was understandable that Dad pulled me into his lap and settled against the headboard of his and Mum’s bed, wrapping the blankets around the both of us; I felt cocooned and safe again, but it was even better because Dad’s blue strands of magic were wrapping themselves protectively around my indigo colors, and I kept getting flashes of soul-deep safesafesafe love happy comfort safe! I leaned into his chest, feeling every bit the child my physical body was…

“I… I can’t tell them the part because of the colors.” I stuttered out.

Dad hmmm’ed at me gently, as if he was encouraging me to go on (which he probably was). I shouldn’t have been this nervous about this — *I’m fucking twenty-four!* — but I refused to look at Arthur Weasley’s eyes, the ones I had, too. My previous life’s dark coloring had spilled into my skin and hair, but my eyes were all Dad’s. It was something Ginny was infinitely jealous of, because she claimed brown was a dull color (I had brown eyes before, and I rather missed them, but I didn’t tell Ginny that).

Great.
My thoughts were all over the place.

I took a deep breath, and started again. “It’s not just dreams. I can see colors. They hum.”

I cringed at myself. Well, well, well, aren’t you a Luna Lovegood all of a sudden?

Who, by the way, I’ve met. She’s a lot less weird than I thought, but then again, she’s only four. And it’s Ginny who plays with her; I don’t play much, I like to read and stuff, and that’s probably why Percy likes me best-

Babbling.

I’m babbling to myself. God, how sad was that? I was a fucking adult, how hard was it to tell the person I trusted the most in this life? (And wasn’t that a strange though, that out of everyone in the Harry Potter universe to latch onto, I chose one of the more obscure ones, a character who wasn’t taken really all that seriously… Well, I have proven that wrong, Dad was probably the best person I knew.)

“You’re blue, dark blue usually.” I went on, trying to make my Dad understand. If anyone could understand, it was Arthur Weasley, I’ve learned. “Mummy’s bright red, with some oranges and purples and golds. Ginny’s reddish-maroon now, she used to be just maroon, though. Bill’s blue and purple, and Charlie’s dark green, and Percy’s blue and steel-grey and silver. Fred and George have different colors, Fred is dark red and George is kinda purple-red. Ron’s red and orange and yellow and cream.”

“And you, Lys?”

“I’m purple. Bluish-purple, ‘cos I used to be bright purple but then you always held me when I was a baby and I became a bit more blue. So I’m indigo now.” I said quickly, wondering if this was making any fucking sense.

Dad thought to himself for a while.

Then he asked, gently, “What do the colors do?”

“Do?”

“Do they tell you anything? Do anything?”

I blinked, then whispered quietly, “They’re magic.”

He gasped a little; I wouldn’t have noticed, if I weren’t lying down on him. I went on anyways, though.

“There’s a… an aura around people, waves of-of color floating just outside our skin. It’s… It’s like air, or fog, but it’s… it’s more. There are threads, glowing — same color, though — and they float through the air. They… When Mummy summons a book, it’s the threads that grab it for her. And her magic will… er, sing. Like it’s happy to be used, or something. But… it’s more than just that, it’s… when I have nightmares, Ginny’s colors mix with mine and I can feel… Sometimes, the way the threads and fog move, or how the magic hums, or when my magic touches someone else’s, I can tell things.”

“What sorts of things, little queen?”

The use of Dad’s very rarely-spoken nickname for me made me relax considerably. I clutched his
sleeves with my small hands, wondering if I was a bad person for taking advantage of such a kind family that I really shouldn’t have belonged to.

(They gave so much to me. Me, who was alone in this new world, and what did I give back? Nightmares, accidental magic… I took their money and their food and I couldn’t even make them happy like a normal child would-)

I swallowed. “You’re safe. You’re home. Mummy’s nurturing, comfort, discipline. When her magic are quick and twitchy and loud, she’s mad, but sometimes I can… if I make my indigo touch her red, I can tell that she’s worried… or something.”

“And how did you magic move last night, Lyssie?”

I blinked, trying to remember. “It was… angry. Scared. Trying to protect me by… by getting rid of the dreams. But… but the dreams don’t go away, so it’s just… lashing out. The lines were all… wonky. Wrong. And the fog, it was exploding out, twisting into more threads to do more damage… I tried to keep it down, like usual, but…”

“Do you keep it down a lot, Lys?”

“Uh-huh. I almost hurt Ginny once, ‘cos of the broken glass. So never let it out, even when it wants to help or if I want something.” I muttered, opting for the truth. At this point, as long as no one found out about the past-life thing, I was fine with my family knowing it all. I trusted my Dad.

He was amazed, as evident by the widening of his eyes, that I remembered that far back. And then his eyes were filled with tears; I could see his thoughts all across his face. (Arthur Weasley was not one for tears, and I hadn’t yet seen him cry before; unless one counted when my first word was ‘Da’, but I really don’t count happy-tears.) He realized that I’d truly been having visions ever since I was born.

Now, it wasn’t necessarily true… the last bad bout of accidental magic had been because I realized I was in the Harry Potter universe, among other things. But in a way, it was true because I have been having strange dreams since I was born in this world. And I knew things that I shouldn’t.

“You talked to everyone last night, didn’t you?” I asked, “You told them I’m a… Clairvoyant.”

“Was this another dream?”

I nodded. “Right before you and Fred and Georgie came in, I Saw. It’s because great-grandad was a seventh son of a seventh son? I don’t understand why his ability would pass down to his second great-granddaughter. Two isn’t an important magical number.”

Dad chuckled a little, but it didn’t seem as lighthearted as I know he probably wanted it to. “I’ve always wondered why you were so smart and quiet, Lyssie. Do you See lots of things like this, Lys? Is this why you’ve been reading since you were little?”

“Mm-hm. I See stuff all the time. Every night, and now it’s getting… Well, I See stuff even when I’m not sleeping, now. I See a lot of the Muggle world, you know?” I beamed at my father. “I can teach you how electricity works!”

If I can make up the pain of having such a problematic little daughter, I’ll gladly learn how Muggle electricity works.

He laughed again, more genuinely this time. “What else do you See, little queen?”
“Lots of whales! And I saw a woman writing once. And I saw how to make the Draught of Peace, all the colors and stuff. I see all sorts of neat stuff, Dad, so… I mean… It’s not like… I’m not just Seeing bad things, right?’’

“It certainly doesn’t sound like it.”

I smiled. “So don’t be sad, okay? I can tell you are. Your magic is wilting.”

He looked intrigued by that. “You can sense our emotions?”

Shaking my head, I answered, “Only when… Only when they’re very, very deep. Soul-deep.”

“Core-deep,” he muttered, catching on quick. “You’re seeing the spillages of magical cores. So you don’t see surface emotions, or even the reasons behind them…” Then he smiled at me. “Well, my little queen, I’m quite sure you’re not an Empath, or an Assessor, but I reckon, Lyssie, you’ve got another Seer ability.”

I frowned. “Is that even allowed?” Being this bloody powerful should be outlawed.

Dad’s chest rumbled with soft laughter. “We’ll see, Lyssie. We’ll explore the family trees, see what we can find. I’ll be there, with you, every step of the way. But… You understand why we have to keep your abilities a secret, luv?”

There is no good or evil, only power — and those too weak to seek it.

I nodded. “He’s not dead.”

My father looked sad. “Nothing evil dies for long, little queen. If he’s not truly dead, then someone else will take his place.”

My grip on my father tightened. I seemed to constantly forget how very safe a father’s arms were, until I was embraced again. “There will always be people who’ll want to take advantage of my abilities.”

Dad nodded grimly. “Yes, luv. But we’ll protect you. Your mother, your sister, and all your brothers. All of us. We’ll protect you. And we always will.”
Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

A/N: Oh wow, I didn't expect people to actually like this. I mean, I hoped you would, but you guys are being really nice. Thank you, all of you.

Fair warning, Lys might come off as overpowered for a while. Which I wanna say right now, is due to my absolute fascination with magic. I think I have a tag about really trying to tone her down, but there are reasons behind why, and I also tried to balance it out later. Still working out the kinks of this, doing a lot of world building.

... 

I suppose this is where the butterfly effect comes into play?

Arthur Weasley was a veritable, secret fucking genius. Which, I think, he passed down parts of to all of us, which is why some of my siblings were very specialized in their fields of interest.

The kids who got it in the best ways were Percy, Ron, and me. Percy was just good at everything he pursued, which was mostly academics and management. Ron was a ridiculously talented strategist, and had an incredible memory when he was focused on something (which was probably why he wasn’t all that good at academics, because he just didn’t care).

Me?

Well, I learned how electricity learned in, like, a month. Which was without instruction, I just kinda started concentrating on it in visions, I started going to town to buy and take apart random electronic appliances.

And this is where Dad comes back in, because he figured it out in a week. And this is a man who was NEVER exposed to the Muggle world or its technology before, who grew up without knowing any of this electrons and magnetism shit, and he still mastered it in a week. A week.

Anyway, the butterfly effect comes into play because Arthur motherfucking Weasley became a more-than-adequate Occlumens and slightly-less-than-adequate Legilimens in four months. Four months. FOUR FUCKING MONTHS. My father taught himself — and I’m not sure who he got to help him, so I’m just gonna go with self-study for this — how to safely and effectively break into minds, and how to shield himself from those breaks. (FOUR MONTHS???)

When I expressed horrified amazement at his accomplishment, Dad just smiled.

“Anything for my family, Lys,” he said in explanation.
That’s some serious protective instinct.

Butterfly effect: I’m born, so Dad becomes a skilled Occlumens and Legilimens in order to teach me how to control my stupidly-overpowered Clairvoyance. And I’m not complaining. Anything that makes him stronger, that makes my family stronger, I’ll gladly get on board with.

I was getting better, now that my family was involved. Before, visions came to me at night and hounded my dreams, showing me things I wanted to avoid. It came in bursts of pain and fear that made me wake up screaming. I mean, it still did that, but much less in number and much more in intensity. Which is… maybe worse? If only for my own sanity, I decided it was better. The Weasley household could, at least, sleep peacefully for the majority of a two-week period.

With Dad training me in Occlumency — Legilimency, I’d never really need (or so he thought) — my new hobby, besides trying to learn absolutely everything I could, was meditation. It helped, actually, to look back on past visions and try to sort them out, and then start categorizing them. The practice was a preliminary step to organizing my mindscape, which I hadn’t quite gotten to yet; it was an advanced Occlumency technique that even Dad was still rudimentary with, so I didn’t feel all that bad. But being able to sort out my thoughts was a good practice, and it calmed me down. That, or the more traditional magical meditation of becoming metaphysical again and trying to submerge myself in the own folds of my indigo-colored magical core.

Control over my magic was a must, so that I didn’t lash out in fear. Especially because it was growing rapidly, something that Dad attributed to the fact that I was a Seer and Seer-witches were always a bit magically stronger than norm. Also especially because my physical condition would never, ever be very good; witches with Seer abilities always had some sort of physical defect, along with the usual side effects of their ability, due to the strain of Seer magic on mortal bodies.

It was a fucking pain, but I needed to exert so much self-control in everything I did.

The first incident where I sunk too deeply into my Clairvoyant visions, I had to be shaken “awake” and it was a very terrified and panicking Percy that supported me when I collapsed onto him, blood leaking from my lips.

So, right, most sheltered Weasley? I became even more so after they all figured out that if I didn’t try to control my Clairvoyance, my magic would actually kill me. And I didn’t know why, I just knew that that’s what would happen. Fuck my life.

“Lys, are you sure you don’t just wanna go inside?” asked Ron worriedly.

Fred, George, Bill, Charlie, and Ron had the old, rickety brooms from the shed in their hands. Ginny, Percy, and I were following them outside to watch them play the Weasley version of mini-Quidditch.

Ron, ever the protective big brother, was eyeing my too-pale complexion with intense scrutiny.

I nodded. “Mm-hm. We’re just gonna read and watch.”

He narrowed his eyes, then glanced at our brothers behind him, waiting for him to get into his usual Keeper position. “Okay… But if you get another ‘dizzy spell’, you’ve got to go inside, alright, Lyssie? Promise?”

‘Dizzy spell’ was the Weasley’s official key word to ‘Clairvoyant vision’.

“Promise.” I said solemnly, deciding to humor my big-little-brother.
He nodded, and then trotted to the rest of our athletically-inclined brothers to start the game. I smiled after him; all of the family was always so worried now. I suppose when they told me that I didn’t have to hide anything from them, they weren’t quite expecting me to go ahead and start learning the entire Hogwarts curriculum (scavenging older brothers’ books and homework was fun, sometimes), reading classical works from the Muggle library in down in the town, and still go through the Occlumency training and magical meditation that I did. It made them think I was pushing myself, I think.

(My family was fucking adorable.)

But what could I say? Apparently my father was a genius — makes me wonder why the Jesus FUCK he hadn’t been promoted yet when he could literally learn Occlumency in less than half a year — and with my drive to be stronger, to protect these people who I owed so much to and loved so fucking much, of COURSE I’d start learning all this shit!

Honestly! Dad was completely fine with it, as long as I meditated at least once a week and tried to put a pattern to my visions.

…

There was just so much absolute shit I had to catch up on in this world, I felt like things were slipping through my tiny fucking fingers.

I wanted to get the stupid-ass general education curriculum over with, of course; things would heat up when I started going to Hogwarts — Death Eaters storming the castle, black cloaks flying out behind them — crooked wands in their hands — led by a cackling woman with crazed violet eyes and dark, wild hair and a penchant for shattering things around her like — a bull in a china shop… — so I needed to be sufficiently skilled to defend my brothers and sister by then. My goal was to finish Hogwarts curriculum before I actually got there, so I could use the lack of constant supervision to start learning how to fight for my life.

(It was mostly just theory and shit, since I didn’t dare use a wand… I wasn’t quite sure how the Trace worked, and until I was, I didn’t want to risk the attention of the Ministry. That’s exactly what we wanted to avoid, actually.)

So, there was that.

But then I also had to be a goddamn Clairvoyant — Thanks Grandpa Weasley, you motherfucker! — with really, really powerful magic, so I needed to become an Occlumens and a pro at magical control before everything else. So, an hour or two of meditation every week at least; and lots and lots of practice with Dad, which was headache inducing for the both of us.

Okay, that’s cool too. So I have to be more in touch with my indigo magical core and be an Occlumens, sure. (“You’re making quite a lot of progress, actually, luv.” “Really?” “Yes, I’d say that you’re a natural at this. You’ll probably get to my level within a month or two.” “Huh. Dad, does genius run in the family?”)

Anyways, with these two things and making sure I paid attention to all my siblings and parents on a regular basis — playing with Ginny and Ron and the twins, reading with Percy and Charlie and Bill, cooking with Mum, learning how to do nerdy Muggle shit with Dad — it completely fucking
slipped my mind that there was something wrong with this world.

Laughter and laughter and more and more curses. “Itty bitty ickle Weasley, so alone in the world!” cackled a voice, “How many of your little litter mates have we killed, baby Weasley?”

“I’ll KILL YOU LESTRANGE!”

“Crucio!” A pause. “Hm? What’s this? Is baby Weasley crying? Oh, but it wouldn’t be right to call you ‘baby Weasley’ since you’re not really the ickle youngest, are you? Your little sisters… One of them still goes to Hogwarts, at least, yes?”

Stop.

I blinked at the strange nightmare. It was scary, of course, and I almost felt like I was there, being tormented alongside my littlest older brother. (Many of the nightmares I had were of my brothers’ respective mutilations at the hands of the fucking Death Eaters, and sometimes, I swore, I’d see Bill, Fred, and George die… Those were the worst…) It was wrong though, was the point. These things didn’t happen. Not according to what I knew—

But you don’t know everything. Why do you exist here, in this world?

Which led me to believe that this was NOT canon! Harry Potter-verse, which was really fucking bad. Like. It’s like… It’s like I was actually flying in blind here. Which was strange to think about, because one would assume reincarnation is supposed to be more random and frightening. Meaning, I’d derived some sorta comfort from being born into a universe I was mostly knowledgable of. Meaning, I was a cheating scumbag and this was probably the world telling me to fuck off. The only plus I had was my stupidly overpowered Clairvoyance, but it also destroyed my physical abilities and made me quite sick a lot of the time… A balance, of sorts.

Balance.

My eyes widened.

“Dad?” I asked quickly, cutting into our Occlumency time.

(Interesting to note: Dad never caught onto the fact that I was a reincarnation when he made periodic little pokes into my mind. All he ever saw were clips of blurry, distorted visions and my own memories and experiences of this life as Guinevere Weasley.)

Dad gave me a reassuring smile. “Yes, Lyssie?”

I twiddled my thumbs. I sounded so intelligent most of the time, but when it came to magical knowledge, I was kinda just a kid. Hurt my pride a little, I guess.

“Magic… Does magic balance itself? Naturally?”

He gave me a questioning, but fond (as in, ‘ah, my littlest is being profoundly curious again’) look. “What do you mean, Lys?”

I frowned. “Like in Clairvoyance. Grandpa Weasley was just a little frailer, and his Sight was weak. But me… I have asthma and I get sick all the time and it’s easy for me to get hurt, but my Sight is…” Monstrous. “…really strong.”

Dad tilted his head in thought. Then he nodded, slowly. “Yes, I see how you came to that conclusion, Lyssie. To answer your question, though: Yes, magic is a balance. I’m no Magical
Theorist, but the gist of it is that magic is semi-sentient; it’s not a have-all, fix-all, in any sense — for something to be gained, something must be lost, etcetera.”

Nodding, I went on to practice my Occlumency with Dad (I was growing much more successful each day, but it might’ve been because I was already quite an introspective being and my mind was pretty developed with how old I actually was) and I kept that bit of information in my head, carefully piling ideas around it. Trying to connect it to something, because there had to be a connection between this non-canon HP world and my being here.

The problem, I think, was that I didn’t even know what questions to ask in order to figure out why this world was different, what was different about it besides the horribly gory futures of my brothers, and why I was here.

Balance, that was the nature of magic.

What balances my presence in this world?

There.

That’s the question I need the answer to.

What was taken so that I was given to the Weasley family?

(Because there’s nothing but magic, that could’ve taken me from my death in a very non-magic world to this one, where I shouldn’t exist.)

Finding that answer was the object of my obsession for a month, with me simply trying to See something — extremely unsuccessful, especially that one time when my magic flared up, the fucking ornery purple shit, and scorched a quarter of the orchard — until finally Dad pulled me aside before an Occlumency lesson. He was, after all, the one I bounced most of my ideas and visions off of; I’d say he was the closest member of my family, especially since my age-mentality was so much closer to his than to anyone’s (especially Ginny’s, which she was quite put off about, us being twins and all that.)

“Is this about balance?” he asked me seriously, “You don’t need to clam up, little queen. We may not have much money, but we can afford to buy some books on Magical Theory, or Core Theory, or whatever you need.”

A stab of guilt.

Dammit, I’m worrying them, aren’t I?

I shook my head. “No, it’s… well, okay, it’s about balance. Kinda. But I… I want to research this on my own, Dad. I- Diagon Alley, I want to go to Diagon Alley to find what I need. It’s… It feels like something I have to do.”

Dad looked at me closely. “Lyssie, you’re only five. You don’t need all the answers right now.”

Wrong on both accounts. I was not, in fact, only five; even counting out my past life, one might argue that the Clairvoyance, the amount of time I lived vicariously through visions, gave me more experience. And yes, I did need the answers now. I needed to know what the FUCK was wrong with this alternate-universe shit, and how I could fucking fix it because instinct and Murphy’s law was telling me that the increased severity of the war? My brothers dying? Yeah, that was my fault somehow. And my responsibility, because I was NOT going to let a single. Brother. Die. (If I had my way, they wouldn’t even be hurt. But I wasn’t that idealistic.)
“Dad, I need to know. There’s… There’s something wrong with the future.” I whispered the last part, shuddering at the images of empty blue eyes and red hair darkened with blood, “And I bet I could change it. But I need to know more.”

My father gave me a steady look. I stared right back, not letting my gaze waver; I loved my father, he was my absolute favorite person in this world, not that I’d be telling Ginny that, but I would fight him on this.

Then he sighed, running his fingers through his hair. He gave a weak smile. “You’re going to run me ragged, aren’t you?”

My lips twitched. “Were you expecting anything different when you had a daughter?”

(Good thing they were all so used to my speech patterns. Five-year-olds didn’t talk like that…)

“Maybe a little, luv.” he chuckled softly. Then he stood, nodding to himself. “Alright, Diagon Alley it is. Flourish and Blotts, I suppose?”

I nodded.

Again, another sigh. “Alright. But I’ll have someone of age escort you, alright? And they’ll keep an eye on you, make sure you don’t wander.”

Hand holding hand — small and weak and the other large and calloused — the little girl with dark crimson hair — the crowded, crooked bookshop and darted towards the historical section immediately. Hours. Hours. Hours and hours of poring over books — watched like a hawk, skimming his own book.

Again. Hours — hours — the bookshop — crowded and hot — robes of many colors blurring the background like globs of Impressionist paint.

Again. She didn’t look up from her books, only ducking her small head in one after another. They grew in number — the stack beside her — towering over her — threatening to fall.

Again.

Again.

And finally the escort — tall and gangly and bored — left her alone. He walked out to the Quidditch shop — it would be the same. As he left, her eyes — icy blue — flickered up, and behind the leathery pages she pulled off a devious smirk. It would not be the same.

(Stop.)

I nodded, and then I grinned to myself as Dad went to make arrangements. I felt a little bad, giving them this much trouble, but my vision showed me that I needed to not have an escort. Which meant that there was something I needed to leave Flourish and Blotts for. If it was another Diagon shop, I’d probably just drag them there… But since I was sneaking away, that meant…

Knockturn Alley?

Looks like I was going to need to practice wandless magic. If only to run away, of course. Half of those books I was reading, they were probably things to prepare me for my little escapades into the Dark, where the true answers lay.
“Wandless magic it is, then.” I muttered to myself, heading out to the orchard to see if I couldn’t manage a Notice-Me-Not.

God, this is going to take forever.

As it turns out, my meditation and exploration of that indigo crap I assume is my magical core gave me a disposition towards wandless magic. Or maybe Guinevere Weasley was just a goddamn freak of nature that honestly would probably be dead or insane if there weren’t a mind of an adult in her head.

Because, seriously. Wandless magic was fucking exhausting, but it was fun as fuck. And I was fucking good at it.

My fingers, tiny as they were, twitched. The collection of leaves and flowers I’d been levitating around shifted with my movement. I had a headache building up; my indigo magic was spread over the whole little clearing, trembling and humming happily. As if it were happy to be used, which if Dad said right, it might be; semi-sentience, and all that.

The little threads of electric blue-purple were weaving lightly through the things I was controlling, and I watched in (pained) amazement as my magic bent to my will clumsily, as long as I inserted enough resolve into the mental image of what I wanted to happen.

“Come on, come on,” I muttered to my indigo colors.

It rippled in response. I felt like I’d run a marathon all of a sudden, but the leaves and bits of grass and flowers and all manner of meadow debris began to dance around me, bobbing softly to the rhythm of my magic.

My grin must’ve been vicious with how fucking smug I felt.

“I’m a fucking genius.” I cackled, ignoring how tired I was.

It might’ve been a combination of Seer-magic (which was already very powerful shit), my adult mind, the intensive Occlumency, how much I meditated, and my overall interest in magic — No shit I’m interested, magic didn’t exist in my last life! — but I was just getting better at being able to prod my magic into doing stuff. I knew basic spells, of course, but when I tested if I could set shit on fire by just demanding it to burn instead of chanting *Incendio* internally, it worked. So I decided to start with learning how to get my magic to do what my imagination cooked up, and I’d practice spells and incantations later.

Months passed.

October was just a lot of that, me fucking around with magic (and cackling). My request for private Diagon Alley trips would be granted during the winter hols, so that Bill or Charlie could take me instead; Dad was just too busy with work, Mum too busy with the rest of my siblings. I didn’t mind. I found a new project to sink my time into.

It started getting cold in November — enough that I really didn’t want to go outside to practice my growing magical control anymore — so I began to learn how to do smaller things. Color-changing.
Shrinking and enlargement. The silent, wordless equivalents of Scourgify and Spongify. And, really, I shouldn’t have been surprised when one of my siblings happened to walk in on my practice.

My indigo magic was flickering around Ginny’s stuffed rabbit. I was playing with its colors, having been bored to death because Ginny and Ron were napping, Percy was reading in his room, and the twins were being scolded by Mum. I’d finished my required half-hour of meditation — funny, ’cos the more control I had over my indigo magic, the more it grew; and the more it grew, the more the Clairvoyance began to kick my ass — for the day, so Mr. Giffy was a good target for my boredom.

He was sporting a very fetching maroon color, and I began to brighten it into Mum’s magic’s candy-red when the door slammed open and someone gasped.

I whipped around guiltily, and was inordinately relieved it wasn’t the twins. (They would’ve pestered me to teach them or something, they loved filching wands and experimenting with them however they pleased.) Standing there, surprisingly, was Percy.

We blinked at each other.

“Don’t tell the demon twins.” I said quickly.

(My British accent was coming along, by the way — five years in a foreign country will do that to you. I just… had to be careful not to start ranting, ‘cos that’s when it would disappear and I’d give away my American-raised mind.)

“You’re controlling your accidental magic,” said my brother in awe.

“Erm. It’s not accidental like that anymore, is it?”

Percy’s blue eyes were wide. “Lyssie, how long have you been able to do that?”

I shrugged, waving a hand and returning Mr. Giffy to his cream-brown color. “I started practicing in October.” It’s not that hard, is what I would’ve added if I didn’t think Percy might get annoyed with me for that.

My brother shut the door quickly, trotting to my side and sitting down eagerly, vibrating in excitement. He was trying not to smile; Percy always liked to look smart and serious. “What else can you do?” he asked, trying to mask his enthusiasm.

Grinning, I made grabby motions towards the little squat bookshelf in the corner. Bill’s old first-year books zoomed towards me, my indigo tendrils wrapping around them and sinking inside; the books glinted purple as they came close, slowing and opening gently, landing on my lap. The others piled up next to me, in a neat stack. It had taken me a few days of constant practice and muttered profanities to get the damn books to not smack into my fucking face, but I’d done it.

I flashed a proud look at Percy. “It took me forever to get that!”

Percy looked at me in amusement. “You would learn how to fetch books wandlessly first.”

“I prob’ly got it from you,” I reasoned. He was the bibliophile of the family, after all. He didn’t have to know that I’d been one before I’d died, so it wasn’t, in fact, his influence that had me more interested in books than anything else.

Ah, but then again, I hated flying — heights made me nauseous — and I couldn’t run around
much, so, there was that.

Truthfully, though, I was very invested in the idea of being able to wandlessly summon my wand — or any wand — back to my hands if I were disarmed in a fight. Moving objects was pretty easy for me now, though there was a certain limit to their mass that I had to train up and work around. I’d started with little things like leaves, and now I was getting books to fly to me. Accio was going to be a breeze at this point.

“Does Dad know?” he asked diplomatically.

“Nope. Just you.”

He looked faintly flattered. “You should tell Dad. It might be a Seer thing, wandless magic.”

I nodded. “Dad said that Seer-witches are magically powerful and physically weak. I’m very physically weak— I had asthma again, goddamnit. —so I’m very magically strong, see?”

Percy frowned a little. “That’s dangerous, isn’t it?”

“That I’m magically strong?”

“Cos of the dizzy spells. Your magic attacks your insides, that’s why you were coughing blood last time.”

Another nod. “Yeah.”

Seer-magic was finicky, after all. It was a delicate see-saw of my control vs. the magic’s semisentience. I was hurt if I resisted the visions, and I was hurt if I tried to See too much; like, as Percy remembers, when I desperately kept myself within the hold of the Clairvoyance trying to See more about George’s supposed demise in this new shittily-fated world. I didn’t managed to see much beyond his severed ear-hole bleeding profusely and it apparently blackening (Did that happen in the books? I couldn’t goddamn remember but I had a bad feeling…) before the Clairvoyant magic started to attack my physical body. Then I was coughing blood and vomiting for a few hours afterwards, with my family panicking all around me.

It was a goddamn mess, this magic business.

(I loved it so much.)

My brother was giving me a very concerned look, eyes flicking between my face and the books I’d just summoned and levitated wandlessly.

“Don’t worry, Perce,” I soothed, “I know what it feels like when I push myself— Like my insides are bursting and being crushed at the same time. —and this isn’t even close, yeah? My magical core’s getting stretched lots ‘cos of the Occlumency and meditation! And practice.”

Percy scrutinized me closely, eyes squinted.

“Don’t tell anyone, please? I’ll tell Dad myself. I’ll tell him when he gets home.”

“It might be dangerous, though, Lyssie.”

“It’s really not! My core is big enough to handle a lot more than just fetching books and changing colors, Percy.”

“What else can you do?”
I grinned. “I can set things on fire. Make things move. And some of Mum’s household charms from her book. I’m still working on the Stasis Charm, though. I’m better at making things fly about or burst into flames, though.”

There was a flash of panic in his eyes. “What have you set on fire?”

“What? Leaves! God-er, Merlin! I’m not going to set anything in our house on fire!”

He sighed. “Good. Lyssie, really, we live with the demon twins. I think I’ve got a right to worry. And no, I won’t be telling anyone — least of all them — about your wandless magic. But you really ought to tell Dad. He’ll know what to do.”

“I already know what to do,” I grumbled a little, “I ought to be in Diagon Alley, researching. But I can’t right now, so I’ll at least have some fun first.”

Percy snorted a little, reaching over to ruffle my hair. Ginny kept her carrot-orange strands long and straight, but my hair took a bit more after my first life: dark, thick, and filled with waves. As such, I liked to chop it short, almost boyish.

Then my brother hesitated a little. “Lyssie?”

“Hm?”

“Would you… er… Do you think that I…?”

I blinked up at my older brother. He looked fidgety and shy. I smiled at him. “You want me to help you do magic?”

He nodded shallowly.

I laughed. “Okay! That’d be nice, too, you have a lovely core. It’s a very nice sky blue.”

Percy brightened. “Really?”

“Mm-hm. Erm… oh, here! Look.”

Holding my hands out in front of me, I cupped my fingers and squinted a little. It took much less effort than the first time I tried to become some sort of magical firebender, but I still needed to concentrate. Sure enough, my indigo concentrated — it felt like it was solidifying, but I knew that Percy couldn’t See what I could — and sparks of the incandescent threads sprouted. It was like compressing my color into one space, and instead of the oxygen exploding, a flame shimmered into existence; dancing above my cupped palms, hot but not painful.

It was a regular flicker of yellow flame, but I pushed my magic, poking at it, and the candlelight shuddered and grew. A little fireball sat in the air above my fingers, and I grinned at a gaping Percy as I made its color flicker. Then it was sky blue, the innermost flame nearly white and the edges a darkening navy, and plum blobs of color rippled through the flames every now and then, representing the threads of Percy’s magic. Percy’s mouth was open as he stared at it.

“I can’t really do the colors right,” I murmured, not really wanting to break the awed silence, “but this is as close as I can get it.”

“This is mine?” He sounded like he didn’t believe it.

“Yeah. This is yours.”
Percy smiled, and it was the happiest smile I’d ever seen from him. “What do your colors look like?”

I laughed, then—

“Ow.”

Percy straightened in an instant, eyes bleeding of warmth and sharpening. “Lys?”

“My head…” I whined a little. There was a stab of pain, then another; then it was just a dull throbbing, like I’d left my hair tied too tightly for several hours — back in my last life when I had longer hair — and then tried to read for several hours more after that.

The Percy-colored flames winked out of existence, and I winced again, squeezing my eyes shut.

A clear, babbling brook — grows into a river aways from the house, part of it trickled off to feed the Burrow’s pond — larger part deepened and widened and grew with thin ice in November. The twins were irritated after the scolding — identical faces set into frowns.

They ran off, even though it was so cold. Ron woke up and saw them and followed, worried a little — little maroon-colored scarf around his red-cheeked face — the sun was just setting and the sky looked like it was on fire even though it was so cold.

“Go away, Ronniekins!” — “You’re not supposed to go this far!” — “We’re older, Ron.”

He followed, still — three blobs against the hibernating brush — streaks of red smothered in wooly coats and hats and scarves — the twins just wanted to get away from their little brother, who was bored with how Ginny was sleeping — little girl curled up in blankets, tired out because her own little sister played earlier with her — lonely child sandwiched in between two sets of twins, no playmate/partner to call his own, Ron just wanted to be included — the twins took his following as a challenge — the brook widened and then it was suddenly a river, with three children walking alongside it in the autumn chill.

Blurs — distorted colors — screaming — “RON NO!” — underwater, pale hands in front of him — surface is so far — gurgling.

“GO GET MUM!”

Drowning drowning drowning? — water surges upwards blurry and distorted and colors all over the place — indigo everywhere, straining, writhing like a thousand worms — blurs — drowning? — Ron with a hard, gangly face looking at the water uncertainly.

“I’m afraid of water,” he admitted quietly — green murk in the black lake.

Fred and George screamed as the fiery-red hair soaked almost black and sunk sunk sunk sunk sunk — “NO, NO, RON, NO!” — drowned brother, white body laid out in soaking wool, eyes closed and belly full of just too much river water — CRACK CRACK CRACK! went the ice — blurry vision — a crying woman in the kitchen, the twins huddled up in their room silently.

( Stop. )

My eyes opened, and it was instinctive. My magic didn’t even fight me as I forced it to pulse outwards, combing through the entire house, through every nook and cranny. The indigo swept over the sky blue of a worrying, panicking Percy; then the candy-red of Mum, downstairs, humming in the kitchen; then the slow-beating pulse of Ginny’s gold-flecked maroon up in
Ron/Bill’s room; then the sickly yellow murk of Scabbergrew in Percy’s room (I really have to think about what I’m going to do with him…); then little dots of mint-greens and pale yellows in the garden, the gnomes I think; and the dark, sluggish colors of the ghoul in the attic.

No twins. No Ron.

And the window showed me a sky that looked like it was on fire.

There was no time.

“-ys? Lys? Lyssie? Lyssie, are you alright?”

OUT OF THE WAY!

My indigo gently pushed Percy away; he landed in a heap on my nest of a bed, looking ruffled and afraid and shocked. The door to my and Ginny’s bedroom was attacked by the electric purple-blue threads, streaking across the air like lightning, and the wood was knocked off its hinges as I barreled through. I tumbled down stairs, trusting my magic to catch me and land me on my feet lightly. My hand flew out and my purple, wooly sweater was in my hands and over my head as I nearly broke the back door down.

Faster! There’s no time! I NEED TO RUN FASTER!

My lungs heaved, and there was the smell of ozone as my indigo magic flailed wildly with my emotions.

Ron, drowning? He’s only six, why is he going to die? Why is he going to drown? And why did I see that he might not? Was it because I could save him? I didn’t want him to die, he was my big brother, he was protective and lonely and he loved Quidditch and his colors were so, so bright. He couldn’t die! He was Harry Potter’s best friend, he was Hermione Granger’s husband, he was a hero of the war, he was a victim of the Death Eaters — which is still better than dying I suppose — my brother cannot, WILL NOT die! It’s so cold, he might get ill even if he doesn’t drown, but the child in my vision was just so still, so pale, I wanted to be sick…

There was no time.

He stepped on a safe-looking section, trying to get to the two figures faster — they were laughing, feeling much better after an impromptu game of tag with their littlest little brother — the ice groaned — CRACK CRACK CRACK! — “RON, NO!”

( Stop. )

NO! I would NOT allow this to happen! NEVER!

FUCK, what is with this future? I Saw that Ron would live up to at LEAST seventeen, he was being tortured, he is NOT going to drown today, what is going on, will I be fast enough I HAVE TO BE FAST ENOUGH No, no, no, please don’t take him away he’s too important, what if I don’t make it? I have to make it, RON NO!

My lungs were burning, I could barely suck air into them; my magic swirled around me, inside me, trying to keep my body from falling apart after sprinting the better part of a mile down the river. I know they were here, where were they, my brothers-

“What-"
“NO! RON, NO!”

“GEORGE, GO GET MUM! HE’S DROWNING!”

“RON! RON!”

“GO GET MUM!”

My brother was drowning right now and there was no time.

My indigo magic reared up, building up like a storm, as I ripped through dormant bushes — ignoring the cuts and snags of the branches on clothing and skin — and stumbled at the riverbank. George nearly slammed into me, Fred was wading into the water, and there was a struggling blur in the middle of the dark river. A pale hand shot up, flailed, and sunk again.

The sight made me burn.

You will not take my brother.

My magic’s song was deep and snarling now, loud and buzzing in my eyes.

...

I’d been changing Mr. Giffy’s colors, and then I summoned those books, and then I made flames and changed their colors to Percy’s. My magic wasn’t even half-spent, but it was obviously used up for the day.

So I didn’t question the splintering feeling in my chest, the way pain shot through my core, up my heart down my ribcage, down my spine, ripping through my gut carelessly, just to return and travel upwards again. My skin was tingling, then there was a buzzing feeling, and then I could only hear the roar of my magic. Indigo leaked out of me, curling around me and making my hair stand on end.

Save him. I demanded, feeling a push in my core and watching as the indigo burst out and split into a thousand spider-silk strings, like lightning shattering, all of it surging towards the something in the water.

Electricity ran up and down my bones, power forcing my lungs to contract and my breath to empty; my eyes widened, strength rushing through me, down my stomach, to my legs, to my toes, back up to my knees, to my heart, to my arms, through my fingers, up my neck, in my head… It was painful, it was intoxicating. It felt like I was wringing my very organs of every drop of magic their cells contained, like I was ripping it out of my system with my own two hands — stupid, but necessary, and very very very exhilarating.

I will not fail. something whispered in my head; it might’ve been me.

Then.

The river lifted.

My indigo sunk into the water, droplets splattering out from the stream at the dark thread’s
command — the water lifted, a puppet on my strings, swirling upwards and around the *something* in the water. Sheets of water wrapped around the something protectively, like it was curling up in defense, shielding the *something* in the water. There was buzzing in my ears, strings thinning between me and the orb of water; I snarled, pushing more into them; the puppet-strings thickened, curling around each other, the water rose at my command.


The magic was buzzing on my skin. The threads of indigo were unraveling and raveling constantly, like it didn’t know what it wanted to do; or, rather, it was trying to do what I wanted it to, but had a hard time focusing. The threads kept twisting outwards, leaving the fold, evaporating into the air — wasted. I’d never done something like this, and unpracticed magic meant this messy, useless display of untrained, undisciplined… It made me angry, and I used that anger to fuel the magic, to force it to keep going. The threads strained, but I had to save Ron.

(There was no time.)

(I wasn’t thinking.)

(I was panicking.)

Something warm leaked down my lips. Blood, probably. I was wringing my organs dry, after all, and damn the consequences. Ron would not die. He would probably have a phobia of water forever, but he *would not die*. And he’d never fucking be tortured, either, because if all I had to do was bleed internally to make sure of it, I would.

The water was like a marble, really. A marble constantly reforming itself, sheets and layers splashing up to keep the flow. The inside was hollow, though; I made sure of that. And whatever water was swallowed by the *something* inside, the thing to be protected, was coming out and joining the defense. It languidly floated, small but larger than I was, until it was resting on the bank of the river.

SNAP!

*A gasp, and it was like the first time tasting air again — the November air was chilling and he was turning blue but his chest rose and fell and rose and fell and he was alive — the twins were crying but they covered their eyes — blood on small, pale lips that were smiling in utter relief — IT HURTS — four to a boat and Ron’s hands were pale as they clutched the sides, his new green-eyed friend giving him a funny look.*

“Are you alright?” — “I’m afraid of water,” he admitted quietly — worried — blurred — pale knuckles and fingers digging into the sides of the boat like steel.

“Oh. Are you going to be sick?” — Ron snorted a little, he wished he were only seasick.

“Not that kind of afraid, mate. Don’t worry about it.” — “We won’t be on these bloody boats for long, I reckon.” — Thank Merlin, thank god, no more water.

(Stop.)

I gasped, and it felt like it was I’d tasted air for the first time again.

The water collapsed, my indigo fizzling out into nothingness. As my magic was spent, warmth spurted up my throat; I gagged, and the world spun as my hand covered my mouth. When it came back from my lips it was just red, bright against the cold pale of my hands. Someone was saying
something but I couldn’t understand, it felt like I was ten feet underwater and they were trying to
tell me something, standing on the surface and waving down at me.

The water collapsed, and then so did I.
Golden light was streaming through clouds. Fields patterned with stripes of green and brown and wheat-gold, it was warm and the wind was gentle through the eaves — hands running along the crop with appraising pride, hands that were calloused with hard work and many years of experience. He smiled at his fields, a few teeth missing as he chewed on tobacco.

\( \text{( Stop. } \)\)

It was deep, deep blue — a darkness that barely saw light — stillness in the cold deep — silvery winks of fish, their scales catching — wake up — the soft glow from the sun above, rays barely drifting down to this empty peace — in a patterned, abstract formation, gliding through the water like a silver cloud.

\( \text{( Stop. } \)\)

Hands traced the wood gently, hesitantly. He set his tools to the smooth panel that had once been a tree growing tall and flowering strong, thick and sturdy, roots spread wide — Ah, that’d be ironic, he thought to himself as he carved out wooden flowers. The tree was dead, there were no more flowers for it but these — over and over, flowers blooming from dead wood once again, over and over — wake up, lys — crisscrossing pattern — smooth, dead petals, painted white with practiced, only slight-trembling fingers.

The creatures crept over the dead leaves, nose to the ground — the tracks were leading this way, the smell the other — fake tracks — trusting its senses — a sort of cat? a lynx? dark spots on grey, fluffy fur — wake up — the prey was hiding there, it was trying to trick its predator — wake up, lys, please

wake up

\( \text{( Stop. } \)\)

The man was plucking flowers from the ground with precision — his hands were pale and his cloak was black — wake up, lys — The ones that had three-curl leaves were bad. He needed the rarer five-curl ones — fern-green, fuzzy with fiber, curling to protect its stem from the world, the world that wanted its flowers so badly — he needed these herbs, they would heal his village his people, he was practiced in its remedies, yes.
Wake up, lys, wake up — simmering in the cauldron, bubbling a clear bluish — those flowers with the five-curled leaves, as the three-curled were poison — ingested, the victim would spasm and froth from the mouth and suffer, depending on how many they managed to eat before the bitter taste set in — one, two three — seven stirs — don’t forget to lower the heat or it will become purple — keep it a turquoise — wake up, dear...

wake up
wake
up

(Stop.)

My eyes blinked open suddenly. Wooden beams on the high-ish ceiling. Light from the window. A soft sort of scent. This was my room wasn’t it? But it was different, somehow. What was different about it? And why was I here? With all the blood and magic I’d somehow expended, I’d have thought that I’d be waking up in St. Mungos.

It was different. Why? What was different?

Where is my indigo.

Fuck. Fuck fuck fuckity fuck. Did I use too much? Was I a Squib now or something? Where the FUCK was my magic? There was no haze of my colors drifting around me, curling around my skin like some sort of protective, foggy cloud. It was always there, and if I willed it, I could force it into the corners of my eyes; but now it was completely fucking GONE.

Shit. Shit, no, please, my magic, not that-

“Don’t worry, Miss Weasley. I have simply been casting a Soothsayer Soothing spell on your behalf; you still have your magic. You can feel it, can’t you?”

Immediately my eyes shut again and I was searching for my colors. There was total blackness all around me, nothingness, and then there were swirls of my familiar indigo, deep and dark and lovely, folding all into itself like velvet. I smiled at the sight of it, and I could finally feel its indiscernible rhythm underneath my skin. It was huge, much bigger than the last time I’d meditated, and the threads of color were paler; almost white, glowing silver, wrapping me in comfort. I’m here, it seemed to be telling me, I’m here, I’m yours, I’m here, I’m here.

I sighed in relief.

Blinking my eyes open, I looked to who was sitting at my bedside. The fuck.

Albus Dumbledore was sitting at my bedside.

The strongest wizard in the Western Hemisphere was sitting at my bedside.

The Headmaster of Hogwarts was sitting in my room.

That was Albus Dumbledore.

THE FUCK??

“Oh.” I said intelligently. (I wanted to smack myself.)
He didn’t look like his movie-counterpart exactly. He was thin and elderly, his beard and hair nearly white, neatly tied from the rest of his face. His eyes were a stunning ice-blue — and yes, they did actually fucking twinkle — behind half-moon glasses perched on the edge of his crooked nose. The robes he was wearing were eye-watering to say the least; bright, garish purple with golden stars that periodically twirled around a little, neon green trim. It made me kinda sick to look at him, honestly, because not only could he probably snap me in half like I was a twig, my eyes were on fire.

The strongest wizard in the Western Hemisphere smiled congenially at me.

“Hello, Miss Weasley. I am Albus Dumbledore,” he said simply, “It’s a pleasure to meet you.”

I could only nod politely. “The pleasure’s all mine.”

His smile widened. “The spell’s incantation is Dī-konden An-drixtā, called simply ‘the Soothsayer Soothing spell’ for lack of better translation. It is an old Proto-Celtic spell. In fact, it was once a ritual, bastardized by wand-users because staff-users began to die out when Rome invaded the home of the Druids. Normally, only the caster is affected, but I myself have dabbled lightly in Spell Crafting; in that case, the incantation is Dāno Dī-konden An-drixtā, followed by the name of whom you wish to sooth.”

I nodded, taking in this information eagerly. “Dāno Dī-konden An-drixtā Albus Dumbledore.”

(Weird. Pain? Was it an after-effect of my saving Ron?)

(But I still had my magic, and that’s the important thing.)

The Hogwarts Headmaster hummed happily. “An excellent first try, Miss Weasley. It is easier with a wand, of course, despite your skill in wandless casting. You’ll find, however, that your magic will be a little… tender, shall we say? You expended more than what is healthy for a child of your age during your admirable rescue of Mr. Ronald Weasley.”

“Is he okay?”

He chuckled a little. “Yes, your brother is in perfect physical health.”

I twitched. “Mentally?”

Dumbledore grew a bit grave. “I’m afraid Mr. Weasley has developed something of a phobia of water. Completely understandable, though I was informed that it was a bit of an issue hygiene-wise for a few short days.”

“I've been asleep for days?”

“Two weeks, to be exact. You were admitted to St. Mungos, where they examined your magical core and the internal bleeding your overuse caused. Their treatment settled on keeping you in a
magically-induced coma to heal, and your family was given permission to take you home for the
duration,” explained the elderly wizard patiently, “During this time, your father contacted me and
told me a fantastical story of how his youngest daughter is apparently a powerful Soothsayer —
not that he was aware of that aspect of your nature — and an even more powerful Clairvoyant.”

I blinked a little. So they put me in a coma so that my core could heal better, and they let Mum and
Dad take me home to sleep. Which is why I woke up in my and Ginny’s room, minus a certain
Ginny. Then Dad probably panicked, not that I blame him with how I nearly killed myself trying to
save Ronniekins, and called the strongest, Lightest wizard he knew.

“Dad didn’t call you here just so that I could learn the Soothsayer Soothing spell.” I said,
narrowing my eyes.

“Quite right, my dear,” replied the Headmaster, “Arthur initially called me here to answer your
questions, actually.”

“My questions? Sir?”

“Hm. Perhaps not a question you have actively been asking, but it is something you have thought
about, I’m sure. You were not aware that your ability to see the bleeding of magical cores of others
was an aspect of Soothsaying.”

“Wait.” I interrupted, inwardly cringing a little at my rudeness but not caring all too much at the
moment, “Not only am I a Seer-Clairvoyant — the most powerful branch of Seer — I’m also a
Seer-Soothsayer? I’m a Seer twice? Is that why I’m so… so weak?? Er… Sir.”

Dumbledore nodded, looking quite cheerful despite my incredulously rude tone. “Well, technically,
yes and no. The ICW no longer recognizes Soothsayers as Seers, which is unfortunate. Soothsayers
are quite interesting. Their abilities are very similar to the Muggle illness synesthesia. Do you
know what that is?”

I did, but I shook my head. A five-year-old shouldn’t know what that is.

“It’s a unique illness of the mind that rises occasionally in Muggles,” Dumbledore went on,
looking very happy to explain this to me for some reason, “Afflicted Muggles can sense things
differently through it, you see. You and I listen to music, we hear the different high and low notes,
yes? Muggles with synesthesia can see the music, or smell it; low notes would be green or sweet-
smelling, high notes purple or fresh-smelling. It’s not always like that, of course, every mind is
different… But Soothsayers do much the same with magic.

“I met one, once, who could taste magic. She told me that my magic tasted like apples and
raindrops, you see. She always knew when I’d performed magic, because it tasted so unique to her.
Another I knew, long ago, could smell it; I was apparently quite summer-like, with a bit of rain. Of
course, taste and smell are so interrelated, they nearly sensed magic the same way, though they
were two completely different people.”

I blinked at him, tilting my head to one side.

“Sir? Er… Why are Soothsayers no longer called Seers?” I asked.

The strongest wizard on this side of the world smiled. “Ah, you see, Seers are born — bloodlines
are very important to them because of that. Why, my Divination Professor at Hogwarts is quite
proud of her ancestry! Cassandra Trelawney, you see, was one of the strongest Prophesiers in
Western history… Ah, but I grow ahead of myself.
“Soothsayers are, of course, born; but they can also be made. I myself am not a born-Soothsayer, but as long as I have lived and as powerful as I have apparently become, I developed the ability. It happens, sometimes, you see, Miss Weasley, in the oldest of us. The Soothsayers I mentioned before, in fact, show this; Miss Fawley, who has passed now, was a born-in, while the other… well, he acquired power through whatever means he could, and to be able to sense magic… That is an advantageous talent.

“One you have inherited, I see. Your maternal grandmother, Genevieve Prewett, was a born-in Soothsayer. She had her ability sealed permanently, I believe; her sensitivity to magic was bothersome in her profession, Healing. But during her years at Hogwarts, her Soothsaying — Mage Sight, it’s called sometimes — was of touch and hearing, and it is quite rare to possess two senses of Mage Sight. I myself only possess hearing. She did not pass the ability to any of her three children, your mother included, but I see it has made its way to you.”

I took in this information like a sponge. I did like learning about magic; it was just so much more interesting than mundane subjects. (I was probably biased, though.) And this didn’t feel canon, or if it was, it was never mentioned. Why was I thrown into such a different HP universe?

Dumbledore chuckled. “You seem confused, Miss Weasley.”

I shook my head. “No, I’m fine. I… There are different types of Seers, sir?”

Dumbledore nodded, smiling now. I suppose he would always be a teacher at heart, and this was a rare chance to lecture.

“All Seers are divided into Sovereign and Acquiescent. You, Miss Weasley, are no doubt Acquiescent. Meaning, you cannot control your ability, when and how and what about the visions come. No Seer, in fact, is ever completely Sovereign, which is the opposite. But some can come close.

“There are the Prophesiers, who see only the future — Destiny, most scholars agree — and are mostly of the Acquiescent variety. There are the Assessors, who look at people and creatures and can understand them and their intentions, who are a mostly Sovereign division. Cognizants are largely Sovereign, and they can see the history and pasts of the people and things they touch. Empaths are emotion readers, both Sovereign and Acquiescent, depending on the bloodline, though they also have the added benefit of understanding all intentions surrounding the specific emotions they sense in a person. And of course, the rarest and most powerful, the Clairvoyants, who see past, present, and future — and, scholars argue they see Fate, rather than Destiny — and can be either Sovereign or Acquiescent, depending on the person.”

I thought hard; that definitely wasn’t canon, all the divisions of Seers. But it was cool and shit, though. I frowned, though, running his lecture through my head again.

“What is the difference between Fate and Destiny?”

Dumbledore brightened; I didn’t know if it was because of my curiosity and willingness to learn, or because he got to teach more.

“Terms for the future, my dear; not completely accurate, but it is what all the greatest minds have agreed on. Fate: the flow of time, the reactions of events occurring to the reactions of events, over and over. Fate can be changed, you see. Destiny, however… Destiny cannot. Destiny is what is and what will be; what will happen regardless of the little complexities in Fate.

“Prophesiers, much like my own dear Professor Trelawney, are very rare, and can only Prophesy
when Destiny reveals itself to them. Their Prophecies cannot be changed, or avoided. On the reverse, Clairvoyants — even rarer than Prophesiers, and much less well-known — See bits of the past and present constantly, and when certain choices are made, see the effect those choices have on the future as well. The difference, of course being…”

“A Clairvoyant can change what they See.” I said softly.

Dumbledore nodded. “Yes. Though… Well, the repercussions are quite…”

“Painful?”

“Disastrous,” said Dumbledore, nodding. “You have been subject to this, I believe, Miss Weasley. Ostensibly, the reason you were injured so badly during your rescue of your brother was due to several contributing factors: your physical fragility, an asthma attack, your depleted stores of magic, and the unnaturally strong current of the river that day. However, my hypothesis is that your brother was going to drown that day, and his accidental magic could only protect him from either the cold or the water. It chose the cold, and your brother would have died.”

“I was not going to let that happen.” I growled out.

The Headmaster of Hogwarts smiled and nodded approvingly. “No, you did not. But if it was not fated that your brother was to drown that day, you would not have been injured as severely as you were. However, that was Fate; and you interfered. So Fate made sure to punish you accordingly.”

I frowned. “But… Sir, when I looked at my core, it seemed… Well, it seemed even larger than before. So the punishment was the pain I felt, but then I was also rewarded with a larger magical core, then?”

Dumbledore hummed again. “Yes, that is fortunate. Magic is somewhat like a muscle, you’ll find, Miss Weasley. A bit more volatile, I should think. When one expends as much magic as you did, the core can react in one of two ways: destruction, or strengthening. As you are quite alive, we can only assume that your core decided to strengthen itself. In turn, your natural abilities will also increase. It was a gamble, in essence.”

I smirked inwardly; that was a stroke of luck, one that I wouldn’t be repeating — gambling was a big no-no, especially when the odds were as fickle as magic — but it was good. Anything to get stronger was good.

Still, though… it was strange, that Dumbledore was speaking to me like this; I was physically five, after all. It was appreciated, because I didn’t like being treated like a child even if I’d accepted it, but strange nonetheless.

Dumbledore seemed to read my mind. “I assume, of course, that the fifth-year books underneath your bed are telling of your intelligence.”

“Er… I didn’t know anyone knew about those. Dad thinks I’m on third-year.”

He laughed lightly. “I do encourage, my dear, for you to tell your family that you are as capable as you are.”

I shrugged a little, looking away. “They worry, sir. It… I think it scares them, that I do so much. I always spend time with them, but then I’m always meditating and building my Occlumency skills, and then now I’m almost done with Hogwarts curriculum? They’ll tell me to stop. I can’t stop. I need to learn as much as I can, I need to prove that I’m independent so I can…” so I can protect them.”
Dumbledore’s expression saddened. “I was told of the night Arthur discovered your abilities.”

Nodding, I sighed, looking at my hands, resting on my lap. “I dream of them dying all the time.” I looked up at Dumbledore, staring at his eyes. They were not twinkling. “The Dark Lord did not die that night.”

And I would tell you all his Horcruxes, if I weren’t so unsure about the alternativeness of his universe. That, plus the fact that Fate will probably kick my fucking ass if I tried to change things that much.

“No,” said Dumbledore quietly. “He did not.”

Another sigh. “Okay. Is that why Dad called you, then? Because… I’m powerful and need to control it? To hide it, so he can’t use me?”

Dumbledore nodded. “Arthur tells me that you are making remarkable progress in Occlumency. While I am impressed that he was able to teach himself, it will not be enough for a Clairvoyant of your caliber. He asked me to mentor you through your abilities — including wandless magic, or so young Percival told me privately, which explains your abnormally large magical core.”

“Oh. Er… is it large of the bad sort, then?”

“In a way, Miss Weasley. The size of your core is likely linked with your practice of Occlumency, or so I theorize. The mind magics are meditative practices: Occlumency, defense of the mind, and Legilimency, attack of it. Meditation in Occlumency, however, also serves to heal a magical core after strained use of it—”

“Like building muscle.” I said quickly, recalling his earlier lecture.

“In a way, yes. And with the control you displayed… This is not the first time you have practiced wandless magic, is it?”

I shook my head. There was no use hiding something like this from Dumbledore.

“There we are, then. You have been quickly building up your magical core; on top of its already extreme growth, due to your physical age, your abilities, and the families you come from. Prewett and Weasley are Ancient Houses, quite powerful in their own rights.”

Shit. So I was too magically powerful for my tiny, shitty body to handle. God dammit.

Then I asked the big question:

“What happens now?”

Dumbledore smiled, and it was a nice and grandfatherly. “I would think we should inform your family that you have awoken, first of all—”

“Alright—”

“-and I will offer to train you myself, of course.”

My jaw dropped. I couldn’t help it. Trained by THE Albus Dumbledore? Holy-

“I am a proficient Soothsayer, of course, and I will teach you how to perform the spell to block it wandlessly. You have a talent for wandless magic, as we have all seen, so I will endeavor to help with that as well. Your core is quite large for your age, almost dangerously so; you will have to be
trained to maintain it, as it will only grow larger from here, otherwise a block might be in order, and those are not extremely pleasant. As for your Clairvoyance—

“Please don’t make me study under Trelawney.” I muttered.

He chuckled. “Alas, you are not quite the same type of Seer. History has recorded very few Clairvoyants, but as you have studied Occlumency in reaction to it, I believe that training you in the mind arts would be in order.”

I blinked rapidly, trying to school my features. “I- You- But- You’re the most powerful wizard in Europe! I’m just- I’m- I’m five!”

Dumbledore laughed, then. “Ah, my dear, but it is precisely because you are so young that you will need guidance. You are powerful, Miss Weasley, and in many ways. Put together, it could be rather dangerous for you. Your Soothsayer abilities will react to a magical block — it will be quite painful for you, because you will be able to sense intimately that your magic is being withheld. Your powerful magic is born from both natural talent, blood, and your constant mediation; but you cannot refrain from mediating, because you are a Clairvoyant and that is what you use to curb the ability from injuring and possessing you.”

“I’m… What a rubbish situation.” I sighed.

(It did not escape my notice that Dumbledore was trying to get me to be dependent on him; confronted with such a powerful, gifted child… He would do his best to ensure I grow underneath his watch, and turned towards the Light rather than the Dark, even if it was improbably with my family being around. If it were, say, Lucius Malfoy who discovered my abilities first, he would do the same thing.)

(This was a rare and important opportunity to become more powerful than the monster — Murderer. Brother-killer, something inside me hissed furiously — that would rise once again in less than a decade.)

“Indeed. It is a rare and once-in-a-millennia situation, so we must take precautions.”

I snorted, then. Almost laughing, really. “Mum and Dad are going to faint.”

Dumbledore smiled. “That is why, Miss Weasley, I would like to be present when you inform your parents that I will be mentoring and tutoring you. Molly and Arthur will be quite shocked.”

I fidgeted, though, suddenly nervous. “Are you sure? You’re… Aren’t you the Supreme Mugwump o-or something? And more? You’ll be busy. Shouldn’t you be training the Boy-Who-Lived more than me? If the Dark Lord is going back—”

“Voldemort, my dear. Fear of a name increases fear of the thing itself.”

“…I would be more willing to call him that if I didn’t dream of the aftereffects of your advice during the War. Taboo, and all. Sir.”

He chuckled. “No need for such formalities, my dear. I offered my help, and as such, we will be spending quite a lot of time together. You may call me Albus, if you’d like — you’re not of Hogwarts age, yet.

“The Taboo was devastating, yes, but there is no such thing now. We cannot live as if we are still subject to Voldemort’s whims. It is not wartime yet; so we must enjoy life and prepare for what is to come, rather than wage war on shadows and dust and exhaust ourselves, while the true battles
are waiting for us.”

I hummed thoughtfully. “Okay. I see your point. Voldemort, then.”

Then I stared at him, quirking a brow. He smiled a little.

“I’m afraid I can’t disclose anything on the Boy-Who-Lived, Miss Weasley. If it interests you to know, he is being raised away from the wizarding world, where he will be free of the suffocation fame seems to bring.”

I raised a brow, but decided, ultimately, it was not a decision that I could contest. That, plus: Harry Potter was none of my bloody business right now. He might’ve been a favorite character of mine back in the day, but this Harry Potter was a stranger to me. What would I do to help the famous Boy-Who-Lived, when I could barely even help myself?

I nodded, then. “You can call me Guinevere. Lys is for family.” I had sort of a thing for nicknames; back in my last life, I had a family-only nickname, too. It felt weird when people who weren’t family called me by that name, so I was a little happy that the tradition occurred again in this life. “-but you’re going to be my mentor for a while, right? You can call me Guinevere.”

“Guinevere, then,” he acquiesced pleasantly.

A thought occurred to me.

“You won’t force me to tell you about my visions? Even though it’s such a powerful ability?” Even though I’d be an asset to the war? was unasked and quite conspicuously there.

Dumbledore shook his head. “No, I would not do that, Guinevere. You may not feel it, but you are a child. But more than that, you are a person. As such, outside of the realms of necessary Occlumency exercises, your mind is entirely your own. I would not tear your visions from your mind; as a Clairvoyant, you deal with the magic of Fate and Destiny, and for me to intrude upon that would very well be to sentence you to a painful death.

“No, my dear. I’m afraid that Clairvoyance is a burden entrusted only to its Seers. How you wield your power is your responsibility. I am merely here to guide you safely.”

I knew there was a reason I loved Albus Dumbledore the character.

“Albus?”

“Yes, Guinevere?”

“I think this is the beginning of the beautiful friendship.”

His eyes twinkled as he smiled.

...
there, too. Dad spoiled me rotten, and pushed back my Diagon Alley fieldtrip to the summer (“To recover a bit more, little queen,” he said… Ergh.). And the letters from Charlie and Bill, good Merlin…

 anyways, not important.

It was time to address something: Peter fucking Pettigrew.

The rat bastard was just sitting innocuously in Percy’s room. Sometimes on his shoulder when Percy was reading somewhere else. I’ve stared at him enough and wondered too much about what I should do about him.

After Albus explained a little about Fate and Destiny to me (we weren’t going to start the tutoring until after the winter hols, just because it was the middle of the semester and he needed to catch up on paper work and frame out a schedule for our tutoring sessions), I thought that maybe I could purposefully trigger my Sight. I’d decide to destroy Pettigrew somehow, and if I got a vision telling me I was gonna die for that, then I’d just not do it.

(“Clairvoyance isn’t a solve-all, of course, Guinevere,” Albus explained just before he left last time I saw him, “But it is assumed that the Seer-magic wishes to preserve its Seer. If you are going to die, it will likely warn you beforehand.” — “But it didn’t warn me that I’d die if I saved Ron…?” — “You would not have died, my dear. You had many serious injuries, but nothing fatal. And the worst that would have happened, core-wise, would be a little set-back. Especially with how you train your magic so.” — “Oh. Huh. Alright. Thanks, Albus.” — Anytime, my dear.”)

So, here goes. I needed to know if I could fuck this guy up, because he was probably some sorta closet-pervert. If I didn’t confront this, I was letting my brothers and sister play with a grown man. Sleep with a grown man in their beds. Let a grown man stay in the room while they were changing and such. He was sitting in Percy’s lap right now, as he was reading imperiously to a faintly snoring Ginny and a heavily drooling Ron. (The twins were on either side of me, poking at each other to keep themselves awake.)

My brother’s lap. It was that, that irritated me.

I can sneak out to Diagon. I thought viciously, staring at the damn creature in my favorite big brother’s LAP. Buy an identical rat, cut off its finger. Switch them out. Turn in the little perverted shit, since I don’t give a damn about him!

Percy was my goddamn favorite brother, dammit. I wasn’t going to let this son of a bitch cuddle up to my favorite brother! I loved the rest, of course, and Dad was my absolute favorite Weasley, but Percy was just… He was intelligent and liked reading and discussing literature and magical paraphernalia with me. And he was an overprotective little bastard, too, and he fretted so hilariously because he was trying not to smother me — he knew I didn’t like it, bless him — but wanted to at the same time.

Point is, there was a grown man in my favorite ten-year-old brother’s lap. I was going to kill the little shit.

Then the headache came.

Brown rat with greying furs — alive for twelve years, wasn’t that strange? they didn’t think so, they didn’t even notice, not with everything they had to do — Percy held the rat close to his chest, slipped the creature into his Hogwarts robes breast pocket — Percy grew taller — broader — like his father — the rat was passed to Ron…
Brown rat with greying furs — large, soft hands of an older Ron — lankier and longer, taller, thinned out — girl with bushy brown hair lecturing — boy accidentally grabbing rat when looking for the rounded glasses in the room all red and gold and home. Ron laughed, put the rat on his pillow, small little brown splotch on off-white — the rat was snoozing now, relaxed, curled around the paw missing that one finger.

Newspaper — Weasleys won the Daily Prophet Draw. There was rat on the front page, sitting on Ron’s shoulder as he grinned at the camera.

Grim running through the woods and werewolf howling — Forbidden Forest, dark at night and the moon glowing in the starry sky — ran scurrying through the grass, lights flashing — fear fear fear for his life — brown rat with greying furs, held by the girl with ice-blue eyes and dark crimson hair — ice blue eyes were cold and calculating? angry? empty? — something — girl hands the rat to red-cloaks — she smirks — she screams — agony, suddenly — blood splattered like blooming flowers all along the walls, cackling laughter in the background.

(Stop.)

Goddammit.

Apparently if I interfered with this right now, I would be killed in a manner so spectacular that my death would just be screaming and blood. That… sucked. But made sense. Trelawney would be making her little prediction, after all, in Harry’s third year. Servant of the Dark Lord, chained these thirteen years and all that, I think (my memory was a bit fuzzy). No, I couldn’t interfere with Destiny. Not now, at least. Maybe an opportunity would present itself later, when different choices were made.

So… Favorite or not, Percy would have to put up with Scabbergrew for a while.

(Sorry, brother…)

In return, of course, I would be making sure that Percy went to Hogwarts happily.

Maybe not with much dignity, but happily; Percy was, after all, a big softie. He loved being spoiled, he loved being shown affection. He just hid it well, that was all; especially since he understood that with four — with me, five — little siblings, he needed to be more mature about things, he put his craving for such affection away.

(I could tell, by the way he got a bit wistful-looking whenever Ginny or Ron clung to Mum without fear of judgement, except by the twins, but they didn’t really count now, did they?)

Well. I could fix that. A hug and some sort of way to make sure Percy was happy while he was away, then. The first was almost depressingly easy to accomplish; Percy would be ecstatic at a hug, he and I were often quite deprived of those. The second… Well, I had the continent’s most powerful fucking wizard as my tutor, didn’t I?

“Mum, can I Floo call Albus?”

My mother blinked in surprise. Then she frowned. “You shouldn’t call the Headmaster by his first name, Lyssie,” she scolded, brandishing a wooden ladle at me.

I just grinned. “He said I could! And it’s better than, say, Alby.”

(I’d just like to point out that the man was probably called bonkers because of how fucking little he cared about pride. Which was partly worrying — because self-esteem and why are there no
magical therapists? — and partly fantastic. We spent all of my last tutoring session turning his office gold and sparkly, where he taught me that wandless magic was so much easier than I thought, I was just using buckets of it where I only needed trickles.

Like Hagrid would say: Great man, Albus Dumbledore.)

(Gold and sparkly. Four hours.)

“He’s still very much your elder, Lyssie, and in a few years he’ll be your Headmaster!”

Rolling my eyes, I kept my grin up. “I’ll ask him, Mum. Can I still Floo call him?”

“You can’t write?”

“Oh, I could do that, too, I suppose. But I’d rather ask.”

“Make do with writing for now, won’t you, Lys? The Headmaster’s a busy man, after all. You know where the parchment and quills are, and you can borrow Percy’s inkwell if the one on the desk is low.”

I acquiesced easily. “Okay, Mum.”

As I started upstairs, Ginny and Ron — miraculously waking from their impromptu naps — trailed after me. I grinned at the thought of my own little duckling trail.

“Whatcha doing, Lyssie?” Ginny asked curiously.

“I’m gonna write Headmaster Dumbledore a letter.”

“Dumbledore? Why?” Ron asked, looking bewildered. He may have only been seven, but Ron was quite aware of who my tutor was; it freaked him out a little, I think, but he understood that I needed tutelage partly because I’d had to save him.

Mum and Dad’s room had Dad’s little desk that was only neat because Mum was a saint, and that’s where the parchment and writing shit was. I struggled to climb onto the seat, noticing out of the corner of my eye that Ron and Ginny settled on the edge of our parents’ bed.

I started to write very carefully, then. (Percy had the most beautiful fucking handwriting in the world — it was goddamn calligraphy or some shit, I swear — and try as I might to imitate him, it was still a clumsy attempt at best.)

“I wanna ask him something,” I explained to my littlest older siblings, “There’s something I wanna do with magic, but I don’t know if my wandless will cover it.”

“You’re not supposed to be using wandless for another month!” Ron protested.

“Lyssie…” Ginny muttered suspiciously.

I rolled my eyes again. “That’s why I’m writing Dumbledore, isn’t it? I’m all better anyways.”

They were mostly unconvinced, because my mother was a paranoid woman and her opinion trickled down to them, but I ignored them. I really wanted to start learning from Albus, especially because he said he was open to any questions, as he was less a tutor and more of a mentor for now. Maybe a very favorite distant relative.
Dear Alby,

Mum says I couldn’t call you Albus, and because I’ve decided that you need more friends that aren’t afraid of you, I’m going to call you Alby instead. We’re friends now, you agreed, so it’s alright, right? Don’t worry — when I get Sorted and all that, I won’t let your reputation go down because of it. I’ll be good and call you Professor or Headmaster, like everyone else.

Anyways, I have a question. Is there some magic I can do to give good luck?

From what me and Dad have researched I’d assume it’s some sort of ritual, but there’s so many rituals in so many cultures that I wouldn’t know where to start. And I’m actually not sure if rituals are allowed in Britain, since I think they’re mostly Druidic, and most of that was wiped out of the books?

That potion called Liquid Luck isn’t quite what I’m looking for — I want it to last for a while, and the luck doesn’t have to be that strong. I’d just like to make a somewhat-working lucky charm, that’s all.

Also, we’re not all that well-off in the way of money and those kinds of books are expensive to buy, so if you could give me something from public records, that would be appreciated. I was going to Floo you about it, but Floo powder is a little pricey, and this isn’t really that important.

Thanks, Alby!

Respectfully,

Guinevere

Something to let Percy know, as I send him off to Hogwarts, that I wish him well and that he’s very loved. Something that might even protect him a little, nudge him in the right direction; Percy was just so bloody terrible at socialization, I was a little worried. I had a feeling there had to be something, I could make to help him, and if there was, Albus — Alby? — would know, wouldn’t he?

With that, I folded my letter up and enclosed it neatly; Ginny and Ron watched interestedly, as they always liked to watch our Mum and Dad write and fold up letters. It was the wax seal that amazed them, I think. It was fun to use, especially because we so rarely used it. It had the crest of the Ancient House of Weasley and everything; Alby would get a kick out of it, I felt.

Errol took the letter and an owl treat (and a pet on his head, because I loved this poor owl a lot), and then I had free time on my hands. So back down to the kitchen we went, me and my little duckling trail.

“Lyssie!”

“Dear sister-”

“-why, Lyssie, you left us alone with Percy-”

“-rather rude, don’t you think?”

The twins were suddenly on either side of me, arms thrown around my shoulders. Fred on the left
and George on the right. Percy was following, looking irritated, and Ginny and Ron looked put out that I’d sent the letter so all the cool stuff was finished. Mum was chuckling, listening to the radio which was softly playing Celestina Warbeck’s latest love ballad.

I frowned. “Did you cause trouble for Percy?”

They grinned at me mischievously. “Us?” asked George.

“Of course not, dearest sister!” Fred laughed.

“Whatever gave you that idea?”

“I don’t believe you, Fred. And you know why, George.”

The demon twins just grinned at me unrepentantly. I sighed. As much as I loved them and their hilarity, I was trying to curb their relentless attack of Percy. It was mostly because Percy was just my favorite brother, but also because I really didn’t want him to feel isolated enough to turn his back on our family later on down the road. It was just difficult for the demon twins, I think, because they loved playing tricks and experimenting with magic through trial and error, but they were so limited here at home. Only so many people to mess with, really; no wonder Ron and Percy always looked at them suspiciously, since Ginny and I were out of the running.

In essence, they were bored as fuck, and everyone else suffered for it. I frowned a little, then looked at Percy. “They might stop being little prats if we let them in on the secret.”

Percy looked up thoughtfully, his face conflicted.

For the better part of the month, I’d been coaching him through wandless magic training. I’d already mastered the Occlumency that Dad could teach me, and I wasn’t allowed to use wandless, and I had read most of the books in the house; there was nothing for it but for me to spend lots of time with my favorite brother.

We could only practice when Ron and Ginny were sleeping, since they were always following me around, but Percy liked having one-on-one time with me; he was used to it, from before the incident, so it grated on his nerves that his favorite sibling suddenly never had time with just him anymore. (Secret sap, my big brother.)

So, wandless magic lessons were random and private, and Percy liked them that way.

“You’ll be going off to Hogwarts soon, you know,” I said with amusement.

He sighed. “Alright. Outside, then.”

Fred looked irritated at the exclusion. “What? What’s going on?”

“What secret?” asked George.

Ginny was giving me baleful looks, which I expertly ignored. I think she wanted us to be more like Fred and George, attached at the hip and all that, but honestly… Well, I just couldn’t spend every day 24/7 attached to a little girl. Which is why I was always off alone or with Percy or even just with Mum. Ron looked like he just wanted to be included, but didn’t give me a guilt-inducing puppy-dog stare or anything, thank Merlin.

I grabbed Ginny and Ron’s hands. “Come on, we’ll show you!” I said cheerfully.
“Are you going out? Don’t stray and put on your coats!”

“Yes, Mum!” we all chorused, doing the latter. It was mid-December, after all. Our eldest brothers would be coming home for the holidays soon, in fact.

Trudging out into the snow, we headed for the edges of the orchard. Percy and I usually delved a little deeper in, or holed up in one of our rooms, but since we were exposing our secret magical practices I suppose it didn’t matter.

I asked Ron and Ginny to collect some sticks, which they did eagerly as Fred and George needled me into telling them what was going on. Percy had a secretive little smile on his face, which he schooled admirably into something neutral whenever the twins looked back at him. The two youngest brought some drier-looking cuts of branches, which I then shoved into the cold earth with difficulty.

Then I looked up at Percy. “Think you’ll get it this time?”

He frowned. “I’ll try.”

I shushed the twins and clamped a hand on a restless and cold Ginny, watching Percy’s attempt. His sky-blue magic was slowly pulsing out of his skin, and his eyes narrowed in concentration. The color, tinged with darkening blue at the edges, concentrated on the branch and trembled in effort… But it kept swirling this way and that, leaking away from the branch; Percy just didn’t have the tight, methodical control that I had (though I’m sure that my Mage Sight certainly helped with that).

Percy sighed. “I don’t think it’s working.”

“Mm, your magic’s too undisciplined.” I agreed, nodding. “I’ll go.”

“Lys! Mum said you’re not supposed to!” Ron argued, sharply catching onto the exercise.

I grinned. “What Mum doesn’t know won’t hurt her.”

(“Bravo, Lyssie-” “-definitely a sister after our own heart!”)

I narrowed my eyes, the movement signaling the crackling of my magic. There was a familiar warm buzzing under my skin, gentle and welcoming; if my magic could talk, I’m sure it’d be happy and relieved that I was using it again, that it wasn’t broken, that I wasn’t going to be afraid of it after what happened the last time I was wandlessly casting. The indigo trembled, its gentle hum growing faded and higher-pitched… I grinned at the feeling, at the rush that it gave me. I’d missed it, and I’d only really been practicing with it for a month or two before I was banned for the duration of another month.

**Burn**, I commanded silently.

The branch burst into flames.

There were *Oooh!*s and *Ahhh!*s, but I wasn’t finished yet. I wrapped my magic around the tongues of flame gently, careful not to snuff them out. Then I quietly siphoned my indigo color into it, and the magic suffused with the flames…

And once-golden tongues of fire began to burn… hm, what did I feel like? How about Fred’s dark, cool red? He didn’t know that’s what his magic was colored, of course, but he and George looked positively *amazed* as the colors shifted.
Then I nudged the magic in the fire, pushing an elegant arc of flames out to circle the burning branch prettily; it completed its loop and then I changed the flames’ colors to George’s pretty deep violet color, and my four Weasleys clapped in delight as another trail of flames jutted out from the burning branch, curving around me — it was bloody hot but I was very careful, and very skilled with flames — and then back into its source flame.

It was pretty, enough for Ron to grow distracted from his crusade to keep me healthy.

“Wow! Lyssie, how are you doing that?” asked Ron, eyes shining and watching as I blinked and the flames became his shining sunset orange colors, dancing around me again. He lit up at the color-change. “That’s a wicked one!”

I huffed out a fond laugh. “That’s your color.”

“My color? I have one?”

“You all do. The red earlier, that was Fred’s. And the violet was George’s. And here’s yours, Ginny.” I said, making the twins grin at each other and Ginny looked confused and eager; the flames flickered into her subtle, cool wine-red tone.

“What’s Percy’s?” she asked, looking excited.

I made the flames flicker to Percy’s sky blue, pale and pretty and light. Percy smiled at the sight. Perhaps it was instinctive, but he loved seeing his colors somehow. I think they all did, honestly, which was they their favorite colors were so similar to what their magical cores were painted.

“Will you show us Charlie’s?” asked Ginny.

The flames darkened and yellowed and then they were Charlie’s jungle-green.

“Do Dad!” called Fred excitedly.

Deep, lovely royal blue, the edges tinged with greying-indigo.

“Now Mum!”

Bright, candy-apple red; as cheerful and welcoming as the woman herself.

“Can you do Bill?”

I did, and I sighed internally still. I liked doing colorful fire, but they really just didn’t do the magical cores justice. The shades were correct, but there was a life to them more vibrant than mere flames. And the sound — I couldn’t imitate the music magic sang, not even if I tried. They didn’t know it, as none of them were Soothsayers, but I could tell. These were parlor tricks, really. But my brothers and sister were grinning with their eyes wide, reflecting the shapes and colors of my fire… Well, I didn’t get too hung up about it.

Eventually, though, the branch began to run out and the flames grew weaker.

Fred and George volunteered to go find more sticks for me to set on fire (“We’ll find bigger ones—” “...so they burn longer!”), but I shook my head and planned for the next step. I just… It wasn’t really me wanting to distract them, or me wanting to show off — as if I needed paltry tricks to remind myself why I was a damn good witch — but they were just so excited. All of them. But I couldn’t let them touch the flames, Mum would kill me; or, rather, I would kill me. (‘Cos Mum doted on me too much to want to do that.)
So when the branch was just ash, I gathered my indigo magic again; it was humming in contentment, happy to be used for such little things because it just loved being able to come out of my core and play.

*Just like we practiced, Lyssie.* I thought firmly.

The tendrils of magic crept into the ashes, seeping into every tiny piece of charcoal and every little grain of dust, and I slowly raised my hand; the ashes and debris followed my movement — the edges were crumbling a bit clumsily, but otherwise, the soot flowed to my will like water.

I had never tried Transfiguring something before. But I wanted it now, and I concentrated intensely on the image of summer dew and the river that my magic once touched and molded, on the sound and scent of rain, on the warmth of soaking in a bath, on the cool of jumping in the pond. I charged my magic with these images, hands shaking with the effort of a first-time-Transfiguration, the ash fighting against my indigo quietly... slowly... barely...

The first piece of charcoal melted and cleared into liquid, and I found myself smiling at the feeling. It was like something unlocked, and now everything was rushing through in a panic. The black and grey dust and chunks softened and blended and liquidized, black clearing into clear, and suddenly there were blobs of water at my command.

*I always wanted to be a waterbender,* I thought to myself in amusement.

“GUINEVERE LYSANDRA WEASLEY!”

The water abruptly fell, joining the bits of snow on the ground. I felt myself pale, and looking at my siblings’ faces, I wasn’t the only one. Fred and George both seemed a lot less scared than the rest of us, but that was experience and pride talking — Mum was *scary.*

“What did I tell you about wandless magic, young lady?”

I turned to Fred and George.

Fred nodded solemnly. “Best get it over with, Lyssie—”

“Mum can’t yell for too long—” George added.

“-especially since you’re the ickle baby of the family.”

I sighed. It was probably too late to run anyways.

Ginny held my hand as we all walked back through the cold, re-entering the Burrow’s kitchen door and preparing for a tongue-lashing. She whispered quietly, “We can have a big water fight in the summer!”

I grinned at her. “Yeah, that’d be nice, wouldn’t it?”

My little big-sister took that as a promise. I would have no trouble keeping it.
Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

Oops. I'm a day late. Sorry about that, college started and whatnot. We're almost done with this arc, by the way. Two more chapters and then Hogwarts. And I believe I'm putting in some Potter next chapter. I just love world-building too much.

Oh, and thanks to all who left kudos, commented, and/or bookmarked! I appreciate all of y'all very much.


...

So as it happens, my Diagon Alley field trip occurred in July, and it was Bill who took me first.

Really drives home how damn tiny I am, trotting next to my seventeen-year-old brother with his hand holding mine. I’m just a few months short of six, but I was apparently going to carry around the curse of my stupid past-life midget-ness because I was only 3’6” — which is almost unhealthily short — and I weighed far below what I should. Bill, on the other hand, was not only tall (goddamn Europeans), but he had a good healthy weight on, from all the Quidditch and dueling he did.

(When Charlie took me next time, I was going to feel very inadequate. Fucking buff-ass brothers.)

Anyways, Diagon Alley.

It made me cry.

Part of it was because, fuck, this was my childhood. My first one, that is. This was what I dreamed of as an actual child, and it was just as fucking amazing as I thought it would be. Cobble streets and black streetlamps hung with pots of flowers. Small, crooked shops bunched together with clean windows showcasing impossible things, colorful robes clustered at tables and benches. Shopping bags floating after chatting witches, a man chasing after his young son who’d somehow gotten his hands on his wand, owls fluttering by… It was goddamn beautiful and alive and, really, it was the first time in a very long time that I was completely and utterly happy that I’d been born into this world.

The other part was because fucking hell, my Mage Sight went insane.

I was moderately okay at home because, honestly, only a few people were ever over; I knew their colors and I could separate them, and I also had the choice of isolation if there were just too many magical cores in one small space. Here, though? In Diagon Alley? There were magical cores and colors and threads everywhere. Fucking. Everywhere.

It was nauseating, how the real world was being blanketed with so many layers of magic, how strings were criss-crossing all over the place like spider webs, how my Mage Sight was fluctuating
between burying me in color and then trying to ease my sight and make it all fade; and that wasn’t all. No, I had two sensors for my Soothsayer abilities, didn’t I? The NOISE made me wanna smash my head against a wall. It was like walking into a tiny room containing several loudspeakers, all of them blaring different genres of music. But then there were also whispery tunes, drifting through randomly. I very nearly threw up right there, and resorted to clinging to Bill’s side and burying my face in his worn brown jacket to keep myself from emptying my stomach.

Bill, evidently, noticed this. He shook my shoulder gently.

“Lyssie?”

I groaned. “Too many colors.”

A quick glance up and I saw his eyes widened with realization. “Mage Sight,” he whispered (since my abilities were still on the down low, of course), “Oh, Merlin. We didn’t think about that, did we?”

I shook my head, muttering curses under my breath. I was getting a headache.

“Lys, what’s the Soothsayer spell? Do you know it?”

Right, right. Bill was of age and all that.

“Dāno Dī-konden An-drixtā Guinevere Weasley,” I murmured, taking a precious hand off my head and mimicking the twirly wand movement that I’d seen Alby perform for me.

It took a few tries, but Bill got it in the end and suddenly everything went silent. I blinked, then popped my head out from his jacket — when had I actually started burrowing inside my brother’s jacket? — and looked at the Alley with wide, eager eyes. No colors, besides what should be there. No sounds, besides the cacophony of the crowd, occasional owl screeches, etc.

I grinned at Bill. “Thanks, Billy!”

He rolled his eyes at the nickname (which he’d successfully stamped out of commonality years ago at home), but chuckled. “Anytime, Lyssie. Dumbledore hasn’t been teaching you that one wandlessly yet?”

My voice was soft, but enthusiastic. “We’re focusing on meditation and Occlumency because my visions are getting stronger, and he thinks I’ll hit some sorta Clairvoyant growth spurt when I turn seven.” Magically powerful number and all that. “I’ll ask him, though, since I’ll be coming here a lot.”

“No doubt.” Bill said, raising a brow. “Never would’ve thought Percy’d corrupt you.”

“Rude. If anything, I corrupted Percy. His edges are looking awfully indigo lately.”

Bill laughed, ruffling my hair affectionately. “Alright, little Seer, shall we?”

I nodded, taking his hand again and ducking into his shadow when the crowds threatened to carry me away. “Are you going to look for books on Egyptian runes?”

He looked surprised. “Did you See that?”

I smirked. “You want to be a Cursebreaker.”

My brother grinned sheepishly. “I haven’t told Mum and Dad yet.”
“Don’t worry about it so much. The only problem Mum’ll have with it is that you won’t be home anymore. But you don’t really want to be anymore, do you?”

He scratched the back of his head; his hair was getting longer, but not enough for Mum to have really noticed it yet. “Well, you know… It’s home and everything, but…”

“You wanna go explore the world and be independent?” I suggested.

Bill looked startled, but then nodded. “Yeah. Still… Merlin, Lyssie, if I weren’t holding your midget hand right now, I’d think you were my age sometimes.” he chuckled, hitting a bit closer to home than I’d have expected.

“I’m just an old soul, Bill.”

_Truth._

He chuckled again. “No doubt your dizzy spells help, though.”

_Also a truth._

I shrugged, and was about to reply when we arrived. Flourish and Blotts was a right bit bigger than the movies and amusement parks depicted, but it still seemed narrow and cramped with how the stacks of books were practically walls. Bill and I squeezed in, shuffling through a bit of crowd at the ground floor before escaping upstairs. Up here was much more empty, and I was pleasantly surprised when I found there was actually another story, and the floors were quite a bit bigger than should be physically possible.

Gotta love the Undetectable Expansion Charm, right?

“Let’s get my books and then we’ll bring them down to… well, wherever you need to be. I never asked, Lyssie, but what _are_ you researching here?”

I grinned. “Family lines. I want to confirm something with my dizzy spells. I got it from Grandpa Weasley, but I want to see if there wasn’t someone else, too. ‘Cos, you know, the dizzy spells are pretty bad, right?”

Bill nodded. “Smart move, Lys. Even if it sounds incredibly boring.”

“Egyptian runes sounds much more interesting, yeah.”

“Tell you what, Lyssie,” Bill said, giving a grin, “We’ll exchange information at the end, yeah? You’ve been reading my Ancient Runes and Advanced Studies textbooks, you’ll be fine. Maybe if you find something interesting about the Weasleys, I can take those snooty pureblood idiots at school down a notch.”

“Don’t you already take them down a notch by being better than them?” I asked innocently.

He threw his head back and laughed. “You’re going to be a menace when you get to Hogwarts, I can see it already.”

I laughed. “You’ll be the first to know, don’t worry, Bill. I’ll use a school owl, though, so Errol doesn’t keel over trying to fly to Egypt and back again.”

“Hm, he _is_ getting on in the years, isn’t he? Ah, well, best get to work. Come on, Lys.”
What I was actually searching for, of course, was two-pronged: what was different about this world that made the war so violent, and why I was reborn here. They might’ve been the same thing, honestly, but I didn’t want to rule out the possibilities.

If I only knew why I’d been born into the Weasley family, I might be able to…

Well. I wasn’t quite sure what exactly I’d be able to do, but I would be a lot less lost in this damn world. And if I was put here for a reason, was there going to be a cost for not fulfilling that reason? Would I even really be able to get concrete answers from researching, or was I practically grabbing at smoke?

*It can’t be random, though, I thought to myself, I’m too powerful, right smack-dab in the middle of a very important point in history — a point that I’m very well-informed about. Too many coincidences.*

So with Bill settled in a corner where he’d be able to look up and see me if he wanted to, I started pulling down random shit from the history shelves to see if I could round out my magical history knowledge first; if there was something screaming, ‘LOOK A CLAIRVOYANT WAS HERE AND IT CHANGED A LOT OF SHIT’ I’d find it this way, right?

Well. Might as well narrow down the options; if I got nowhere this way, I’d try tracing back the family trees. Blood was important in magical society, after all; no prejudices were without reason, even if the prejudices themselves were stupid as fuck.

Hours of that, anyways.

At one point, actually, a dizzy spell set in; I had to bury my face in a book to hide the obvious unfocused irises of my eyes when that happened. Little flashes of visions, some spells with very gruesome effects — I jotted down notes on those after the vision passed, in a little notebook that Dad had gotten for me just in case I wanted to have physical reminders of what I Saw — a lot of interesting bits of history, like the Hagia Sophia. Again.

“Hm. Weird, I Occluded yesterday.” I muttered to myself, shelving the third or fourth book — interesting stuff about Druidic magic versus ancient Roman wizards, basically the rundown of how Hellenism was tearing old traditions apart; then the addition of ancient Islamic rune circles and alchemy, it was a clusterfuck back then — and walking off towards the genealogy section. “And it wasn’t even anything very important to me. Maybe the spells?”

Hidden in the shelves, I dug into my Extended pockets for the little purple notebook.

*Sickly purple light, fast movement, sharp wand movement — And then a stick-figure diagram of the movement I’d seen, very rudimentary and embarrassing considering my previous life’s art skills — phonetics :: <jen-uh-STRAH-jis AHN-go> probably Latin, might be Greek? effects on human victim = blood pouring from eyes and mouth, presumed intense pain, loss of eyesight or eyes ???

Yep, that was a gruesome spell. Was it somehow important? Or the other ones?

I shook my head. I’d keep in in mind but my gut was telling me no. My Sight might’ve been getting more ornery, with how my magical core was growing. Damn cycle, I had to keep it balanced is what Alby said, but I really just… Couldn’t?

Perfect.

Ah, this was where the Sacred Twenty-Eight stuff popped up from. Some of the family names I’d never heard of before, but others — Flint, Black, Bulstrode, Shacklebolt — I recognized. I grinned at finding both the Prewetts and the Weasleys.

Prewett was positively ancient. The name derived from Φerut(i), which roughly translated to ‘last year’ — there was a story about how that’s what the third-century Muggles called the druid clan that were mostly nomadic, circling around the Isles and visiting places once a year to offer their healing and blessing services. It was Latinized to Perette, then Anglicized to Prevett, and somehow (Germanic languages were involved) it became Prewett… Powerful blood, most children born with Grey or Light cores until the early seventeenth century, when they intermarried with Voraustes, who were completely Dark (a dead name, now); then they started gravitating more towards Grey with the occasional Light or Dark. The Directory didn’t go past the 1930’s so I guess Mum and/or her brothers weren’t in there yet, as that generation had decided to fight for the Light…

Ah, Weasley, there it is. As old as the Prewetts, but there hadn’t been many intermarriages; before Mum and Dad, the last one had been all the way back in the fifteenth century. Predominantly Light and Grey cores?

I frowned.

“Bill?”

He looked up immediately, which honestly spoke volumes; the boy loved his Runes. “Yeah, Lys?”

I gave him a wide-eyed, innocent stare that Fred and George had helped me create. (“Looking innocent is half the battle, Lyssie,” Fred told me sagely.) “This says stuff about Grey and Light cores. Alby hasn’t gotten to that yet in our Magical Core Theory lessons.”

*Since, y’know, I really need to have Occlumency and magical control down or else my magic will crush my organs.*

Bill nodded. “It’s where Light and Dark magic are from, Lys. Not sure ‘bout the specifics, but if you’ve got a certain core, Light or Dark spells are easier for you. It’s not all that talked about anymore, I don’t know much else.”

“What’s Grey magic, then?”

“The in-between. It’s weird, ‘cos it means you’re balanced but you usually prefer one or the other. Or, er, that’s what Blishwick told me. He studies that more, it’s not really all that well-known anymore.”

I nodded. “Thanks, Bill.”

“Anytime, little sister.”

He dove right back into his Egyptian Runes and I looked back at the Directory. I really wanted lessons on that; it sounded much more important than the HP books/movies made it out to be. I didn’t know Light and Dark went as far as cores. Which, if my Mage Sight weren’t being soothed, I’d be able to actually See. I’d ask Alby later; the man loved teaching, even if we could only meet up every so often because of how bloody busy the geezer was.
So, Weasley: similar to the Prewetts, been around since the Druidic reign at least. That’s the fucking third century, goddamn. Was a clan called Włiskā, which refers to the staffs that they used, whoa weird, it was actually Germanized first into Wliesche, which pissed off the Anglicans who changed it to Wealse for some odd reason. It fell to obscurity, though remained Pureblood, and it was only during the beginning of the Italian Renaissance that it somewhat began to resemble my surname, though it was apparently a predominantly Dark house for a while. Under the reign of the Twin Dark Lords (they were not actually twins, apparently), Estmaro II and Ambrose Wealse…

Dark crimson hair, long and silky — pale face all angles and shadows — silvery eyes that darted to and from the corners of the room, the hidden places under the furniture. Two men sitting at a fireplace made of white limestone — Their wands twirled through long fingers and elegant hands.

“Nos omnes interficere.” — “Quisque.” — Rune layout in a candle-lit room of stone — white dress, dark hair, eyes full of tears, two men standing before the kneeling woman — “Avada Kedavra!” — CRACK CRACK CRACK!

“Lys?”

I snapped to attention. Bill was giving me a concerned look.

“Are you alright, Lyssie?”

A slow nod. “Yeah. I’m okay. Dizzy spell, that’s all.”

The Twin Dark Lords, huh? They’re important somehow, I can feel it.

I blinked again, and started to read. Under the reign of the Twin Dark Lords, Estmaro II and Ambrose Wealse, the House of Wealse grew disgustingly powerful and feared, mostly in Italia, where the main branch relocated for cultural enrichment purposes. But they honestly grew so insane that the rest of the House freaked out, disowned them — including their father — and then the Directory just kinda moves onto how only Estmaro II had a child, who was a bastard, and there was all kinds of goddamn drama because of that. Oh, and most of the family was wiped out at some point.

Huh. What were the odds that I’d find a book on Dark Lords in Flourish and Blotts?

In fact-

Wait.

It is believed that Lord Estmaro II and his brother Ambrose were driven to their fate due to the violent death of their mother, Helvynya Wealse neé Prevett, who is believed to have been the most powerful Clairvoyant in recorded history. (More on Helvynya Prevett, page 493)
A Clairvoyant. A Clairvoyant of both Prevett and Wealse. Who died a violent, grisly death; one bad enough that her children became demented *Dark Lords*?

“What are the odds of a Clairvoyant dying in such a violent fashion?” I whispered.

‘A Clairvoyant can change what they see…’

‘Yes. Though… Well, the repercussions are quite…’

‘Painful?’

‘Disastrous.’

Page 493 it was, then.

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*Helvynya Wealse neé Prevett, 1501-1528, the most powerful Clairvoyant in the entirety of Europe; extremely magically powerful, presumable due to Seer-witch blood; one of the most celebrated pioneers in Legilimency and Occlumency; famously known for her book *Sollertia Augurium*, one of the most detailed accounts on Clairvoyance and a biography of her life. She has been said to have been murdered in an unspeakably cruel fashion, consequently traumatizing her witnessing children into insanity (Ambrose Wealse and Estmaro Wealse II, see page 2934)*…

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*Sollertia Augurium*. That must hold some answers, even if my little theory proved itself wrong. And my theory *could* be wrong… after all, Helvynya Prevett might just be some innocent woman that just died a very gruesome death, right? …Not likely, but honestly, this was a beautiful lead.

I could go somewhere with this. I’d have to research this deeply. Thank god she wasn’t a Druid, I wouldn’t have been able to dig up anything *that* old. 1400’s? Piece of cake.

*I was a fucking college student. I can damn well do my research. Might take a while, but I’ll fucking do it. I don’t even go to school yet, who needs summer vacation?*

I really had to resist the urge to cackle. Bill might give me funny looks.
I grew to see Professor Dumbledore as a grandfather.

The first time I thought of something silly like that (our grandparents on both sides were dead already, they’d passed pretty recently though none of us younger siblings were all that broken up about it with how we spent so little time with them), it was right after an intense Occlumency lesson. Alby had somehow stumbled across one of my more grisly visions for the first time since we’d started, and he’d stayed and watched in some sort of transfixed horror as my brothers were torn to shreds before our eyes. When we were in our own minds proper, both of us were pale-faced and I was trembling with violent (Fearfearfearfearfear).

“Er… sorry about that, I suppose.” I muttered, still too eloquent for a normal almost-six-year-old.

Alby gazed at me long and hard.

I could feel the visions playing out between us: blood splattering like blooming red flowers — leaking from ripped flesh — haggard breathing — fire-colored hair darkened with sweat and blood, soaked in the stuff without abandon. Ice-blue eyes flashing goldgoldgold, bared teeth — moon not full in the corner of the window but his nails were sharp and they tore — Bill screamed, writhing in pain, the werewolf man laughed and laughed — “Not so pretty now, are you, human?”

(Stop.)

“Is this what you See?” he asked, voice just barely wavering.

*I bet if you hadn’t cast a Dāno Dī-konden An-drixtā, I’d be able to see the hurt in your colors.*

“Not always.” I muttered.

“What else?”

I hesitated. “Red eyes,” I whispered, the images coming to mind, but not at the behest on my Clairvoyance; they were memories. “He has red eyes. The colors of his magic are dark, almost black; some of it is black, and he loves it. When he gives them white masks, he makes them… kill people. Or worse. It’s worse a lot of the time.”

*Rape, torture, self-mutilation…*

I gripped my hands into fists, hating the steady thrums of fear that was being slipped through my blood like my heart was working against me. I didn’t want to be afraid of Voldemort and his goddamn Death Eaters. I wanted to hate them, but all this fucking child’s body could feel was terror at the mention of him.

“Mum once told us if we weren’t good then the Dementors would eat us.” I chuckled humorlessly, “After that, I had a vision… there were people in cells — probably Azkaban with how dark it was — and the Dementors were really eating them. Not physically, but… the prisoners… they didn’t even look like people anymore.”

With every word, the Hogwarts Headmaster deflated into a sorrowful, pitying old man. A tired one, too. He sighed. “A child as young as you shouldn’t have to See such terrible things. I’m sorry.”
I frowned, and looked at him, letting no self-pity or weakness show.

“I’ve seen a dragon hatch.” I said, managing to surprise the man who seemed withered. “I’ve seen a boy step into the woods and walk with fireflies. I’ve seen the ocean and heard the whales sing. I’ve seen the sun set in the desert, and the moon rise in the tundra. I saw when Bill got his Curse Breaking license, and I have to keep quiet from laughing or telling, or else it won’t be a surprise anymore when he gets it next year.”

Dumbledore looked at me in fascination; I beamed at him.

(I am not weak.)

“Don’t worry, Alby. It’s not all bad. I don’t need pity.”

Dumbledore, for his part, looked amazed. “You are incredibly mature about this, Guinevere.”

I grinned. “Kinda have to be, don’t I?”

He gave me a very kind smile. “No, you don’t. And that is what makes you strong, Guinevere Weasley. There are older, more experienced wizards and witches who wouldn’t be able to handle such a curse as well as you do.”

“Butter me up, why don’t you, Alby.” I chuckled.

He smiled, and it was a tad more genuine this time. Then he looked away, towards his high-arching windows, and sighed. “You have been honest with me, so I shall grant you the same courtesy, Guinevere. You asked me about magical cores, before. Light, Dark, and Grey. I told you not to worry of it.”

I nodded. It hadn’t really bothered me, honestly; there were other things to learn first. Occlumency took up lots of my time, with how bloody strong my Clairvoyance was getting. There was a reason Seers were usually locked away from public view, after all. The visions and power came randomly and weakened our physical bodies; we were just too damn fragile for the world. Oracle of Delphi? Yeah, that’s why she never bloody left her mountaintop. She’d never make it far, and she is the strongest recorded Prophesier of all time.

So I needed Occlumency to make sure I wasn’t mind-attacked all the time, and to keep the contents of my visions safe. Occlumency meant meditation, though, which made my magic stronger. That by itself wouldn’t be so bad, but I used my magic constantly, since I needed to get a handle on it so my Seer-magic didn’t attack me. Like a muscle, I kept destroying and rebuilding it. It was an endless cycle.

Yeah, magical core theory was kinda the last thing on my mind.

“I don’t mind. I know Occlumency and wandless magic and magical control are important.”

“I will admit, it is a bit more pertinent than I made it out to be.”

Frowning, I waited for my mentor to explain.

He sighed. “You are aware that magic is a balance?”

I nodded.

“Light against Dark; one cannot exist without the other. And Grey, the ambiguous middle-ground
that is rarely untainted by either side. These are not just the proclaimed sides of the First Wizarding 
War, my dear. They are categories of magic itself, of spells and rituals…”

“And of magical cores.”

Alby nodded. “You must understand, the study of magical cores and the ambient magic of the 
world is very vague, very undeveloped. It is only one of the many branches researched in the 
infamous Department of Mysteries.”

I listened attentively; there was a reason he was hiding this from me, then?

He seemed to read my mind (and I know he wasn’t, really, because my Occlumency barriers were 
pretty top-notch by now). “While the Light is looked kindly upon for its connection to healing, 
protection, etcetera, the Dark has been heavily stigmatized because of a side-effect that is called 
‘Madness’. Light magicks are inherently weaker than Dark, but are easier to use and master. It’s 
giving to others, benefitting others; the intent is considered ‘good’. The intent doesn’t even have to 
be clear, with Light magicks.

“Dark magicks, on the other hand, are stronger, but the will to dominate must be present. Dark 
magicks are taking, conquering, etc. When one uses Dark magicks with negative emotions and 
strong will and intent to harm or destroy too often, in too close of a succession, Madness begins to 
take root. The stronger the emotions, the more likely it is the emotions will take over your mind.”

“Magical footprints.” I remembered from some obscure book I’d flipped through in Diagon, “You 
leave a piece of your magic in things the more you use them, or are around them. That’s also how 
colors change, and how people bond.”

Alby smiled a little. “Doing a bit of recreational reading, my dear?”

I smirked. “Of course. But… go on?”

He gave another grave nod. “I’ll explain it more thoroughly later, this I promise you, but 
Guinevere, what you need to understand is that the Dark and Light are both necessary. But where 
the Light’s weakness may be found in increasing amounts of impotent wizards and witches, the 
Dark will produce insane magicals, who then grow into Dark Lords. And the reason I have been 
guiding you as I have is because you are the first of your siblings to have a naturally Dark core.”

Oh. Ohhhhh. Oh, this is making too much sense all of a sudden.

I twiddled my fingers. “You know, I picked up on that when we first met. I knew, somehow, that 
you were trying to get me on your side. I didn’t really care, since I just wanted to learn… But this 
is why? You want to make my core Light?”

Alby frowned softly. “I had hoped to gradually transform your core into Grey.”

“Because I’m a Seer-Clairvoyant and Soothsayer. If I went Mad, I’d be the worst enemy ever.”

“Yes.”

Hm. Well, I can’t blame him. Also, this isn’t canon in the slightest, I’m pretty sure.

I looked up at Alby. “Why are you telling me this?”

“You are strong enough to know. And I trust you to decide,” he said gently, “You are not a child, I 
see that now. Not completely. You will not fall to the Madness, nor will you side with Voldemort,
both of which I feared when I first saw your core.”

“But how is it pertinent?”

“I have been teaching you through Light means. It slows your progress, as your undeveloped core is struggling to adapt. I will, if you ask it of me, teach you the Dark Arts — of the legal variety. Including a certain ritual to grant good luck to others.”

I perked up at that. My ‘sorry-I’m-letting-a-grown-man-pretend-to-be-Scabbers’ present to Percy!

Alby noticed my expression. “I take it you wish to learn magic through the Dark Arts?”

“I just want to be strong enough to protect my brothers. The faster that happens, the better.”

“Alright, Guinevere-“

“Lys.”

“Hm?”

“My family calls me Lys. Or Lyssie. I’m calling you Alby already, so. It’s fair. You’re being fair to me, teaching me to the best of my potential sans any manipulations, so it’s the least I can do for you. Right?”

Albus Dumbledore smiled. “Alright, Lys. This ritual is rather extensive, taken from the Druids of the time of Merlin and Arthur…”

I never thought I’d learn flowers this extensively, but I did. Yellow Primroses, little red Maltese-croses, Cornish heath — that had been a pain to look for — wild golden Daffodils, and Burnt-tip orchid, a deep wine to white color. (I would change the colors later, after the ritual.) Lots of thin, green stems of rowan and hawthorn, woven with grass, tied together with strands of my hair for goodwill and personal touch.

A crown, a wreath, threaded with ribbons I’d had to ask Alby to conjure (since I didn’t know how, even with all these months of study with the man), encircled with smooth river stones in a field under the moon for three nights — and the stones needed to have runes carved into them, sealed with fresh water or the blood of a sacrificed animal. (I chose fish, because those were easy enough to catch and compatible with the water I could’ve used.)

“Ó, urramach Draoidheachd Màthair! Ó iomhainneach fuil caraid dhomh! Tha mi a’ guidhe ort, Màthair mèinn, beannaich mise!” I chanted, my indigo magic nearly glowing with affection and contentment, the sound of it like a cat’s purr. It slid across my skin and danced into the open, welcoming the ancient ritual it had once performed and lived in ages and ages ago, lives and lives ago.

“Faigh am bliadhna tabhach mèinn, agus cuinn mo cuid-thagraidh!” I went on, the words smooth and pretty on my practiced tongue; it had been very difficult, to go through this ritual more than fifty times, completely, but it would be worth it.
Also, I learned quite a bit about Gaelic festivals; many of which were obscure now, known only to the Pure-bloods; and even then, they were out of fashion and very few practiced them. Ridiculous, really. I think there was some sort of Ministerial law prohibiting the festivals themselves, but the rituals — as long as there were no more human sacrifices — were alright. Just forgotten. Apparently not by Albus Dumbledore, though.

It was a shame it was summer; the ritual wouldn’t be half as effective like that, and supplementing summer dew for spring dew made it that much weaker. But I sprinkled little bits of glittering morning-dust on the wreath. The ritual was actually pretty fun; I enjoyed putting it together, stressing out over the little details, learning the ancient incantations on my own. At the end of it all, I’d have a gift for my favorite brother; even if it didn’t work, it could still be given.

(And, knowing Percy, one day — well, probably soon — he would research and then understand the work I put into this.)

“Mo tagradh airson iochdalachd, cluinn!” I finished off, circling the wreath and stones counterclockwise steadily, “Chan eil an corr ‘gam dhith, tha mi seirbhesiche. Mas cuimhne leat, liubhair dé cha sir!”

The final words, and my magic almost crooned in delight. The ambient magic in the air — which had no color, only a soft, mirage-like distortion and quiet buzz in my ear — swirled around my ritual. My indigo joined in eagerly, and I braced myself as my magical core spent much of itself gathering around the old practice. I breathed deeply as my magic filtered to and back, filling me with warmth from the summer dew and energy from the blood; it was kind of an uplifting feeling, something like hope, but gathered in the depth of my chest and spreading out in waves of comfort through my veins.

I closed my eyes and reached into my core, trying to see what was going on. (Alby had suggested something along the lines of doing that, which made me think it was perfectly safe.)

The mass of indigo tendrils was pulsing with shining silver, and the strings looked thicker and healthier. There were streaks of gold running down random lines, making the entire think blink and shine. When I reached out to touch a mass of the magic, it felt warm and gentle and very, very happy — enough that I almost physically laughed in delight. My magic was drunk on the ritual, invigorated by it, soothed by it.

(No wonder Alby encouraged it, despite the borderline illegalness; the ritual was Grey-bordering-on-Dark… perfect for my core. I think he was having fun experimenting with my magic and core, now that he’d decided not to keep anymore secrets; apparently he’d never personally mentored a Dark-cored witch, especially not a Seer-witch. “Quite the puzzle, you are, Lys!” he’d said.)

When my eyes opened, the magic had ceased dancing. Instead, it was floating almost lazily, calm with power. I trotted forward, starting to take apart the stone circle, and wiping off the runes drawn in very strong ink, then the water, then the blood; these stones would be tossed back into the river, which would help the water by drawing ambient magic to it for purification. If they were found again and used in another similar ritual, that ritual would be very powerful — but stones must be drawn randomly, and reusing them were a big no-no.

With stones in my pockets, the crown of flowers was taken into my hands; it was warm to touch, and the flowers seemed fresher than when I picked them. And most likely, they would stay fresh until the this day and hour, a year past; this was a yearly ritual. (Though I read that the old Druid ones lasted for many years instead… A shame that the Roman invasions bastardized so many Olde
Magicks, I would’ve been quite interested in seeing how those spells and rituals worked.)

Inwardly, I was cackling. The ritual worked.

Now the real challenge: how to get Percy to wear it at least for an hour, and then not throw it away when he got to Hogwarts?

...

Real challenge? Yeah, right. Who was I kidding?

Percy wouldn’t do that if I asked him specifically not to. He was my favorite, and in turn, my brother adored me — not that difficult, really, to get people to like you when no one really pays them much attention and you constantly prove how much you love them through bouts of affection and actually listening.

Makes me a bit jumpy, honestly, because really, these kinds of manipulative techniques (even unintentionally) scream Voldemort all over the place — the only solace I can find is that I actually mean my affection for my brother.

He’ll love it, something whispered in my head soothingly.

I grinned to myself, using wandless magic to change the brighter colors into the pale pastels that Percy’s core liked. Lots of cool colors, but in bright shades: the shade of the sky, robin eggs, cornflower blue, lilac, morning glory.

“He’ll love it.” I said to myself, grinning at a ritual-well-done and pocketing the stones to give them to the river.

And, really, what else was I expecting from my precious big brother?

King’s Cross the next morning was crowded and filled with Muggles. Dad didn’t make it this year; he liked to make a tradition of walking through the Muggle side first, and then showing us the barrier, if only for dramatic effect for whoever was going to Hogwarts for the first time. He was busy, though, and Percy understood (though I could sense that little thrum of hurt in his colors and it made me disappointed, because the emotions I sensed were soul-deep, so this really affected my favorite brother). Bill had an arm slung around Percy, Charlie looked harassed by the demon twins, and my own twin and Ron and I were trailing after our Mum obediently. Muggles gave us strange looks but those ceased as we drew closer to 9 and 3/4.

After Ginny successfully answered where the platform was — she was so proud, even as Ron pouted — we stepped through the barrier and then we were in a world of magic. It was, if possible, even more crowded over here. And a lot more lively, with children running around and families hugging and trunks being rolled every which way. Magic was like that, I thought: beautiful, vivacious, and extremely chaotic.

“Dāno Dī-konden An-drixtā Guinevere Weasley.”

I gave a grateful smile to Bill, the headache had almost set in. “Thanks.”

He grinned, and then started to help Charlie and Percy get their things on the Hogwarts Express. Mum started fussing over the twins, who’d done something to set Ron off, with Ginny taking his tide; I found it a rather golden opportunity.

I waved Percy over, feeling a bit shy and embarrassed about the whole thing (even if it was
perfectly socially acceptable for a 5-year-old girl to make flower crowns, I still felt like a 20-something year old giving teal roses and blue daisies to an 11-year-old).

Surprisingly, it was Percy who initiated the hug.

“I’ll miss you, Lys,” he admitted quietly, “But don’t tell Fred and George I said that.”

I nodded; the demon twins picked on Percy a lot, after all. Grinning up at him, I whispered, “I have a good luck present for you!”

He looked on curiously as I rolled up my sweater (where I’d been stuffing the wreath, as the jacket was once Fred’s and was quite oversized). Then he blinked in surprise as I plopped the crown onto his head, setting it just right. As I thought, it matched his color well and even looked good from a purely physical aspect (teal and blue and Percy’s coppery-red hair was nice, I think). I felt my face warm a little — I really wasn’t the girly twin — but I smiled when he didn’t move to take it off.

“It’s for success and health,” I said quietly, feeling irrationally shy all of a sudden, “So don’t take them off, or I’ll know. I’ll write Charlie to tell me.”

Percy laughed, nodding. “Promise.”

I grinned, then threw my arms around his waist. He seemed surprised — my fault, I always felt more than a little awkward hugging these people who were just so much younger than I was and all that — but only hesitated for a second before he hugged back.

“Thank you, Lys.” he muttered.

“You’re going to be fine,” I said firmly, “Write lots, alright? Don’t let anyone make fun of you because you’re smarter than them. And wear your flowers. Hang them above your bed after the train ride.”

Percy gave me a bemused smile. “I will.”

And then it was time for the Hogwarts-bound to board the train. Bill and Charlie gave Percy funny looks, but smiled in the end. The twins laughed and pointed, and got punished with little flicks from wandless magic (good practice). Mum kissed the three eldest on their cheeks and hugged them silly, but the whistle blew deafeningly and then the three were shoved onto the train. They were sticking out the windows (well, Bill and Charlie were), waving to us younger ones as we laughed, waiving back, chasing after the train wildly.

It reminded me of my first life, actually. We lived rather far away from most of our extended family; visiting took five or six hours of driving, and too much money to fly. So visits were long and happy, and always filled with honey-skinned cousins playing around with each other; aunts and mothers gossiping; uncles and fathers catching up on old times.

When they left, me and my siblings would chase their car down the street and to the corner, where we’d stop and wave goodbye. It would piss off the neighbors something silly, with how loudly we shouted, but we had to send off our family properly — I forget who started the tradition, but even when I turned eleven, I still chased cars down to the street corner. And when I turned eighteen, college-bound, my brother chased my car, too.

Ah, well. It wouldn’t do, to think about something that was gone.

As we were trotting back to Mum, the train mostly gone, I twitched a little when the itching in my head began. Very soft and steady, then it began to throb a little, a headache. Something wanted to
“Dizzy spell,” I sighed in annoyance.

The twins, Ron, and Ginny straightened immediately. Ginny took my hand and Fred glued himself to my other side, to keep me steady as I allowed the vision to come.

Copper curls adorned with pale flowers. He was slightly pink-cheeked, but holding his head high through the compartments — empty compartment, good — sitting reading learning glancing Hogwarts curriculum too easy for his tastes.

The girl with a dark crimson mess on her head pointing at worn out books and she laughs as he does at something nonsensical — Hogwarts, A History. He knows the first year well — slides open — boy standing in the doorway looking mostly confident and a little nervous.

“Mind if I sit here?” — Yorkshire accent — brown hair cropped close to his head — crowd in the platform a dull roar of noise. Percy glances outside, reflection hitting his face — family is still out there, looking for him and he just noticed.

“If you don’t mind me reading, I guess.” — “Nah, go ahead. I’m not the reading sort, though.” — bemused look countered by an amused one, quirk of the lips that doesn’t usually grow into a proper smile — not unless she’s making him laugh, his favorite playmate in the family — “You can ask about the flowers, I don’t mind.”

“Oh. Well, yeah, I was wondering who they were from.”

No laughter. It’s refreshing, others as he’s passed their compartments have laughed — “They’re from my sister. That’s her.” — pointing out the window as the train leaves. The children are running — she was holding Ron and Ginny’s hands and releases Ron to be able to wave — waving and chasing the train.

The other boy smiled. “Cute, eh? Must adore you. Very carefully put together, them flowers. I got a cousin can’t do anything like that.” — Percy blushed again — smiling out the window even though the platform is passed — the flowers on his head seem to bloom with his own happiness — “Powerful, ain’t it? Not all that popular, that magic.”


“Oliver Wood, by the way.” — “Oh, right. Percy Weasley.”

Stop.

I laughed to myself, making my siblings all look at me strangely. Ginny tugged on my hand in curiosity, pink lips pouting. (Most of our bonding time was me telling her stories about my nicer visions, describing how whales sang and the moon rose and flowers bloomed — pretty things like that.)

Grinning, I said softly, “Percy’s going to be just fine.”

The twins snorted. “Of course he’ll be fine!”

“He’s Percy, isn’t he?”

“Bet he’ll make prefect”
“-or Head Boy-“

“-or both!” the two chorused.

I shook my head, then muttered to Ginny, “He’s going to be very happy.”

Ginny brightened. She wasn’t as close to the older siblings as I was — though she looked up to Bill a lot — but it spoke of our closeness that she understood how much Percy meant to me. I’d even say that Percy annoyed her, but she was happy for me; because, honestly, I’ve been worried about Percy the most. Isolation is as much of a killer as Greyback, only it’s slow and maddening, and I didn’t want that for my brother at all.

“Is it ‘cos of the flowers you gave him?” she asked.

“Well, they’ll certainly help. Don’t tell Mum about the magic on them, though, alright?”

Ginny giggled. “Only if I get one when we go, too!”

I blinked. Then I smirked. “Maybe I’ll make it a tradition.”

Fred and George… well, I’d say that the perfect word is ‘glomped’, because suddenly I was being manhandled by a grinning George and Ginny was getting hugged by an enthusiastic Fred. Funnily enough, that’s usually how us twins paired off: me with George and Ginny with Fred. Habit, I suppose.

“We get flowers too-“

“-right, Lyssie? We overheard Dumbledore-

“-and he was saying something about old Beltane rituals-“

“-and flowers. That’s what you did-“

“-isn’t it?”

I rolled my eyes at them. Bloody twin-speak. No matter how much Ginny and I practiced, we couldn’t get it down. Maybe it was only for identical twins? Unfair.

“Yes, yes, you all get flowers. Even you, Ronniekins.”

“Stop calling me that!”

(He said that, but I could tell he was secretly pleased that I hadn’t forgotten about him; like so many of our siblings do. Poor Ron… surrounded by twins. It was a good thing, I think, that I was closer to the older three — Percy especially — because Ron needed Ginny as his playmate.)

We reached Mum, who smiled at us fondly. “Ready, then?” she asked.

I gave a lopsided grin that all eight of us Weasley children had inherited from Dad. “Sure, Mum. Also, Percy’s going to get into-“ Red and gold — “-Gryffindor, so should we start making his favorite sweets already?”

She chuckled. “Maybe after your arithmetic lessons, luv.”

The other four groaned. I gave Mum a deadpan stare. “Mum, I know my arithmetic.”
“Then you’ll do well in my lessons, won’t you? Arithmetic is the building block to Arithmancy, you know, Lyssie. The Headmaster told me about your interest in Spell Crafting, and don’t think I don’t see you quizzing poor Pandora Lovegood whenever she brings Luna over. Come on now, all of you. It’s time to go home.”

And that about wrapped up the end of the summer of 1987, I suppose.
Hey guys! I'm almost done with this arc, which will be nice, and you'll get to meet all the OC's I've thought up and see all the crazy shit I did with Hogwarts.

Big, big thank you's to all of you who commented, bookmarked, or gave kudos! Seriously, every comment I read makes me really happy, and every time I see someone bookmarked RPR, I'm over the fucking moon. I'm really, really glad people seem to like this.

I'm up to 25 chapters backlogged, so you'll have weekly updates for quite a long time. Hopefully I won't catch up and I'll be able to finish this up, though it's gonna be a long one. Again, thank you all so much for reading and I hope you enjoy!

1989.

Fred’s wreath was all burgundy and dark lilac, and colors that suited those main ones. George’s was a dark, dark violet — very similar to me, actually — and a lovely plum color.

Ginny and I were seven when they got on the Hogwarts Express, and while Ginny was fighting with Ron about something or other, I walked up to the very expectant demon twins with a grin on my face.

“Kneel, stupid big brothers.” I commanded, now eight years old to their eleven.

With a bit of joking complaint, they did. And when they stood, I could almost feel the magic binding itself to them, wrapping around them, protecting them. I’d already had Bill (who was going in as Head Boy this year, Mum had sobbed in pride when he got the letter) cast me a Dāno Di-konden An-drixā so I couldn’t really see it, but I knew the feeling. There was part of me in those wreaths, after all.

George threw his arm around Fred and winked.

“You look ravishing, brother-dear.”

“Ah, I must say, you’re the handsomest gent I’ve ever seen!” Fred replied.

“No, no! No one could compare to your beauty-"

“-except you, my dear brother, you gorgeous man, you!”

I laughed at their antics and gave them both another hug before they stepped onto the Express and
waved us goodbye with increasing silliness the further they got away. I felt sorry for Bill; he was going to have to curb them as much as possible this year, or else Hogwarts would be doomed for the next six years. Or maybe he’d just let them do whatever the fuck they wanted, since they’d probably be a bit more cautious their first year? Then he’d let the rest of us suffer under their prank mastery that would be the bane of many teachers’ lives.

Well, no doubt my fortune-bringing Beltane wreaths would crown them with success for whatever they wanted to do. It only lasted a year, but first year is usually the precursor to all the rest of your years. The demon twins would wreck mayhem with their flowers painted their magic’s cheerful colors.

As we went back home, I leaned in to whisper to Ron, “Don’t eat the leftover lemon cakes. The demon twins did something to them.”

Ron, for his part, giggled maniacally (he was often the target of their pranks, and loved being able to pay them back with me or with Ginny), and nodded. I wondered how I would craft his crown in two years, when his colors were the brightest of us all.

…

“Helvynya Wealse?”

“Sollertia Augurium by Helvynya Wealse née Prevett,” I repeated patiently to a befuddled-looking Alby. “I’m her descendent.”

Alby shook his head. “The mother of the Twin Dark Lords,” he said quietly.

I raised a brow. “You know her?”

“There are few educated wizards and witches who do not. She was one of the most powerful Dark witches to ever live, and never go Mad from it. There are few who have the mental discipline, and fewer who can become as incredibly powerful and successful as she was. One of the greatest minds in magical history, known for her creativity and viciousness. There are many historians who agree that if Helvynya Wealse had ever the inclination, she would have ruled magical Europe easily. Many more still believe that the Madness of her children, the Twin Dark Lords, was the only thing that saved the magical world from a new magical empire.”

I blinked in surprise. I hadn’t been able to find anything on them, and here Alby was just spewing history like it was nothing! I suppose he’d been holding back all Dark or even Dark-Grey aspects of my education before I’d proven myself strong enough to resist the Madness. My near-mastery of Occlumency along with my pure intentions to protect must’ve helped with that. Oh, and my willingness to cast Light spells (though they were much more difficult for me — I’d never have a career in Healing, I didn’t think).

Thank goodness I proved myself to him, I thought.

I wondered, quietly, whether Alby would be this honest with Harry Potter. Somehow I didn’t think so… I was powerful, intelligent and mature beyond my age, and my personality was mostly formed, not susceptible to change. A personality that was fiercely protective of good people from the Light, my family, and had a thirst for knowledge but the humility to accept his help. I had, in short, proven myself to be an ally; and I suppose my Clairvoyance led him to think that hiding
things from me would be more detrimental than advantageous.

That was, of course, the more cynical way to put it. Ideally, Alby just wanted to be more honest with me because he cared.

(Pffffft. Grandfather-figure or not, the man was the Leader of Light. A fucking politician.)

“Do you think Helvynya’s lack of Madness was because of her Clairvoyance?” I asked.

“It is possible. Seer-Clairvoyants are rare enough that studies on their exact abilities have always been lacking. It is why I choose to hide you, Lys; if the Ministry understood how powerful your Sight was, I have no doubt that you would never see beyond the walls of the Department of Mysteries ever again, sad as it is.”

No doubt he was also thinking along the lines of, ‘If the Ministry knows about the most powerful Clairvoyant in centuries, then Lucius Malfoy also knows about the most powerful Clairvoyant in centuries. And that’s bad.’ Alby was, first and foremost, a manipulator. With good intentions, of course; I loved the old man, after all.

“I want to study her. Her and the Twin Dark Lords.”

“That, my dear, is where I would like to draw the line,” Alby said seriously, “I will teach you the Dark Arts and what Grey magicks I know, but Helvynya Prevett and her children’s exploits border on complete Madness. I do not worry that you will grow Mad from what Dark Arts I teach you, as I myself find them simple despite my Light core, but I do not paint you invincible.”

I sighed. “Still a threat?”

“Power will always be a threat. Yours is significantly more so, which means more caution.”

“So no Helvynya Prevett?”

“I would prefer your core to mature, at least, before you attempt to learn more.”

“So it’s not a ‘no’ forever, then?”

Alby smiled. “Is there ever really a forever, my dear?”

I narrowed my eyes, but smiled anyways. “Getting cryptic. Classic move, Alby.”

He chuckled. “You will truly be a force to be reckoned with when you’re older, Lys.”

I grinned. “Bet on it.”

So Helvynya Prevett and the Twin Dark Lords were off the table with me and Alby. He wanted to expand more into wandless magic, advanced Occlumency techniques, and Grey magic (to eventually lead into the softer Dark magic that he knew). It was a lot already, so I suppose I didn’t find it all that difficult to put my questions to rest.

It just meant I’d be researching more on my own.

(Alby thought I wanted to learn more about Clairvoyance. A truth, but I also wanted to learn what Helvynya Prevett or her sons did to have fucked up the timeline enough that Guinevere Weasley was born.)
I liked Luna.

She was adorable, first of all. She played with Ginny all the time, and was endlessly patient with my big sister’s brattish tendencies. She was quiet and liked to read, but she also wasn’t afraid to get herself muddy when she went exploring. Honestly, back in my last life, I would’ve wanted my daughters to be like her.

I really did like this little girl.

And then Pandora Lovegood died, and the Luna-that-lives-down-the-road became closer to the Luna-that-I-read-about-and-thought-was-super-cool. Luna became the character I knew and loved; and yet, I felt more devastated than when I woke up from a fucking Voldemort nightmare.

Logically, I knew there was nothing I could’ve done — I had no fucking clue how Luna’s mum had died until she did — but I still felt useless. For all my foreknowledge, for all my Sight, for all my... my power, I couldn’t have saved my next-door neighbor’s family. I couldn’t save them when obviously I should’ve been able to, and now Luna was all fucked up and traumatized from seeing her mum die in front of her.

Death is traumatizing at young ages. Death right in front of you? Witnessing it? No wonder the Lovegood family always had that sort of interest in death, in the Deathly Hallows, if their family’s heart just up and blew herself up violently one day.

I liked Luna.

She was a friend, and yet I didn’t do anything about her mother.

Even worse, I forgot. I forgot about her pain because I was just so busy with my own things, with my lessons, with my wandless magic. I knew. I knew that Luna was half-orphaned, I knew that she’d seen death before — that’s why she could see Thestrals, dammit — and I did nothing. I didn’t try to curb Pandora’s fanatical Spell Crafting, I didn’t warn Xenophilius quietly, I didn’t stop it.

Pandora Lovegood had been a sweet woman with platinum blonde hair and hazel-blue eyes and an airy laugh and a spark in her eyes whenever Spell Crafting came up, and I loved trotting over to her and asking her about Runes and Arithmancy when Luna came to play with Ginny. I spoke to this woman, I was friends with this woman. I was friends with her daughter. And yet, I fucking stood by and let her daughter watch as she died violently. I as good as traumatized Luna myself, standing to the side and allowing the Lovegoods to just... break.

Shit. If I could do this to one of my only friends outside of my family, what sort of messed up shit was I going to get into later? How could I have let this happen? Why didn’t I try to help? Drop a hint?

This is on me. I could’ve stopped this. What would it have changed? Fate wouldn’t have cared, Luna’s not extremely essential, is she? She could still be happy and whole and nothing would’ve punished her for it. Now Luna and Xenophilius are half-fucking-insane and I have to see them, knowing I could’ve prevented it.

The Luna I knew would joyfully run towards us, hug Ginny, quietly listen with a soft smile as my sister babbled. Then they’d run off and play in the orchard because Ginny liked having a girl-
friend who acted her age; and then Luna would ask me to come, and they’d teach me how to be a bit more childish and girly and I’d indulge them (and secretly enjoy acting like a little brat).

After the funeral, Luna’s eyes could go distant at random intervals, and her smiles were no longer wide and innocent, but almost wistful. I hated seeing that sort of soft sadness in a child, a child who was my friend. She’d sit and think more, never run or shout or play.

Ginny was frustrated and annoyed with the nearly complete 180, and played with her less; but that was also because Xenophilius just had so much shit to take care of, suddenly a single parent, that he just often forgot about Luna and taking her over. It fluctuated between Luna just staying with us for hours and hours, quietly sitting in the woods and looking at nothing with silvery-blue eyes and a blank expression, and her not being there at all, locked up in her house because her father had forgotten.

I’d have visions of her, sometimes, which I cursed because I only began to have them after Pandora died: Luna sat on her bed, looking at the window quietly — there was sobbing downstairs, great heaving breaths of her father — she crept down and watched, afraid, and when she gathered the courage to approach he didn’t even look at her — hand softly grazing against a robe sleeve — heaving sobs, head buried in arms. There were traces of a dead mother all over the house — “Daddy, please don’t cry anymore.” went a whisper, high-pitched and gasping. Her tears in silver-blue eyes — “You still have me, don’t you? You still have me.”

Stop.

I didn’t have to hear the Aren’t I enough? that she was silently asking. I couldn’t even find the effort to be angry with Xenophilius because this was my fault too. Luna had lost her only friend, Ginny, who’d become very bitter that her favorite girl-friend suddenly ‘began to ignore her’, had lost her beloved mother — glue of the family — and had lost her father. My friend had lost everything and I frequently set fallen branches and shit on fire with how angry I was at myself.

I couldn’t look at her without thinking, Oh God, she’s thinner than she was last time, look at her eyes, look at what you’ve done, look at what you could’ve fucking stopped and didn’t because you’re a fucking selfish bastard!

It was a very irritated Ginny and a subdued Guinevere that saw Bill off to the Gringotts branch in Egypt. Then it was a somewhat upset Ginny and a very subdued Guinevere that said goodbye to the freshly-graduated Charlie as he went to Romania to follow his dreams of dragons. And then it was a normal Ginny (she began to play with Ron more) and an extremely subdued Guinevere that said goodbye to the demon twins and Percy for their second and fourth years, respectively.

At that point, even Ron was picking up on how strange I was acting, and the demons twins and Percy gave me very encompassing bear-hugs as they boarded the Express.

“Well, we don’t know what’s going on-” began Fred.

“-but don’t stop writing!”

“If you need some ideas to prank whoever’s gotten you in a stint-”

“-probably Ron or Gin-gin, of course-”

“-then we’re your twins!”

They both hugged me to the point where it was almost painful, George ruffling my hair affectionately (since I was his twin-pair). And I knew that was their special way of saying, ‘Write
us if you’ve got problems and need cheering up, okay, Lyssie?” Percy took the much more direct route, of course.

My fourteen-year-old erudite brother smothered me in his own hug. (It was actually funny, because he was so stiff to affection with everyone but me, since I always covered him in affection since I’d decided he was my favorite.) Then he muttered quietly, “Whatever’s going on, Lys, you know you can write to me in our weekly letters, if the demon twins are too much.”

I smiled weakly. “There’s nothing wrong with me.”

Percy gave me a deadpan look. “And I’m the Queen of England, Lys.”

I laughed; Percy so rarely made jokes, even with me. “I’ll write you when you’ve settled, like last year. Send your and the twins’ monthly letters to Bill and Charlie with you, I’ll mail them with the rest of ours.”

He looked at me gently. “Whatever you’re going through, little sister, you know you can write me about it. It might be easier that way.”

I nodded, and then three of my brothers were gone.

And home felt so much emptier, with Bill in Egypt Cursebreaking and Charlie in Romania dragon-keeping and my favorite brother and the exuberant twins at Hogwarts. Ron and Ginny played together — they both could sense I was gloomy and didn’t want to bother me, since such instances were usually me working through a snag in wandless magic or Occlumency — leaving me to my books and my work, Mum in the kitchen and sitting room, Dad at work as always. And then all I was Seeing was Luna Lovegood, curled up by herself because her father didn’t know how to grieve.

With great power comes great responsibility, was one of the first lessons I’d been taught in my last life.

I was very powerful now.

And yet my friend, an innocent girl, was slowly shattering in the house just past the creek.

*Who else will you fail?*

I didn’t want to know. I didn’t want to See the faces of people who needed my strength, and who wouldn’t receive it. I didn’t want to See how many people in this world that deserved happiness lose it because I wasn’t enough.

…

It all came to a head when Dad put his foot down in October.

He and Mum sat me down in the living room, Ron and Ginny sleeping already.

“Lyssie,” my father began, “This has gone far enough. Ginny’s gotten to asking me to fix whatever is wrong with your magic or books. Ron’s starting to sneak into your little library to see if any of your favorite books are ripped.”
I raised a brow. “Is that really all they think of when they think of me?” I said, slightly amused.

Dad didn’t smile. I sobered up; this was serious business, then.

“Lyssie, dear, what’s wrong? You’ve been like this since…” Mum trailed off. *Since Pandora died.*

I gave her a meaningful look.

She sighed. “Lyssie, I understand that Pandora was your friend, but… Shutting us all out, even Luna…? Is it just that Pandora i-is gone? I-Is it something else? Nightmares? We can always get Professor Dumbledore to get you Sleeping Draughts or Dreamless Sleep from Professor Snape…”

I looked away, feeling awkward and horrible. I didn’t need a bloody *grief-talk* with my parents. But I was worrying them, they didn’t deserve to worry this much, honestly… I just couldn’t do anything right, could I?

“Lyssie.”

My Dad was giving me a blank, but somehow still stern, gaze.

I knew that look. A small nod, and I quietly released my peripheral Occlumency barriers. My mind was structured in a way that protected my Clairvoyant visions first and foremost — if anyone ventured that deep, they’d find themselves surrounded by a mist-filled labyrinth among other things — and then my memories, then my thoughts, and then emotions; with the emotions being free to pass through the outermost barrier unless I willed it otherwise. Complicated stuff, that. But I unshuttered the emotions and the thoughts quietly, granting my father access to my mind.

*I killed Pandora Lovegood.*

*I ruined Luna.*

There was a beat of silence, then suddenly there was a sharp *SLAP!* and I was holding my cheek tenderly. It was reddening, sharp with pain, and there was a look of determined anger on my father’s face. Mum shrieked when she realized what just happened.

“ARTHUR-!”

“Never,” my father snarled, looking like he was furiously holding down his emotions via his own Occlumency, and stopping Mum short with how angry he sounded, “NEVER. Never ever think that, Lyssie. Pandora Lovegood’s death was not your fault. Luna’s grief is not your fault.”

Mum looked horrified that that was what Dad saw in my head.

“Lyssie?” she whispered.

*Don’t pity me. I don’t need it. There are others who do, who need help. Don’t pity ME.*

Dad’s voice was gentle. “It’s not your fault, Lyssie. It’s not-”

“What do you know about it?” I burst out, suddenly on my feet. I clenched my teeth, angry with myself, angry with Dad. “What do you know about my- my visions?” *My knowledge, my power.* “I knew she was going to die! I knew what Luna was going to be like, how she’d be affected. And I did NOTHING! I forgot, I slipped it to the back of my mind, and now there’s a girl my age sitting alone in her bedroom without *anything* because I let that happen!

“How many more are suffering because I’m conveniently hiding myself?” *Sirius Black. “How*
many people could I help if I only reached out?” *Harry Potter.* “How many people am I failing already, because I’m a terrified child, because I can’t make sense of my power, because I’m WEAK?” *My family, my brothers, this world-

“ENOUGH.”

I jolted. Royal blue and navy and cobalt were swirling around the room, their voices deep and powerful, angry. Tones of deep violet and indigo slipped in and out of the waves of blue, sparking threads of gold scattered throughout the cool but bright colors. I watched, shrinking back a little, as the blue bore down on my indigo. I hadn’t realized that it was lashing out, that the frames of our pictures were cracking with my anger.

Shame colored my face. I hadn’t lost control like this in years. And never to anger. I’ve never had a burst of accidental magic in anger. Only in fear.

I bowed my head. “I’m sorry.” I mumbled, “I’ll fix those. It won’t happen again… I’m sorry.”

*What’s wrong with you? Lashing out at your parents, when they should be the ones angry at you. You let Pandora Lovegood die, you let Luna isolate herself, and you’ll do it again and again and again if you have to.*

I hated being a child. It must’ve been the child’s body, making me cry like this.

*You’re already doing it. You’re afraid of dying, so Pettigrew still sleeps in your brothers’ rooms peacefully. They’re right next to a Death Eater and you’re too weak to protect them. And what about Harry Potter? If you turned the rat in, he’d be happier, him and Sirius Black both. You’re so powerful, where’s that responsibility of yours, hm?*

*Daddy, please don’t cry anymore.” went a whisper, high-pitched and gasping — tears in silver-blue eyes — “You still have me, don’t you? You still have me.”*  

(Stop.)

Gentle, feather-light touches on my face. I blinked tears out of my eyes in surprise, and a very soft pressure tilted my face up. Fingers brushed my rugged dark locks out of my face, and I felt exposed and naked and ashamed when I looked up at my father’s sad face.

“You’re disappointed, aren’t you?” I choked out.

(I didn’t know when Arthur Weasley’s opinion became so important to me. Was it when he grinned at my wandless magic mending the shed last week? Was it when I blocked him from my mind successfully the first time? Was it when I taught him how electricity worked? Was it when I told him about how my visions could be beautiful? Was it when he held me, cradled me in his arms, and laughed when I smiled for the first time? When did Arthur Weasley become my father, really? When did I look to him like a child looks to their parents, rather than a reincarnation looking to a character to be respected?)

My father looked at me quietly, stare like steel and home. “No. Never, little queen.”

“I let her die.”

“You didn’t know.”

“I ruined a family.”
"You didn’t know."

“I knew.”

He shook his head. “No. You might have known that Pandora was going to pass, but you don’t
know this… You don’t understand, my Lyssie, that what happened was not your fault. Pandora’s
death, Luna’s grief, is not your responsibility.”

“I could have stopped it.”

“Could you have? Did you know the date, the time, the exact circumstances? Would Fate have
allowed it?”

“Even if Fate doesn’t, wh-why would I be allowed to choose who lives and dies? Is-Isn’t it the
right thing to do, t-to help everyone you can e-even if it hurts? Isn’t that what sacrifice is?
Isn’t my power m-my responsibility?”

Dad looked at me sharply. “Who told you that?”

I mumbled, “No one has to tell me that.”

He sighed. Then I was surrounded by warm arms that were so, so familiar that it made me want to
burst into tears again. I was really becoming my physical age, wasn’t I? Pathetic, really. But
pathetic or not, I clung to the safest person in this world, burrowing into his robes like I wanted to
disappear.

His voice made his chest rumble under my ear. “Lyssie.” he said quietly.

I looked up.

“Do you know why I call you little queen?”

“Because I was named for Queen Guinevere, since your name is Arthur.”

He smiled just a little, so the corners of his mouth were turned upwards. A not-quite smile. “In that
case, I would be calling Ginny the same thing. ‘Ginevra’ is just another version of Guinevere. But
it’s you who I call my little queen. Do you know why, Lyssie?”

I shook my head.

“Queens are rulers. They are figures of responsibility-”

“Then-”

“to their own,” he completed, raising a brow at me. I snapped my mouth shut, listening intently to
him. “They are not heroes. They don’t sacrifice themselves for every person in the world. They
make difficult choices, wield much power.”

“In the name of sacrifice.” I argued, “They sacrifice themselves for others.”

“For theirs. You are my little queen, Guinevere Lysandra, because what I wish for you is that you
do your best for you and yours and what is fair to everyone else. Whether that is violence against
enemies or ignorance towards those who do not matter to you.

“The world is not your responsibility,” he went on softly, “If I could, I would tell you that there is
nothing for you to worry about. But I know you See that there is, so I can only settle with this piece
of advice: *You are not a god.* You are my daughter, and you are human, and you are selfish, and there is absolutely no one in this world who you are *required* to sacrifice yourself for, just because you have the power to do so.”

“But… you sacrifice yourself all the time.”

“It’s a selfish thing, my little queen,” he whispered, “You, your mother, your brothers and sister, you all make me so happy, I will gladly give myself up for you all. I wouldn’t be able to do this for anyone, you see? And I don’t want you to think that that’s what your Clairvoyance means. Your Sight is *yours*, no one else’s, which is why Albus will never ask you to disclose what you don’t want to.”

“I’m an asset. He should.”

“You’re *my child*. I will duel even Albus Dumbledore if he tries. And anyone else who thinks that *my child* has a responsibility to right all the wrongs in this world that you See. You are not a weapon, or even an adult yet. You are allowed to be selfish.”

I clung to him quietly, thinking this through.

“My brothers,” I whispered. “I would sacrifice myself for them.”

“What’s best for you and yours, little queen,” Dad said, “and what’s fair for everyone else.”

*What’s best for me and mine, and what’s fair for everyone else.*

This ability. Clairvoyance. I didn’t ask for it, or plan for it. And though I’ve seen horrible things and know things about the future — hazy, though I’m still acting under the assumption that the plot will proceed roughly the same — was it really… Was any of it my business? Isn’t this exactly why I didn’t ask more about Harry Potter, when I was talking to Alby? And then there’s the added bonus that Fate is picky and wants things a certain way, which is why Scabbers is still alive right now.

Pandora Lovegood. She was practically… a stranger. Someone I talked to on occasion, really. Her death was sad, but… She was not someone I deemed important to myself. Cold, perhaps. But realistic. Not someone I should feel was part of mine, not someone I would mourn as one of mine. Not someone I should destroy myself for. Not my responsibility, even with all this power at my fingertips.

Everyone outside of this family, at the current moment, was like that.

“Dad?” I whispered hoarsely.

He had been rambling, but he quieted instantly. “Yes, luv?”

I looked at my hands. “Clairvoyance… people will ask me to help them, won’t they? They’ll ask me to sacrifice myself for them.” *And I would kinda want to, just because I have all this power and they don’t and I can, I could, I could help them…*

“They will.”

“…And you’re telling me not to?”

Dad sighed again. “I’m telling you, little queen, that you should not feel pressured to help everyone in this world. Especially if they ask you to tempt Fate. I’m telling you that there will always be
people drowning in rivers, and you will see them. But one will be your brother, and the other will be a stranger. It is your choice who you go to first, but you cannot save them all.”

“Pick and choose?” I asked, eyes widening.

“What’s best for you and yours,” he reminded me gently, “and what’s fair to everyone else.”

“Why? No one else will agree to that.”

_They will point fingers at me. They will beg me to save them. They will crucify me._

*(Fear.)*

Dad gazed at me quietly. There was that look in his eyes again, the one like steel and hearth-fire. Protection and home. “You are one of mine, Guinevere Lysandra. I will burn Europe to the ground to make sure you are healthy and happy.”

Something pricked in my heart. Had someone ever felt like that for me before? I couldn’t remember, all I knew was that Dad would never break his promises to me and that if someone was threatening me, Dad would actually burn down Europe if he had to. It was a nice feeling.

“Don’t be afraid to be selfish. You’re not a hero, and I would never ask you to be one, not like this,” he said, “Your Sight is yours to use. Your life is yours to live. There are no boundaries but the ones you set yourself, and as long as they are set for good reasons, I will not contest it.”

“Are my reasons good?” I asked quizzically.

“I wouldn’t know, luv. Are they?”


“They’re selfish.”

“It’s not impossible for things to be both, little queen.”

I smiled. “Then, yes. They’re good.”

Dad nodded. “No evil in this world is your fault, Lys. You owe it nothing. What you give, how much you give, is your choice. Take up the responsibilities that you choose, not others’ that are pushed onto you.”

*What’s best for me and mine, and what’s fair for everyone else.*

“Thanks, Dad.” I said quietly.

“Of course, Lyssie.”

His hand on my back was warm, and I knew that I’d sacrifice whatever I had to in order to keep this warmth. I knew, intrinsically, that the advice Dad gave was very geared towards my abilities. That, in all honesty, this sort of advice wasn’t something he’d ever repeat to my brothers and sister; it was only because these lessons of selfishness and self-worth were taught as one goes through life normally. I’m sure Bill or Charlie had an understanding of what Dad told me already.

And I’m sure I understood it once, before I was born into this world. But then I was here, my physical body so small and impressionable, so pressured by the power inside that I began to
wonder if I deserved this. If my worth in his life even went beyond my abilities and my will to protect my family.

*There is no Guinevere Lysandra besides you, something whispered, Your family loves YOU. You are real. You exist here. You are human and deserve to exist and form your own views of things. You are not a tool that Fate wields to fix the world’s problems.*

I have — have *had* — a choice, Dad told me. I could choose who and what I would sacrifice myself for, because I obviously wasn’t going to let him convince me that there was nothing like that in this world. He tried to treat me like an adult, and I admired that he re-evaluated that opinion according to how I reacted.

A sigh.

It was hard, but I thought I understood it a bit better now.

*Be selfish. Use your gift for yourself, for yours. Everyone else will get by, as they always have.*

Yeah. This was okay. This was alright.

*(Breathe.)*

...

At some point, Dad must’ve spoken to Xenophilius, because Luna told me quietly — how she knew it was my doing, I don’t know — that her father began to sit with her at night and tell her about his amazing creatures. She began to look for gulping plimpies in the creek and Crumple-Horned Snorkacks in the woods, and there was a lovely pale lavender in her colors now. She was growing closer to her father, through her adventures in magical creature exploration.

I would join her, sometimes, smile growing as she spoke more. Not like before, she was still somewhat distant and wistful, but there was a real happiness in her eyes now. Ginny thought I was mad, hanging around her now that she was strange, but she didn’t question my whims; she noticed I’d gotten happier again, too.

So here I was, sitting with my feet in the brook with Luna as she chattered on about gulping plimpies. I listened in unfeigned interest, because I honestly wanted to know *where she got these conspiracy theories from.* Her and Xeno, I suppose; there had to be some sort of strange origin story for this stuff, right? It was weird, but I enjoyed weird. Weird was my life.

Plus, it’s not like she was just spouting nonsense to get a rise out of me — she believed it, and I wanted to understand her and give her a friend who’d at least listen, if nothing else. (Ginny was of the opinion that Luna was ‘acting more like a crazy person than her friend’, which slightly irritated me, but I decided to try not to get pissed off at my own twin.)

I might’ve been partial to her because of my lingering guilt over Pandora Lovegood.

I might’ve also been partial to her because I’ve actually Seen some of her bullying in Hogwarts, and lemme tell you, *Rowling didn’t cover the half of it.* I’ve never been bullied and I don’t think I’ve been a bully, so I want to be able to punch whoever pushes her down the *fucking stairs,* and I wanted to feel *fantastic* about it.
After a moment, where Luna quieted and retreated into her thoughts, she looked at me innocently with wide, silvery-blue eyes.

“You don’t have to put up with me, you know,” she said in her soprano voice, “Ginny doesn’t, so neither do you. I’ve been planning to catch a moon frog to keep me company, and I’ve got Daddy, so I won’t be alone.”

She gave me a smile, and I crumpled.

“I don’t ‘put up’ with you, Luna. I like you, and I like hearing about your creatures, and I like fishing for gulping plimpies and catching these little silver things that we sing to and release anyways.” I said firmly, trying to emulate Dad’s strong gentleness, trying to tone down my unnatural eloquence. “It doesn’t matter that we never catch the Blibbering Humdinger in the fields, because we have fun running after shadows in the grass anyways. Besides, what if they exist? Then I’ll look really ridiculous and stupid because I didn’t believe in them, right?”

I pretended not to notice as Luna’s eyes filled with tears at my heated declaration.

Then I grabbed her hand and squeezed lightly, trying to show her that I didn’t care that she was a bit strange. “Ginny will come around. She’s just confused and doesn’t see you like I do.”

Luna gave me one of her strange, serene smiles. “I don’t think anyone sees like you do, Guinevere.”

My heart spiked into a frenzy. Who told her? Did I mess up? Did she hear me talking to Gin or Ron about a vision? Did-

“Don’t worry, I won’t tell anyone. Your secret’s safe with me... that’s what... what friends are for, right?” she said, her tone approaching the closest to nervous or unsure I’d ever heard.

I relaxed. Bloody Luna with her weird Seer-ish abilities.

“Yeah,” I replied, nodding and kicking at the water a little, “Of course. Ginny’s just being a prat right now, though, and Ron’s just a boy. They don’t... they’re not as mature as I am.”

“Because of your dizzy spells?”

“Was it Ginny?”

“Her and Ron,” she said, kicking her feet in the water distractedly, “They’re not very good at whispering, are they? They’ve gotten better, but Mummy told me not to say anything about it. It’s a shame they’ve got nargles in their ears.”

I smiled a little. “Yeah. Nargles aren’t very nice, are they?”

She shook her head solemnly. “Not at all.”

“Where are they from? The moon?”

She hummed, but didn’t answer me quite properly. “Hm. I wonder if I came from the moon, too.”

“Maybe. Your name is Luna, after all. Does this mean you’re a frog, too?”

“I’d like to be a moon frog. Oh, but the bees! There’s a terrible rivalry between them, the moon frogs and the craterwiggle bees. What if I’m a bee? The moon frogs will never be my friends, then...”
Her soft, wispy colors were warm, pastel shades of lavender and teal that sparkled with quiet silvers lining in between, and it hummed in high, sighing voices of happiness as Luna realized — while I spoke to her of a possible alliance between bees and frogs and moons — that I hadn’t let go of her hand, and if she’d let me, I never really would. I would look out for her in Hogwarts, definitely, even if we were in different houses and those sorts of friendships seemed to be looked down upon.

I’d get my damned twin to do so as well, when she finally got over it all.

“Guinevere?”

I had been in the middle of theorizing by moon frogs camouflaged themselves so cleverly, but Luna sounded so lucid that I pulled short. “Hm?”

“Thank you.” she said quietly.

I smiled. “You can call me Lys, you know.”

Luna went back to that clouded serenity. “I like your full name. It’s a queen’s name. Things like that are important.”

“You and my dad would get along, I think.”

She giggled. “That’s nice. Mr. Weasley has Faglewaggles, of the nice sort.”

Another to the me and mine category, I suppose, I thought fondly, sitting with my feet in the brook and my hand interlaced with Luna’s.

... 

Ron’s flowers were an explosion of warm colors: warm orange, burnt coral, crimson red, soft gold, pale off-white yellows, and just the palest, gentlest barely-pink what-used-to-be-bluebells. It wasn’t more extravagant than the others, but its colors made it seem that way. Ron was a certain Light-core, very inherently powerful, but his lack of training had his core being only the second largest of our siblings.

Anyways, my making of yet another Beltane wreath meant it was Ron’s time to go to Hogwarts. And when it was Ron’s turn to go to Hogwarts, that meant it was the start of the books. That meant, ladies and gentlemen, *Harry Potter.*

*Oh God, he looks tinier than Rowling described,* were my first thoughts of the Boy-Who-Lived.

I knew that as we walked in King’s Cross (Dad made the twins’ send off two years back, but this year was a bit busy so he wasn’t here again) that we’d cross paths with Harry Potter. While everyone else was busy, I was holding Ron’s crown underneath my jacket as per my special tradition, and looking around for a trunk and a white owl and a boy with green eyes.

Jesus, those eyes didn’t even look real. And his colors! He was blue and green and teal and silver and gold, the colors humming timidly but bright as any peacock’s feathers. I was just pleased at the green eyes, though; it was my eternal disappointment that DanRad didn’t put in color contacts for the movies in my before-life.
(I had finally put my foot down in terms of Mage Sight training. Alby simply taught me how to cast Dī-konden An-drixťā wandlessly for myself, enough that it was barely a tug on my magic now, but it set the world off-kilter when I could See and then suddenly not. So I was lowering the intensity of my Mage Sight, and even though the colors were barely pearlescent mist with intense concentration, I could still marvel at how bright Harry’s magical core was.)

Anyways.

I spotted him when everyone else was squabbling (Fred and George had set off a last minute semi-accidental prank on Percy, Ron, and Mum and we had to leave late after Mum screamed them into guilty piles of fear for their lives) and wondered why he wasn’t approaching Mum to ask her for help getting on the platform. That was canon, right? Did something else change?

Wait.

I realized, promptly, that I could see his eyes because he was looking back — and that’s probably why he wasn’t coming forward. I was intimidating the shit out of him with my Occlumency-crafted blank mask, and I should probably stop doing that.

I was about to bound over grinning, like I usually did with my family and close friends (aka Luna, since none of my siblings really took to their childhood playmates as well — Fred and George used to play with Cedric Diggory, but that’s honestly mostly it), but there was a flash in his colors that drew me short. He was all turquoises and deep blues and bright greens, shining lines of gold and soft bronzes running through, but there was something on the edge of his colors. Just barely there, a hint of black.

What I’d learned of Mage Sight, the seeing sense, was very little. There were few Soothsayers, and even fewer of the seeing sense. Alby was hearing, my maternal grandmother had been hearing-touch, and the other two that Alby remembered were smell and taste; seeing sense wasn’t all that common within the very small pockets of Soothsayers, mostly because it really did impede visions and was quite detrimental. ‘Detrimental’ was what these abilities tried not to be, after all, even if there was a cost to their power.

In any case, my own observations led me to believe that — generally, but not always — brighter colors announced a Light core and softer, gloomier shades meant Dark. It was generally because Grey magic was always leaning towards one or the other, which meant that people could be Grey-Light or Grey-Dark, and then their colors would be all over the place. But the thing was, there was no white or black. Not completely. Not unless there was something wrong.

Voldemort has black all over his colors.

The Horcrux in Harry Potter’s head was bleeding its filth into Harry’s lovely colors?

That sorta pisses me off, I thought irritatedly.

So I gently slipped away from the safety of my crimson-haired family, squabbling over the platform number (though Ron looked like he was going to be sick, he was so bloody nervous because the demon twins were ribbing him about Slytherin). He looked wary but hopeful as I wove through the crowd, approaching him. It was just a few graceful steps, and then I was standing in front of the Boy-Who-Lived who would become the Man-Who-Conquered.

He’s so tiny, for such a big destiny.

“Hello!” I chirped, putting on a smile to relax the poor kid, “Muggleborn?”
He nodded, swallowing and brushing his hair down (over his scar, definitely). “I... er, is it very obvious?”

I grinned. “Only wizards and witches come to King’s Cross with owls. Don’t worry, the Muggles are delusional. They won’t suspect a thing. That, and the overpowered Notice-Me-Nots, anyways. Are you alone? D’you need a guide to the Express?”

Little Potter smiled weakly at my attempts at lightening his mood, and nodded emphatically to my questions. “Yes, please, thanks. I’m... er, new to all these wizarding things.”

“There’s no shame in it, don’t worry. C’mon, we’ll get Mum to sort you out.” I tried to emulate Mum’s kindness in this, but pulled an eager Ginny eventually and grabbed his arm, guiding him to the spot where Mum was all but shoving Fred and George through the barrier.

“-ed, you next.” Mum was saying.

Fred looked offended. “I’m not Fred, I’m George! Honestly, woman, you call yourself our mother? Can’t you tell I’m George?”

Mum looked both parts exasperated and guilty. “Sorry, George, dear.”

Fred grinned and the demon twins were running as he yelled, “Only joking, I am Fred!”

They disappeared into the barrier, and I heard — and felt, ‘cos whoops I was still holding Harry Potter by the arm — Harry gasp. I tilted my head to him and pulled a grin I’d ripped off of the demon twins.

“Magic’s great, huh? Go on, Mum’ll help you out, yeah?”

Baby Potter. It brings a tear to my eye. But really, I watched with a small, hidden smile as Harry ran into the barrier after stumbling through a polite version of what he’d said in the books. Mum and Ginny and I went in last, our arms all linked, and by then Harry Potter had vanished.

I found him again, though, turning red as he faced the demon twins.

“Fred? George? Are you there?” Mum called.

“Coming, Mom.” they chorused, coming to meet us.

Mum and the twins were doing something with Ron’s nose — there was dirt or something — and I whispered with Ginny:

“You’ll never believe who I linked arms with today.”

“What? But you were with us the entire time!”

“Not the entire time, Gin.” I said, giggling and turning back to the family.

“-are you a prefect, Percy? You should have said something, we have no idea.”

Fred snickered, replying, “Hang on, I think I remember him saying something about it. Once-

“-or twice-

“-a minute-"
“-all summer-"

“Oh, shut up.” Percy muttered irritably, promptly turning to me; all traces of irritation melted away, and he smiled gently (I was still his favorite, after all these years... though honestly, any of us could’ve been, if they stopped giving him a hard time and talked to him about books... Percy was a secret Ravenclaw, see). “I’ll miss you, Lys.” he said, repeating the same thing he’d said every year as I sent him off to Hogwarts.

He managed to say it louder now, because the last time the twins made fun of him for it, I did some wandless magic to change their hair and skin garish colors and gave them a minor tripping hex. It had amused them more than annoyed them, luckily; and more fortunately, Percy had laughed at their attempts to walk away afterwards.

I hugged him tightly, grinning at his prefect badge. “You’re gonna be the best prefect ever, Percy. Just... go easy on the demon twins, okay? They’re on Alby’s hit list anyways, they’ll be in detention just as much as class.”

Percy chuckled, stepped back from my hug to receive one from Ginny (she liked to do what I did now, the dear girl) and turned to receive a kiss on the cheek from Mum before he walked away on the train.

Mum turned to the twins, her voice stern.

“Now, you two — this year, you behave yourselves. If I get one more owl telling me you’ve blown up a toilet or—”

“Blown up a toilet? We’ve never blown up a toilet.” Fred mused.

George beamed. “Great idea, though, thanks, Mom.”

Mum, for her part, seemed to just give up, her hands thrown in the air. “It’s not funny. And look after Ron.”

“Don’t worry, ickle Ronniekins is safe with us.”

Ron’s ears reddened. “Shut up.” he muttered.

George brightened, though. “Hey, Mom, guess what? Guess who we just met on the train?”

Fred chimed in, “You know that black-haired boy Lyssie brought with us? Know who he is?”

Mum was curious. “Who?”

“Harry Potter!” both twins said.

Cue Ginny.

“Oh, Mum, can I go on the train and see him, Mum, oh please...” she begged and squealed, pulling at Mum’s hand.

“You’ve already seen him, Ginny, and the poor boy isn’t something you goggle at in a zoo.” our mother said a tad impatiently before turning to Fred. “Is he really, Fred? How do you know?”

“Aimed him. Saw his scar. It’s really there — like lightning.”

“Poor dear — no wonder he was alone, I wondered. He was ever so polite when he asked how to
get onto the platform.”

Suddenly Ginny whirled on me, her eyes flashing with childish indignation. “You knew, Lys! Didn’t you? You knew who he was and didn’t tell me on purpose! Mum, I bet Lyssie knew!!”

I frowned, as I always did when Ginny fan-girled. I was, after all these years, done with her Harry Potter hero-worship, and very much looking forward to when she finally looked at him like an actual human being. “C’mon, Gin, don’t be like that. I didn’t See a thing, honest.”

But I did know...

“-think he remember what You-Know-Who looks like?”

I shuddered as Mum tore into George for that question. I don’t think Harry Potter remembered, but I certainly did. Red eyes, rolling in shadowed, sunken eye sockets — dark hair — neat and handsome but vile — black colors — pale hands, fingers holding the yew wand, a smile that sent shudders down the spines of his own followers, donning white masks. He pointed his wand — green light — a scream, and then laughter from the Death Eaters...

The whistle sounded, and I jolted.

The twins hopped on the train, but I grabbed Ron before he could follow.

“Lys, let go, I’ll miss it!” he hissed.

I glared at him. “Nope. You’re getting your flowers, Ron, like everyone else!”

He wasn’t really mad, his fiery colors actually preened in happiness, but he put on a scowl anyways. “Bill and Charlie never did!”

“I was too young then, prat-face. C’mon, even Fred and George attest to their luck-bringing qualities!”

The demon twins piped up and agreement, and Ron finally lowered his head to led me pull his crown out of my jacket and onto his crimson hair. His own fire-colored flowers looked nice with his red hair, and he blushed to the tips of his ears as I hugged him tightly and muttered, “Love you, Ron. You’re going to do great!”

Ron finally got on and Ginny began to cry, wanting desperately to go on with her brothers and her last male playmate. When I was with Luna, it was usually Ron with Ginny; I’m pretty sure he was closer to her than I was (it made Luna feel awful, but I told my heart-sister that I didn’t mind one bit and honestly, Ginny and I were very different anyways. I probably wouldn’t be able to handle her properly until Hogwarts, even thought I loved her very much).

“Don’t, Ginny, we’ll send you loads of owls.”

“We’ll send you a Hogwarts toilet seat.”

I frowned, mock indignant. “Do I get one??”

“You? Of course! We’ll get Alby to sign it!”

“George!”

“Only joking, Mom.”
“Don’t call your Headmaster that! Lys, George, either of you!”

I pouted. “Alby loves his nickname, Mum.”

The Hogwarts Express began to move, slowly, and children scrambled on. Ginny ran after the train, laughing and crying as the demon twins made faces at her, I stood with our mother and waved enthusiastically.

I didn’t want to run; there were things to do, and an itching in my head that foretold my Clairvoyance suggesting a vision, but not forcing. It had gotten a lot more… Obedient? Cooperative? Yes, cooperative; as long as I Occluded and meditated every once in a while, and right before I went to bed, I never lashed out with magic anymore. It was softer, a bit less gung-ho about getting me to See every little thing it wanted.

I let my Occlumency barriers droop a little, calmed my breathing, and released my magic, focusing my efforts on my youngest big brother, calling up my love and worry for him. Emotions, I’d learned, were fantastic to temper my magic, Seer-magic included. Intent was another, of course. Intent was a lot of things in regards to magic.

A compartment door slid open, and inside was Harry Potter — Ron was a bit ignorant of that for now — just trying to find a place to sit comfortably — “Anyone sitting here?” — shuffling in place a little, uncomfortable with confrontation without a brother or sister behind him — “Everywhere else is full.” The kid shook his head, and Ron sat. The twins came to check on him — introductions were made — “Harry Potter!” — Ron shook his head in wonder — surprised blue eyes — wondered about the boy across from him.

“Are you really Harry Potter?”

A nod from the boy-hero.

“Oh — well, I thought it might be one of Fred and George’s jokes... And have you really got — you know...?”

He saw the scar, and couldn’t help a silent gasp.

“So that’s where You-Know-Who...?”

More rude questions — then Ron seemed to remember his manners — looked out the window.

“Are your family all wizards?” — “Er — yes, I think so. I think Mom’s got a second cousin who’s an accountant, but we never talk about him... there’s a lot of family, we can’t really keep track of it all.” — Harry was staring at the top of Ron’s head — a blush — he was looking at the flowers — bright and shining like sunset — fire — warmth of home.

“My sister, Lys — well, her name’s really Guinevere but we call her Lys, for her middle name. Er... well, when my brother Percy went off to Hogwarts for the first time, she was really worried ‘cos he’s kinda quiet and bossy, so she made him a crown of flowers for luck. Fred and George are arses, so they gave him the mickey about it until they went off, and she made them some, too. It’s apparently given them good luck for their first year, so... I dunno, it’s tradition.”

Harry smiled — “Does she make them with magic?” — “Huh? The crowns? Er...” — “You don’t have to tell me.” was quickly said — Ron jolted, looking at Harry strangely — not the way a hero should behave, he realized.

“It’s nothing big. She does, but it’s a ritual. Not... Not very looked kindly on, you know?” — “Er...
I didn’t, actually.” — “Right, right. Yeah, Lyssie does all this fancy magic to make it lucky, then she changes the colors. Different for all of us.”

There was a strange smile on Harry’s face — “It must be nice to have a sister that likes you that much.” — Ron looked pleased — “Lys feels like a big sister sometimes, with how mature she is. But then she does weird stuff like flower crowns and, well... anyways, I heard you went to live with Muggles. What are they like?”

Stop.

Snapping myself from the vision of the present, I grinned.

Ron would be fine. He was a bit more even-tempered with my interference, and managed to read a bit more as long as I animatedly walked him through the boring parts, so I think he’d do just fine. He’d get through Hogwarts, better than before, even.

“Shall we play in the creek when we get home, Ginny?” I asked, grabbing her hand.

She looked surprised, then very, very excited. “Okay!”

It looks like I’d be spending the year bonding with my twin sister. I was alright with that.
Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

Holy hell, this is a long chapter. But never fear, this is where the childhood arc ends! We're gonna get into the OC's and Hogwarts shenanigans! Yay!

Thank you to all who commented/bookmarked/kudos-ed. Out of curiosity, would any of you commenters mind if I replied to you? I want to, but I don't see a lot of authors who do, so I'm just wondering. Still a fanfiction newb, me.

Oh, and there are bits and pieces that I quote directly from the books. Mostly dialogue, but yeah. I still don't own it, of course, but just a head’s up. You saw this last chapter, too.

... 

Nothing *remotely* interesting happened until summer came.

When summer started and we went to pick the boys up from Hogwarts, of course Ginny squealed: “Harry Potter! Look, Mom, I can see-“

“Be quiet, Ginny, and it’s rude to point.” our mother sighed, before smiling at the so-called Golden Trio. I had been Seeing some of their more famous adventures, of course, trying to calm down my inner fangirl and rationalizing it by saying I was looking after Ron.

(I was totally just watching the first book of Harry Potter unfold for fun)

“Busy year?” Mum asked Harry kindly.

“Very,” he replied, then brighter, “Thanks for the fudge and sweater, Mrs. Weasley.”

“Oh, it was nothing, dear.”

To my surprise, Harry turned to me and gave a small smile (Ginny was hiding behind Mum at this point, having vacated the spot next to me as soon as Harry smiled). “Ron told me it was your fudge recipe. Thanks.”

I glanced at Ron, who was greeting Mum. Then I beamed at Harry, delighted at the prospect of a polite pre-pubescent boy who wasn’t a little shit on Call of Duty and who wasn’t related to me.

“You’re welcome, Potter,” I said. “I’m Guinevere, by the way.”

He nodded politely. Then his smile widened a little, turning a bit sheepish as he scratched the back of his head. “Oh, and, er, before, at King’s Cross... Thanks for helping me get to the barrier and all that.”
I smiled again. “No problem, Potter. Looked like you were going to be eaten by the crowd before you even got to Hogwarts.”

He looked surprised by my casual, if friendly, treatment of him. “Er-“

I leaned forward, muttering, “And don’t mind Gin, she’s just a little obsessed. She’ll grow out of it once you start coming over a lot.”

“I’m... not to be rude or anything, but I’m surprised that you... er- that you-”

“Aren’t the same? No offense to you, Potter, but I never read your books. I was the one trying to hunt my own trolls in the woods and stuff. Or, well, Crumple-Horned Snorkacks lately. I’ll tell you all about it when you come over this summer.”

Poor Potter seemed a bit dazed. “I… have a book where I’ve hunted trolls?”

“It’s not like it’s not true now, is it?” I said, grinning.

He looked surprised, but he didn’t get to say anything as his uncle — the fucking tub of lard — called him over like a least-favorite animal. There were more goodbyes, and then the Weasley clan all reunited and went back to the Burrow, Ginny talking ears off about Harry Potter and Percy snapping at the twins as they ribbed him. I leaned my head against Ron’s shoulder and gave him a sly grin.

“You’re so lucky I’m sworn to secrecy about my visions.” I said.

Ron paled, understanding at once that I’d seen all the crazy shit he’d gotten up to.

Honestly, eleven-year-olds fighting trolls and Cerberuses, playing in giant chess matches that result in painful injuries, almost being poisoned, and then facing off against the Dark Lord? The more I thought about it and Saw it this past year, the more I questioned Alby’s sanity. I’d have to quiz him on why he thought it would be a good idea to test my brother this year. Probably explain to him not to do it purposefully again, because it looked awfully purposeful.

“You’re not gonna tell Mum and Dad, are you?” my littlest big brother whispered.

“No, of course not!” I laughed, patting his knee familiarly. “No, that, dear brother, I’m leaving to you.”

My brother went even paler. “…Do I have to?”

“They’re going to find out somehow, you know. Alby’s sure to come over and give out hints like lemon drops.” I chuckled.

The rest of the way home, we brainstormed how to avoid Mum’s wrath when we told her about Ron’s crazy dangerous shit.

…

Percy escorted me to Diagon Alley this time. He wasn’t of-age, of course, but the only ones at home that were, well… Dad was busy at work (he always was) and Mum was taking care of the house and the others. I hadn’t managed to break away from my escort yet because a wandless
Disillusionment was *hard as shit*, and they were very attentive, so Notice-Me-Not’s weren’t going to cut it. Most sheltered Weasely and all that, I suppose.

Anyways, it was Percy because he wanted to read as well, and I think later he was going to meet Oliver Wood — *that* was a friendship that wasn’t canon, definitely, and it surprised me and still surprises me to this day — and Nicholas Rowle, a pureblood Ravenclaw at Fortescue’s later. I liked going to Diagon, if only because researching stuff beyond the Hogwarts curriculum (I had completed it, and was in 5th year of my second go-through just in case) was made easier if I had access to books.

“Are you going to take me back home when you go see Oliver and Nicholas?” I asked, sitting on the floor of Flourish and Blotts with a book on the intermingling of Nordic, Old Celtic and Gaelic, and Egyptian Runes.

Percy looked up from his own research on the Ministry, which he’d set his heart on already.

“Will you be done by then?” he asked.

“Mm, I sort of wanted to see if I couldn’t find more books on core allegiances.”

“The Light, Dark, and Grey allegiances?” he asked in surprise, “I only learned about those last year. Hm… If we had any spending money, it would’ve been nice to study that…” There was a wistful edge to his voice.

Our near-poverty was hitting hard recently, actually. So many of us going to Hogwarts, Mum and Dad barely knew what to do. I was sure that’s why Dad was working so much, and why Mum was always speaking to Alby when she could. They were trying to see if either Ginny or I couldn’t get in with a scholarship somehow; probably me, since I was Alby’s somewhat-apprentice at this point. We just didn’t have enough funds for all eight of us, I suppose.

(The guilt ate at me sometimes, but I centered myself with Occlumency quick enough. That, and my mantra as of late: *What’s best for me and mine, and what’s fair to everyone else.*)

But I nodded to Percy’s question. “My, er-” I whispered here. “-*Mage Sight*, I feel like I could tell what core allegiance someone has, but I just don’t know how. I wanted to learn more about it, since Alby’s more focused on practical wandless magic right now.”

“You mastered *Accio*, didn’t you?”

“Mm-hm.”

Percy smiled. “You’ll have to teach me that one. I haven’t practiced in a long time.”

I nodded. “I guess Hogwarts has kept you busy.”

He shrugged a little. Then he checked his watch. “Well, I probably won’t be *too* long. If you need more time to read, I’ll always encourage that. Education is very important, of course, and you set a good example for Ginny with how much you study. I’ll come back for you at five o’clock, alright Lys? And…” He sighed here. “We’ll tell Mum that I took you with us, I’ll tell Oliver and Nicholas…” Then my brother smiled deviously. “As long as you tell me all about core allegiances later, alright?”

*This is too perfect.*

I nodded eagerly. “Promise!”
He smiled crookedly, ruffling my hair. It had just been cut recently by Fred, and he always managed to make it look so much more interesting than I could. “I’m off. Be good, use your wandless to signal if you need me.”

“Okay. Have fun, Percy! Don’t let Oliver infect you with Quidditch-stupid.”

He laughed. (Was it horrible that I was smug about being the only one of the family that could get him to laugh on a regular basis?) “I’ll try. Five o’clock, Lyssie.”

Then my brother disappeared. When I twitched my fingers and took the Soothsayer Soothing spell off, I was blasted with nausea just before I focused my mind on thinning my abilities. The screaming song of magic lightened into a strange whispering hum of all kinds of tunes, and the bright, swirling heaps of color faded into something just barely there, ghostly imprints of what it should look like. And much lessened, too, so instead of large clouds of color marking magic and presence everywhere you looked, it was just faint outlines over bodies and very magical objects.

Alby told me, actually, that if I weren’t so excellent an Occlumens, I wouldn’t be able to control my Mage Sight like this.

There was no sign of Percy’s sky blue and indigo magic, so I relaxed completely. A few minutes of cautious waiting, then I cast a powerful Notice-Me-Not and slipped out the door.

It was early summer, but still hot. Which made it really uncomfortable, but I managed to walk in shadows and on the edges of the crowd. The place was crowded and loud, and wisps of magic kept invading my vision, but eventually I was at the edge of Diagon and looking into Knockturn.

Historically, Knockturn was built first. Diagon was a newer addition, the nicer one, and thought it was cramped according to my American standards, it was enormous compared to the clutter and narrowness of Knockturn. The place was a cesspool of nonhuman magicals and illegal activities. It was expanded and built up and carved up by all sorts of different, nonprofessional architects; it was a labyrinth, and it was dangerous. The seat of the legal and illegal Dark, hidden away like this; I found it sad, to be honest, because there was nothing inherently wrong with Dark allegiances.

“Seems like the part of the movie where you tell the character to turn back and stop being suicidal.” I muttered to myself.

Cranking my Mage Sight up, I could see all sorts of very wrong colors in there. Well… maybe not wrong, just not human. They moved differently; less like mist and more like oil, or like dye in water. They were much darker, tinged with blacks and sepia tones. Their music was much more sinister, more whispery and guttural and, well, just… Not what I was used to. A little frightening, almost. But very cool, thinking objectively.

Violet-colored eyes, glowing in the shadows. I stiffened at the sight of them. There was a figure standing in the shadows, just standing there and waiting and looking at me hungrily. I gazed at his colors, trying to figure out what he was. The magic around him was… odd. The hum was almost whispers, the way the colors moved was sluggish and strange… They kept shifting in and out of shades of black, the spider-silk strings frayed and loose, like it was…

Dead.

A vampire, no doubt.

Dammit. This meant more research. I was going to die if I tried to go in there. I thought I might’ve gotten off lucky, not needing my wandless to sneak away, but it looks like I’ll need it to actually
not die when I’m gallivanting in Knockturn Alley. Which meant more practice, more time, and a lot more research on what was in there, what I wanted, and how to get past and to those things without any blood.

I nodded to myself. “Good plan. Better.”

So I turned on my heel and returned to Flourish and Blotts, intent on reading about vampires and core allegiances. I’d bet anything that I’d find a copy of Helvynya Prevett’s *Sollertia Augurium* and more things on the Twin Dark Lords in Knockturn Alley. And for some reason, that particular vampire with violet eyes was important. A guide, perhaps?

Well. I could deal with that.

…

We’ve had the Ford Anglia for a while, actually. I think it was much more, er, *upgraded* than in the books/movies, because Dad and I worked on it together and we both had an understanding of Muggle electricity and mechanics because of my Clairvoyance. It ran much better, using whoever was driving it as the power source — granted they contained magic equivocal to a witch or wizard — and the invisibility button was less wonky. It used to be a seafoam color before, but Dad and I thought it’d be *hilarious* if we spray painted it black with flame designs. Fred and George helped with that, years ago.

We would’ve added skulls and shit too, if Mum hadn’t put her foot down. Transfiguring the old seat covers into an annoying shade of red was fun, too, though we hadn’t quite managed to make them leather permanently. Dad and I laugh about it all the time, and the demon twins love that we made it look so utterly tacky. We kept adding bits and pieces to it over the years, including a wireless along with the Muggle radio; so we could switch between the wizarding world’s news and Muggle Rock n’ Roll as we pleased. The car wouldn’t have been complete without some sort of punk music.

In any case, when I woke up one morning, my Clairvoyance buzzing behind my Occlumency barriers, and saw the *fantastic* Ford Anglia was gone…

I grinned.

“What’re you smiling about so early?” Ginny mumbled; she was a light sleeper, probably my fault, and was squinting up at me with bleary eyes.

“Remember how I told you that most sentient things have colors?”

“Mm-hm…”

“The Ford Anglia is a *fantastic* punk-purple and red.”

“Mm-hm…”

I rolled my eyes. “Go to sleep, Gin-gin, I’m off to make breakfast.”

She smiled sleepily. “Yaaaaaay…”
Might be best to try to soften Mum up, anyways. She was going to be furious about the car and the kidnapping that I had no doubt was occurring today, so it’d be nice to keep her a bit happy about something. Who knows, she might go easy on them when they came back!

“Funny joke, Lyssie,” I muttered to myself.

I was about to go down, but I stopped on the landing. Frowning thoughtfully, I switched directions and started upstairs. Quietly, I padded up the stairs — Mum and Dad were still asleep — and peeked into Fred and George’s empty room (a dangerous undertaking on any normal day). Yep, no note and they didn’t even try to cover their tracks. Sad, really.

They probably deserved the tongue-lashing Mum would give them, but I decided to be merciful and stuff their pillows under their blankets in vaguely human-shaped lumps. I went up to Ron’s attic and did the same to him, poking my head up into the ghoul’s room to say a quick hello to him — his dull, muted blue colors brightened a little when I did, and I’m sure it would be easier for us in Ron’s seventh year if the ghoul recognized one of us.

With that, I decided to start breakfast. My family usually appreciated the times, few and far between as they were, when I would actually cook. It’d make Mum just the slightest bit mollified, like I said. I could use a favor from the demon twins and Ron.

Mum woke up and like I’d thought, the pillow decoys were only a temporary fix because she finally got impatient and stormed into the twins room only to shriek in anger and horror as she found my poor twin pillow lumps. She stormed up to Ron’s room to find the same, and woke Percy checking his room (he probably went back to sleep, Percy was surprisingly not a morning person).

I wasn’t surprised, though, as the car landed in the yard and was parked; Mum undoubtedly heard the same, and I cringed as she stormed past the kitchen — not seeing me in the middle of breakfast-cooking — and started screaming at the twins and Ron for everything. Peeking out the window, I had to hold back a burst of laughter at the gangly brothers all shrinking at the sight of Mum on the warpath, and then their spluttered indignation as she turned to Harry with all smiles and rainbows. They walked towards the house, and I hummed with the radio — Celestina Warbeck couldn’t hold a candle to the music of my old-life, but that was okay — as they came in.

“-on’t know what they were thinking- Oh! Lys, I didn’t even see you, dear!”

I grinned. “I noticed, Mum. I thought I’d try to put you in a better mood by starting breakfast. Go easy on them, please? I Saw they’d be fine, and that Potter needed it and all.” I explained, wiping my hands on the oversized apron.

She looked cross, grumbling still. But she smiled at me a little. “I’ll take over, Lyssie. You’ve been up early.”

“It’s mostly done anyways, Mum.”

I hung up my apron and received a hair-ruffling from Fred and a wink from George. Ron just looked happy at the smell of food, and Harry smiled nervously at it all.

I skipped down to Ginny and my room, rousing my sister with a secretive smile and a, “There’s a surprise for you in the kitchen, Gin.”

When I came back, Mum was lecturing. (Not surprising.)
“It was cloudy, Mum!” Fred near-whined.

“You keep your mouth closed while you’re eating!”

“They were starving him, Mum!” George said in a similar tone.

“And you!”

Then Ginny entered, spotted Harry, squealed, and ran out. I laughed, ignoring the disapproving look Mum sent me and the smirks from the twins.

Arguing commenced on whether they would be allowed to go to bed.

“It’s your own fault you’ve been up all night. You’re going to de-gnome the garden for me; they’re getting completely out of hand again—“

“Oh, Mum—"

But she glanced at me and I grinned a little. Our mother sighed. “And after that, you can go to bed — but if I catch you sneaking off an-and . . . and prancing on your brooms to Surrey again, you won’t have Lys to make pillow-dummies in your beds and save your hides again!”

Fred and George laughed and swung their arms around my neck, one on either side of me, and we marched out the door in good fun; I asked them about their nightly adventure and they regaled me with epic tales of dueling troll-sized Muggles with bushy mustaches and saving 12-year-old Potter-esque damsels in distress from barred towers. I watched them fling the gnomes around, cheering as Harry nearly beat Charlie’s record. But my Sight alerted me to Dad coming back from another all-nighter at the Ministry, and I rushed back in to make him a cup of tea before he was cornered by Mum on the issue of the Ford Anglia.

After I greeted Dad with a hug, I went to find Ginny and tease her about Harry.

All in all, a good day.

…

Bloody buggering Lockhart. Liar, cheat, scoundrel— I should kick him, how dare he seduce my mother like this. I thought viciously, reading the booklist. I was so not looking forward to this stupid shit at Hogwarts, especially since I was caught up on most of the curriculum.

“That lot won’t come cheap,” George was saying, “Lockhart’s books are really expensive…”

“Well, we’ll manage.” I heard the note of tension in Mum’s voice. “I expect we’ll be able to pick up a lot of Lys and Ginny’s things secondhand.”

Harry was kind enough to try to speak to Ginny with a friendly, “Oh, are you starting at Hogwarts this year?”

I growled at the list marring my lovely, dream-come-true Hogwarts letter. Fucking Lockhart and his poncy smile. “Don’t get me the books, Mum.” I said, glaring at the list — I’ve wanted a Hogwarts letter for nineteen years and now I’ve got to remember Lockhart! — “I’ll just look off someone else’s, and I can use most of Percy’s old things for the rest. All I really need are robes and
my wand. I’ll dig up everything else from the boys.”

Mum looked at me with a mixture of pride and sadness.

“Of course, not, Lys — what we can buy for Ginny, we can buy for you—“

I waved my hand. “I’ve annotated most of the textbooks already, I’ll use those.” Then I looked at the list again. “Why would we all want a full set of his books? None of us will ever have Defense at the same time, so we should just buy one set and we’ll all share. That’d be much easier. So, really, all I do need is my robes and wand.”

Mum looked conflicted. “Are you sure? You do so like writing in books, Lyssie…”

“I won’t write in these. Mum, you have some of these. I’ve read them. I’m not going to write in them.”

Annotating books is for further understanding and breakdown of content. There is absolutely no content in these books, so there’s no need to annotate. Simple as that, really, but I wouldn’t be telling Mum that. She’d be heartbroken.

While this was going on, Percy arrived and discovered Errol as he accidentally sat on him, and Ron and Harry were reading a letter from Hermione. There was something about meeting up, and that’s when Mum tuned in again.

“Well, that fits in nicely, we can do and get all your things then, too.” she said happily, and I moved to help her clear the table, “What’re you all up to today?”

Plans were set, and the boys sans Percy went off to play Quidditch; Ginny was too embarrassed to join and I was actual shit at flying (weak body didn’t help), so while my twin went off to do… I dunno, probably write in her diary — which was quickly becoming filled up — I followed Percy into his room and bounced on his bed as he closed the door.

“Did she reply?” I asked innocently.

The lovely thing about being a Seer and your entire family knowing about it was, well, they just stopped hiding things from me. Percy would have, as he did with everyone else, ignored me and locked me out of his room so he could write his dear Penelope; but because I Saw their meeting and everything already, he just didn’t. He trusted me already, of course, and we were each other’s favorite sibling, so that helped. Simply put, he swore me to secrecy, and in return for his trust in me, I would give him advice and try to peek in on their future to see if I could help them out, any. I helped him a lot, by the way.

“Oh, she’ll blush real hard if you compliment her like that. But don’t spout off about yourself so much, Perce, it’s not gentleman-like. Ladies like a gentleman.” I finished, chuckling at the strange picture we made: I wasn’t even in Hogwarts, but Percy was coming to me for girl problems anyways.

All Hail the Seer.

He scribbled it down, a smile on his face; the idiot would actually write drafts of his letters to Penelope. His in-a-hurry writing was only a tad less neat than his fancy writing (I was quite jealous, Percy’s handwriting was practically art), but he insisted only the best for her. It was so fucking cute.
Something occurred to me all of a sudden.

“Percy, if I get a boyfriend, are you gonna be the ‘Alright, whatever makes you happy’ type, or the ‘Don’t touch my bloody sister!’ type? Ron’s definitely the latter, the twins will prank him anyways, and Ginny’s the first one.”

(I mean, it’s not like I would — meaningful romantic relationships kind of had an allergic reaction to me, several times, and both of us were traumatized as a result — but still.)

My third eldest brother spluttered, his ink going all over the place.

He turned to me, glaring. “You’re only ten, Lyssie.”

I sniffed. “I’ll be eleven soon!”

Percy’s eyes narrowed. “You’re not to look for a boyfriend until you are, at least, sixteen. I’d rather you be of age- In fact, I’d rather you be twenty, but I won’t be able to do anything when you’re of age, and-“

“Wait, wait, wait. You’re the overprotective type? That’s brilliant!” I laughed, even as Percy looked disgusted at the idea of someone trying to date his sisters. “I really want to see you yell at some poor teenage boy.” Wait. I’d probably fuck up canon relationships somehow. Shit. “Alright, but not for me — boys are icky, anyways — but maybe for Ginny-“

“Out of the bloody question!”

I sat up, wide-eyed. “You swore, Percy.”

He stiffened. “Don’t you dare-“

I was sprinting down the stairs in record time, bursting out the backdoor and up the hill to the makeshift pitch, screaming, “FRED! GEORGE! YOU’LL NEVER BELIEVE WHAT PERCY JUST DID!!!”

...
apologetically at Ginny and Mum, who was beginning to get antsy.

“Mum, you go ahead, all right? I know where Flourish and Blotts is.” I said. She looked like she wanted to argue, but I shook my head and laughed. “It’s fine! This way, my wand’ll be a surprise, yeah?”

Mum gave in, worried about the others and trusting in my Seer-induced (according to her) maturity.

As she and Ginny left, I muttered to Ginny, “Please, for the love of Merlin, don’t let her get me those bloody books. The man’s a creepy menace.”

Ginny giggled and nodded and ran after Mum, and I was left in the dusty dark with a man who was, no doubt, another type of Seer.

I said as much, and Ollivander chuckled.

“I am an Assessor, Miss Weasley,” he explained. Then he looked closely at me, squinting behind his rounded glasses. “Yes, you have also been given a gift of Sight… ah, two if I’m Assessing correctly. Quite rare, that.”

I nodded. “Clairvoyance and Mage Sight.”

He smiled. “I’m afraid I don’t See like you natural-born Soothsayers do, but I do understand things when they’re in front of me, as an Assessor. You have a very fierce protective streak in you, don’t you, Miss Weasley? And much pride, in yourself and those you choose as yours.”

I whistled. “Useful ability. Makes it easier for you to match wands and wizards, I suppose. You’re a learned Soothsayer, then?”

“Indeed, Miss Weasley,” chuckled the aged wandmaker, “Indeed.”

He measured my right arm. “Hm, Clairvoyance and Mage Sight… Like your grandfather, Septimus Weasley — silver lime, dragon heartstring, 13 inches — and your grandmother, Genevieve Prewett — pear, unicorn hair, 10 and 1/2 inches — respectively. Are you very powerful, Miss Weasley?”

I straightened, proud of my power; though it was a secret to everyone but my family — which included my somewhat grandfather-mentor and my heart-sister — and the Assessor before me. “I’ve been Seeing since I was born.” Then I rubbed the back of my neck sheepishly. “It was dangerous when I was younger, less in control. Almost offed Ginny a few times with how I keep Seeing the wars and such.”

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“Yet you possess much control now, Miss Weasley. Much control over even more power.” he said, as cryptic as most old men (including Alby). “Tell me, Miss Weasley, do you fear your Sight?”

“It’s a skill like any other.” I said, “I’m only afraid of misusing it. Everything else... I leave it to fate. I like surprises, generally.”

Ollivander smiled at my reply. “I think you will surprise us all, Guinevere Weasley.”

The seventeenth wand was a match.

“Elder wood and dragon heartstring, 12 and 3/4 inches. It is one of the oldest wands I have, Miss Weasley — the dragon I wrested the heartstring from was the most vicious Hebridean Black I’d ever laid eyes on.” Ollivander said, as he handed the wand to me.
I already saw it was my match yesterday, along with the instinctive knowing I had when I laid eyes on the simple, elegant shaft of dark wood, but I was still elated as sighing heat rushed into my fingers and the magic we cast threw indigo and silver sparks around the shop. Ollivander seemed pleased, and very knowing.

As I handed him the Galleons for my wand, I paused.

“You must be a very powerful Seer,” I said, “if you can hear and see all the colors in these wands. I thought it was dark when I first came in, but I think it’s probably a rainbow to you.”

Ollivander gave me a knowing smile. “Always nice to meet another of Mage Sight. That is, of course, why I see the magic in these wands so clearly; I developed the ability purely for the sake of my craft. A pleasure, Miss Weasley.”

I walked out from Ollivander’s with a wand in my hand and streaks of silver in my core glistening.

As I walked into a very crowded Flourish and Blotts (so it was more like me ducking and weaving than walking), I heard a very familiar drawl:

“Not as surprised as I am to see you in a shop, Weasley... I suppose your parents will go hungry for a month to pay for all those.”

Draco Malfoy.

I’d all but forgotten about the fucking ferret; one tends to forget minor annoyances when surrounded by people worth hundreds of their like, I suppose. (Look at that, I was starting to even think more insultingly with the little shit around!) I sighed, smoothly stepping in beside Ginny and announcing with salesman-worthy cheerfulness, thusly interrupting Ron in the middle of his beginning to thrash the little shit:

“Oh, come off it, Ron. If you so much as flick him, I bet he’d go flying into Fortescue’s.” Ron turned to look at me with a little amused smirk at the imagery, and Draco Malfoy’s lip curled into a sneer. “Little lords with too much money aren’t built like you and me; a bad Tickle Hex would rip the silver spoon out of his arse — simultaneously disgusting and painful to look at, like the rest of him.”

I was smiling, but there was a frigidity in my voice that I hoped he heard.

Do not touch me and mine, little boy, I snarled in my head.

(I rather thought me and Dad’s protective instincts were off the charts at this point.)

Harry snorted, and even pink-cheeked Hermione — who I was introduced to in the passing — seemed to be holding back laughter. Ron and Ginny did no such thing, snickering away as the little lordling tried to formulate a response to top mine. He never got the chance, as Dad took the moment to call out to us.

“Ron!” he said, dragging Fred and George along with him, “What are you going? It’s too crowded in here, let’s go outside- you’ve got Lys and Ginny with you? Come on, then.”

“Well, well, well — Arthur Weasley.”

Oh, I hope he heard what I said to his son. I thought as Lucius Malfoy came out to play.

“Lucius,” my father greeted stiffly.
“Busy time at the Ministry, I hear. All those raids... I hope they’re paying you overtime?”

I wanted to snarl as his hand came dangerously close to my sister; if it fucking happened again, I’d cut the fucking thing off with an ‘accidentally overpowered’ *Diffindo.* This Death Eating bastard.

My hate for the man only spiked when I remembered all my visions of his war crimes, all the things he’d *done* to people... He had been one of the *motherfuckers* that desecrated my Uncle Gideon and Fabian’s bodies, two men I’d never met but admired... But it was important he do this, it was important that this happened, and that was the only thing that was stopping me from attacking him...

“Obviously not.” he muttered after sweeping cold grey eyes over us. “Dear me, what’s the use of being a disgrace to the name of wizard if they don’t even pay you well for it?”

“We have a very different idea of what disgraces the name of wizard, Malfoy.”

“Clearly.” I swear that I will one day I will punch him in the nose and laugh as it breaks. “The company you keep, Weasley... and I thought your family would sink no lower-“

I stiffened as my Sight activated without warning.

*Dad clenched his fists — angry and ready to leap and attack and fight and yell — cool wall of calm slammed down — shut away his anger in his eyes, like walls sliding down gently and locking all the impulsiveness away. Occlumency — calmed him down some — he longed to lunge at Malfoy, his fingers were twitching — lunge? attack? — a fight in the bookshop, knocking shelves over, the crowd gather in excitement — no — he clenched his fists, looking away — hand held by a smaller one, skin tan and palm tiny — pain in my foot just passing and unimportant and I grinned at Dad just a bit later — yes? — Gilderoy Lockhart called by the attention, the ruckus of two pureblood Paterfamiliases fist-fighting on the floor...*

( *Stop.* )

Shrugging, I grabbed Dad’s hand.

He looked surprised when I did, and I raised a brow at him. Despite my disappointment that Malfoy Sr. would not get the black eye he would have received, my father would also not get a cut lip and I wouldn’t have to tangle with my wandless magic (newly bonded to my wand, therefore a bit overexcited) to avenge him. I would’ve tripped the blonde little nancy as he left, I think. Sounded fun.

Instead, Dad just replied coldly, “It is not my family that is Dark as mud. Enjoy drowning in the filth you’ve marred the name of wizard in, Lucius.” *Good one, Dad- way to use Occlumency to keep a clear head!*

Lucius Malfoy sneered, nearly tossing Ginny’s book back to her. “Here, girl — take your book — it’s the best your pathetic father can give you.”

It almost hit Ginny in the face, and I lost it. He was a *threat,* I’d Seen all the deaths and torment he caused in the first war, I’d *Seen* some of the faces he’d slashed into pieces, some of the minds he’d broken, the Muggles he’d tortured into insanity. I’d Seen the absolute *glee* on his face when he did things like that, on all the Death Eaters’ faces. I’d Seen the bloody war, I’d lived through short flashes of it. This man was a *monster,* and he was *too close* to me and mine. He insulted my absolute favorite person in the world — my call of protection and home, steel and hearth-fire — and he almost hit Ginny — *my sister* — in the face.
“You might want to watch where you’re throwing things, sir.” I snarled, unable to hold my tongue back with how irritated and on alert I was, “Didn’t your mother ever teach you to be polite to girls?” My eyes widened in mock-surprise. “Ah, wait! Apologies, Lord Malfoy, you wouldn’t know, would you?”

I referred, of course, to the worst scandal in history, when Priscilla Malfoy née Fawley fled her marriage to Abraxas Malfoy and abandoned her then-young son, Lucius. It’s technically unknown where she went, but there used to be rumors that she’d eloped with a Muggle to America because she was afraid of the war. I hadn’t Seen anything of it, but rumors were a danger in pureblood society; more dangerous than truth, sometimes. It would hurt him, and I relished in the twitch in his face as he was reminded of such a weakness.


Malfoy Sr. stiffened and walked away with his son in silent rage. I grinned, until we walked out of Flourish and Blotts, and Dad singled me out and let us lag behind the main group. I should’ve seen it (oh, a pun…) coming, really.

“You used your Sight didn’t you?” he asked, voice strained.

I nodded, hissing, “That Death Eater wasn’t going to insult us and you, and then almost hurt Ginny-“

“Doesn’t matter, Lys. You know it’s dangerous, you know who Lucius Malfoy is. You know better than all of us, almost. You can’t throw around your ability anymore, Lys, not like at home with us.” Dad said quietly, his voice full of disappointment.

It stung a little, but I understood and nodded guiltily. “Sorry, Dad. It was juvenile insult too…” Then I grinned. “If I were going to throw around my Sight, I should’ve at least made it something that’d make the blonde ponce cry.”

Dad huffed out a chuckle at my olive branch and sighed. “Be careful, Lyssie.”

“I won’t do it again, not without a very good reason — or a wicked insult.”

He ruffled my hair. “If your mother heard, she’d scream herself hoarse at you.”

I glanced at Dad hopefully. “But you won’t tell her, right?”

(Let it never be said that Guinevere Weasley did not have a healthy fear of her mother.)

“Not this time, little queen.”

…

I knew for a fact Dad wouldn’t care, so I stuck around after breakfast, playing with my toast as the rest of my siblings plus Harry trailed out. Mum was humming and I eventually got up to help her clean up, a mix of magic and the Muggle way of doing things. At some point during our washing of the more delicate plates by hand, she looked at me curiously.

“Are you alright, luv?” she asked kindly.
I loved my mother, I did. I felt closer to Dad, though; he just seemed to… well, understand. But I did love Mum, she was well-meaning and pampering and fussy and concerned and cheerful and… Well, I couldn’t ask for a better mother, even if she was embarrassing sometimes and treated me like an infant made of glass.

So it was with hesitantly that I stuttered through my question:

“Well, er… will you mind very much if… if I don’t get Sorted into Gryffindor?”

There was quiet, and then Mum was hurriedly, nearly frantically, telling me that she’d love me no matter what and not to worry because if the old Sorting hat put Neville Longbottom in Gryffindor, I’d get in, too-

She stopped. She studied me. Then she broke out in a warm smile. “You know, dear, that’s a peculiar way of putting it.”

“Putting what?”

“Percy asked me a similar question, you know.” she said, looking at her work and smiling to herself a little. “A bit differently worded. He said, ‘You won’t be disappointed if I don’t get into Gryffindor, will you?’ Not get Sorted but get in.”

I frowned, drying a plate she handed me.

Mum’s eyes were sparkling when she looked at me. “I think, Lys, that you yourself don’t mind at all that you’re not going into our traditional House.”

I slumped a little. “I knew it. You’re a bit disappointed, aren’t you?”

Mum looked at me gently. “I won’t lie, Lys, dear. I would be — but most of all, I’d be happy that you went to a House that was truly yours. I loved Gryffindor, and it’s how I met your father and became the happiest woman in the world… I want you to find something like I did, a place where you’re so happy you hardly know what to do with yourself.”

There was something warm and fuzzy in my chest. I felt faintly embarrassed for some reason.

She chuckled to herself. “Do you remember that talk you had with your father two years back?”

What’s best for me and mine, what’s fair for everyone else.

I nodded.

Mum smiled. “I didn’t want to interfere, since your father seemed to have had a good hold on the way you think — you, Percy, and Bill have always been like that — but I was there, luv. Don’t you remember what he said? You’re not to sacrifice yourself. Not even for us, Lyssie. Don’t you think that surrounding yourself in a House that isn’t truly yours is a sacrifice?”

“But sacrifices are necessary…”

“My Lys, you have yet to understand how to sacrifice for yourself. I’m so glad you’re so close to your siblings, but Lyssie… Who will it hurt the most if you go into Gryffindor and aren’t happy there?”

All of you, I thought quietly, smiling to myself, because all of you think about my problems much too much.
“It won’t be bad, if I get in. It just... won’t be good either, I s’pose.”

“Lys, dear, just because we’ve all been in Gryffindor… it doesn’t mean anything. Your brothers will still look after you and I suppose you’ll still look after them, too. Nothing will change but your class schedule, really, and I suppose whether or not your favorite colors will still be my red that you’re always saying.”

I smiled a bit, but faltered... “You’ll still be disappointed, won’t you?”

She kissed my temple quickly, shaking her head. “I’ll be proud. My Lyssie, we always knew you were very different from your brothers and sister. Did you know we didn’t know we were having twins again? Ginny was born and your father came in to look at her, we were both so awed, and imagine my surprise when I gasped in pain 20 minutes later! The Healers were baffled — apparently you’d been hiding from their scans behind your sister, and you very nearly died because you didn’t seem to want to be born that day.”

“And I wasn’t, right? I was born at 12:07 on the 12th, not the 11th.”

Mum laughed gently. “That’s right, luv. Twenty-seven minutes after Ginny. The Healers bodily threw your father out, you know.” Her eyes twinkled at the memory. “Ginny’s birth was easy, but yours, Lys? Oh, you gave me and the Healers quite a bit of trouble. And even after, you were the first of all your siblings to be so aware that young — then your accidental magic when you couldn’t even sit up — and of course, when we found out about your nightmares, dear.”

I nodded, sighing again. “I’m sorry for the trouble, Mum.”

She laughed again. “Oh, Lys, you’re worth every little incident, I promise you that. We all promise you that. We love you too much, don’t you know? And we won’t be surprised, Lys, when you’re Sorted into Slytherin.”

I widened my eyes at her.

Mum smirked, and I saw a little bit of the demon twins in her there. So she’s where they got it from. “Come now, Lyssie, you’ve always been a Slytherin. Don’t think I don’t see your clever pranks and your thirst to strengthen your abilities. You did manage to hide your abilities from us for years, after all, and you’ve always had your brothers and sister twisted around your fingers. I know you’ve even tricked me at times!”

That just got me to grin. Mum dried her hands magically, and her fingers grazed my face affectionately as she studied me with love in her brown eyes.

“Slytherin or Ravenclaw you may be Sorted, luv, but you’ve a heart of gold — being Weasley, you’re already an honorary Gryffindor, and as loyal to us as you are, you’ve the core of a ‘Puff.”

I sighed, beaming at all the praise (which came not un-often, but sandwiched in between warnings of discovery and such), and I hugged my mother. I gave her a kiss on the cheek, whispered a reverent thanks, and then decided to go to the Lovegoods to see if Luna wanted to play. I skipped out the kitchen door-

Into Harry Potter.

Or over him. I tripped over his stretched-out legs, yelping as I hastily broke my fall with my hands.

“Oh, Merlin, sorry! I’m so sorry, Guinevere-“
I laughed a little, waving him off. “It’s fine, it’s fine-“

“No, really, your hand is bleeding, I think it got caught on a stone or something-“

My palm was indeed bleeding, but I thought it would be kinda stupid if I left my parents after such a serious conversation, only to come back and sheepishly ask Mum to heal a little cut. Shrugging, I wiped dirt and rocks out of my skin and beamed at Harry forgivingly.

“It’s really fine, Potter. If you feel that bad, come with me to the brook — I’ll wash it there.”

Since I’m absolute pants at Healing, with how Dark my core is.

He nodded, looking more than a little guilty, and we walked side-by-side to the woods and towards my and Luna’s favorite spot in the tiny stream. He was quiet and a little awkward, and I sighed to myself; he had too good of a heart, this kid, for what his destiny was.

“I heard you talking. With Mrs. Weasley. I didn’t mean to, obviously, but I am sorry about that. I waited outside before the end ‘cos it was a family thing, but I didn’t want you to not know.”

Knowing me, I’d’ve dreamt of it sooner or later.

Heat crepped up to my cheeks — that was the problem with having such pale skin, now, wasn’t it? When you blushed you actually blushed... like, your skin changed color and everything! Never had this problem in my old life, dammit.

Harry seemed to see my embarrassment (of course he did, it was displayed on my fucking face!), and went on to attempt to mollify me with, “I won’t think anything bad of you if you’re in Slytherin, of course. Just because Malfoy the Git is in there doesn’t mean anything.”

I snorted. “Malfoy the Git?”

“Well, yeah, he’s a git, isn’t he?” Harry replied defensively. Then he twiddled his thumbs sheepishly. “Though... is it true you really did accidental magic that early? Er- Hermione researched in the library, and said it’s usually toddlers or something. We didn’t really believe Ron when he said.”

Nodding, I replied easily, “I’ve had bad dreams ever since I was that old. When they get really bad, I wake up and things explode. The last time it happened, all my blankets unraveled and the string was flying around everywhere, and Ginny was furious ‘cos I ripped up all her... books.”

“Books... about me, I reckon.” he muttered.

I giggled at his disgruntled expression. “Yeah, those. Anyways, after that, Mum and Dad — well, just Mum really — went to Alby... er, that is, Headmaster Dumbledore... and they asked him to help me. He helps with lots of things, one of them is subduing my magic so it’s not accidental much.”

“You call Professor Dumbledore Alby?”

My face went a little pink; I thought it was funny at the time. “In my defense, I was five!”

Harry laughed, and I chuckled too, glad the tension was gone.

“That’s wicked, that Professor Dumbledore trains you.”

I nodded. I’d have to fib a little, but my family had my cover-story down to an fucking artform,
really. “My core was really large for my age — it’s a bit more manageable now — and that’s why my bouts of accidental magic were violent. Alby just meant to help me keep it contained, but it had the added effect of letting me manipulate magic more easily.” Being a natural-born Soothsayer and a Clairvoyant also helps a lot.

Harry looked intrigued. “Does that mean you can do magic right now?”

Giving a grin, I mentally pushed my indigo-silver hues into the wind and the grass. It hummed in pleasure, soft and sweet. Blades of faded green grass rose up and twirled around us, and a cool breeze swept through our messy hair. Harry’s eyes widened in awe as he looked at the grass spinning, and I felt his own peacock-esque colors ripple with amazement and eagerness. That was cute; he still so enamored with magic.

(I mean, I was, too… But not as much as Harry Potter, here.)

“It ties into wandless magic, you know.” I said, guiding a leaf to poke him in the nose gently, “You should learn, too. At least how to summon things. So you can always summon your wand back if you’re disarmed. It’s the first thing I tried to learn.”

He smiled at me, excitement lighting his eyes. “Will you teach me?”

I raised a brow. “Potter, really. You don’t mind that I’m younger than you and probably a Slytherin?”

Harry shrugged. “What does it matter? For either of them, I mean. But you’ve got to stop calling me ‘Potter,’ I start thinking of Malfoy and, ergh, Snape when you do.”

Laughing, I nodded and let my indigo-silver retreat back into my core. “Then I think you’ve earned the right to call me Lys, don’t you think? With that, you can call me Lys, Lyssie, and the twins’ve taken to calling me Lyssiekins for some reason, and I really hope you don’t copy them.”

He snorted. “Nah, I think I’ll stick with Lys. Er... can I ask you questions, still? About magic and stuff. You seem to know a lot about it. I’d ask Hermione, but then she’ll just... well, she, er, explains this complicatedly and gets mad when I don’t catch on as quick as she does. And I’d ask Ron, but sometimes he forgets that I wasn’t wizard-raised, I think.”

I rolled my eyes. We’d reached the brook and I sighed as I dipped my hand in the babbling water, cleaning the wound. “Ron’s an idiot. I love him to death, but he’s an idiot. I love questions. What d’you wanna know?”

“How do you train wandless magic?”

I hmmm’ed a little, flicking the water off my hand but beginning to peel off my shoes and socks and rolling up my jeans. “It’s a little different for everyone...” Depending on the core allegiance, actually. “-but to start, you have to find your core.”

“My core?”

“My magical core. Most everyone finds it through a lot of meditation.” Unless you’ve got Mage Sight or you’ve got someone with Mage Sight to guide you — lucky you, Potter. “Magic flows through your body just like blood, y’know? Your core is sort of like its heart; it stores and creates magic, though, which is a bit different.”

“Can it overflow?”
“The core? Yeah, ‘course it can — that why my own accidental magic was violent and dangerous. I said my core was too big, but it’s just a saying; what it really means is my magic was being produced too quickly for my body to spend it — as energy or just the natural outflow into the air and earth — so it was overflowing and when it had the chance to get out, it flooded.”

“What if we take too much in or it takes too much out?”

Asking smart questions is always a sign of intelligence, I thought fondly. I’d always been convinced that Harry was a pretty average kid, and grew into his destiny. But with his colors and these little signs of something more than that… Well, it was good to see.

“Well, that’s what you call a magic disease or sometimes a curse.” I replied, inordinately pleased that I was tutoring Harry Potter in magical theory, “It’s the tiniest fraction, really. But sometimes, if you’re around someone or someplace or something long enough, you exchange magic enough, both your cores will change and resemble each other. Erm… the best analogy I have is colors.” Totally cheating here. “Everyone has their own color. You bleed them all over the place, which doesn’t really change anything, but if you’re connected to something or someone long enough… your colors mix.”

Harry hummed thoughtfully. “Is that what happens with wands, then? Your, er, colors match and it decides you’re its master ‘cos of that?”

I fucking love smart people. It’s like a breath of fresh air.

“Alby says that wands are special.” I had asked him right after I’d gotten my elder and dragon heartstring, actually. “Their ‘colors’ are dull, like hibernating or something similar, until they’re in the presence of a compatible witch or wizard; however, it’s only their master that they’ll exchange colors with — and unlike most places/people/things, the exchange is immediate ‘cos the wand core basically bonds with the magical core.”

I laughed a little, remembering Dumbledore explaining this.

“It’s why wandmakers bloody hate working with dragon heartstring — the core changes its allegiance like shoes, really, it really fuc- er, messes up your core when it does. If a wand changes its allegiance at all, any core, that’s why you feel so… well, empty when it happens. It takes back its colors as payment, almost.”

Harry raised a brow. “And you don’t get your own colors back?”

“Nope. That’s what makes the Elder Wand so strong. It’s been passed down and through so many wizards, it’s core is disgustingly powerful. Or so I theorize anyways; oh Merlin, sorry, you don’t know what the Elder Wand is, do you?”

Harry shook his head.

I slapped my forehead. “I just pulled a Ron. Bloody hell, what a nightmare.”

He laughed, and it was only then that I realized he’d copied me and rolled up his baggy jeans and
taken off his shoes and socks to dip his ankles in the little river. He was in the same spot Luna usually sat in. I’d have to talk to her later, since this was a rare opportunity to rant about some of my favorite theories with someone who was genuinely interested. (Luna was interested, of course, but she was distracting; honestly, she’ll say something about her creatures and then it derails everything, which I don’t mind all that much, but still.)

We were peacefully quiet for a bit, and I think Harry was comfortable with it as I was. Knowing my brother, Harry was always pestered into goofing off and playing chess or something with Ron; and knowing Hermione Granger, he was always pressured into homework or studying with her. The kid probably needed a breather from time to time; maybe I’d be able to help, getting him away from Gryffindor every now and then, giving him some peace of mind.

Quietly, he started:

“You could ask the Hat to put you wherever you want, you know.”

I know for a fact that Harry’d never admitted that to anyone until his youngest son in the Epilogue. Goddamn me and my shitting on canon.

(In spite of this, I felt touched and happy that Harry would admit this kind of secret to me.)

He went on, “At least, er, it did for me. It wanted to put me in Slytherin, but I’d just met Malfoy so... I asked it to put me anywhere else.”

“Yeah, if I were your age, I’d beg to be anywhere else.” I snickered.

He nudged my shoulder. “But really, Lys, if you want to... you can. I think you’d be a brilliant Slytherin, though! Er, from what Ron tells me and from this summer and all. Hermione’s always going on about me and Ron’s prejudice against the snakes, especially Snape and Malfoy, but I bet you’d make everyone like Slytherin again.”

I laughed at the high praise, face warming — just a little — again. “You’re a flatterer, Harry! No wonder Ginny’s over the moon for you!”

He blushed and scratched the back of his head. “I’m serious! And if anyone’s a git about it, I’ll help your brothers hex them for you. Hermione will help you, she loves learning and you know lots of things.”

“Oh, so I become a walking book for Miss Ganger and she protects me? Rather even trade-off, I think. I’ll take that deal.” I laughed.

Suddenly, Harry stilled.

“Bloody- I just outed the secret to you!” he blurted out, glaring ahead incredulously; he turned to me quickly. “Don’t tell any of the first-years about the Sorting Hat! Don’t tell anyone you know! I’ll be lynched for it!”

I burst out laughing. “You won’t be lynched! Good Merlin, Harry, it’s fine.”

“No it’s not! I just broke tradition!”

“So will I. A Weasley Slytherin, really. But don’t worry, Harry, I don’t snitch. That is, as long as you do a favor for me.”

He side-eyed me suspiciously. “Now you’re acting like a Slytherin.”
I grinned. “Takes one to know one.”

“I’m not a Slytherin.”

“The Hat would disagree. Anyways, my favor?”

He muttered under his breath, but waited for my request.

“Look after Ginny for me, okay?” Harry blinked owlishly, looking confused. I elaborated, “She… she’s a bit immature and she won’t understand. Ron will after a bit of hedging, but… well, Gin and I are twins, and even if we’re different, she loves following me around… it’ll really make her sad when we’re not in the same House. I’ll always try to talk with her and support her, but it’ll be hard when I’m a snake and she’s a lion. So… keep an eye on her? You and Ron?”

Harry gave me a warm look and a nod. “Heart of a Hufflepuff, yeah?”

I laughed, nodding. “You bet. Anyways, we should go back. Ron and the twins are probably looking for you, and Ginny and Percy for me.”

I already scooped up my shoes and socks and was padding through the grass when Harry called out:

“You’re a good person, Lys.”

Turning, I smirked. “Only when I want to be. Last one back has to sit next to Percy!”

He gasped and I got my head start, and we raced back to the Burrow, and I sat next to Percy anyway. It wasn’t much of a punishment in my case, really.

...
from my quite male brother, he’s a calligraphy master in spite of the bloodtraitor thing.

_Haha! Oh, but you are amusing. No, it was just a hunch._

_Excellent. I love meeting sentient objects with intelligence enough to form their own hunches. You aren’t Dark or anything, are you? Dad’s been doing raids on Dark artifacts, I bet he’d string me up if I had one resting in my pocket._

_I’m not Dark. Grey, mostly. I’m just a memory._

And I’m Pansy Parkinson. HA! This liar. The bloody bastard wasn’t going to trick ME, that’s for sure. He might’ve gotten Ginny — he would have gotten Ginny — since she empathized with things that were misunderstood a lot. It’s why she was friends with Luna now, I think? (That happened rather abruptly, actually, now that I think of it.)

_Good, I’ve been starved for intelligent conversation. My whole family is being cold to me because I asked them if they’d hate me if I wasn’t sorted into Gryffindor. D’you think they’ll get over it if my marks are good?_

_Perhaps. But you haven’t told me your name, Miss._

_Oh, right. Promise you won’t look down on me for it?_

_Promise._

_Guinevere Lysandra Weasley._

_A pleasure, Guinevere. My name is Tom Riddle. How did you come by my diary?_

_A smirk. “Let the games begin.”_

**END OF ARC ONE :: THE PREAMBLE**
Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

So... I started my new job yesterday. I worked for seven bloody hours, then went to classes for six hours straight afterwards. I'm... really sad. I'm really sad.

But! RPR must go on. Even if I have much less time to write now. This here's where Hogwarts starts and my OC's really start crawling out of the wood work. Thanks to all who kudos-ed/commented/bookmarked, and I highly encourage those who have not to do so, because it makes me feel very much less sad.

Anyways. Enjoy!

...

Mum smothered me in a hug, sobbing her eyes out as she said goodbye to me and Ginny. I hugged her back as best I could, laughing a little.

“Mum, it’s okay! We’ll be back before you know it!”

“Yeah, Mum, and we’ll write lots! Lyssie’s written to Bill and Charlie once a month since they left, of course she’ll write to you.” Ginny added, trying to get Mum to latch off me so we could get on the Express.

She sniffled, pulling back (finally). “I c-can’t believe you’re going to H-Hogwarts already! Both of you! My little girls, all grown up a-and going to Hogwarts!”

“Maybe you should get a kneazle, Mum,” Ginny said hopefully, “So you won’t be lonely at home.”

I laughed, grinning at Ginny. “You just want a kneazle, Gin.”

“Can you blame me? They’re cute.”

“I like dogs better. Why don’t you get a dog, Mum? They’re very cuddly. Cats are evil little pricks.”

Ginny made an offended noise.

Mum laughed at us. “You two take care of each other, okay? I was so worried... Your father and I thought you’d be joined at the hip, like Fred and George, and when you weren’t we thought... Well, I’m glad you’re closer now. Be good, please?”

I shot a wicked grin at Mum. “You mean, ‘Don’t raise hell like the demon twins’? We can try.”
“Oh, you! Go on, then, onto the train!”

Laughing, I cast a wandless Featherlight Charm on my trunk — an old battered thing, but very full of character, all covered in patches and such — and did the same for Ginny, who beamed at me in thanks. But Percy whisked my trunk from my hands, having decided to stick with us for a bit because we were going to Hogwarts for the first time, and I smiled at his timely intervention.

Ginny’s colors were bright maroons and carmines, with soft pale-pinks and candy-reds on the fringes. Her flowers were like that too, flashing with color in between deep green leaves and spring-colored stems. She blinked as I set it on her brow just right, going as far as to start braiding little locks and twisting them in with the flowers elegantly.

I smirked. “You didn’t think I wouldn’t make one for you, did you?”

But then Ginny’s wide-eyed look disappeared and she smirked. “You too, Lys.”

All of a sudden, the twins whirled me around and Mum shoved a crown onto my head, and I was too stunned to react. Mum leaned down to kiss me on the cheek and whispered into my ear, “You’ll make me proud, Lyssie. You always have. If your father were able to make it, he’d say the same thing. No doubt he’ll send a letter along soon.” Then standing back she said aloud to all of us, “Make sure you write! Percy, Fred, George, look after your sisters — when you find Ron, tell him he’s going to get the scolding of a lifetime for hiding away on the train from me!”

(Everyone earlier had been baffled by the disappearance of Ron and Harry — “Weren’t they right behind us?” — but I told them not to worry too much about it... though I whispered a small apology to Mum and told her not to ask. She’d simply sighed. Poor Mum. She’d have to get Ron a new wand after this adventure and everything.)

Fred and George snickered. “Of course, Mum-”

“...wouldn’t dream of crossing you, Mum!”

We were ushered onto the train and Percy and Fred carried our things, and I made it easier for all of us with wandless Featherlight Charms. (Simple enough, it was a Grey magic; much of the Hogwarts curriculum was Grey, actually, as I’d discovered; it was so that every core allegiance had a chance to learn at equal opportunity.) I was searching for Luna, myself, and we finally found her sitting alone at the end of the train; our trunks were put up and our brothers left, and then it was just us three. Ginny and I stuck our flowery heads out the window to wave goodbye to Mum, who would be all alone in the house for the first time in forever.

I wasn’t sure what was quite going on with Luna and Ginny, but I thought they were okay now (though Ginny still sometimes gave Luna strange looks and often turned to speak to me rather than her). Eventually, though, Gin settled down for a nap — she’s stayed up all night, too excited about Hogwarts to sleep — and I scooted closer to Luna, grinning. Her wide blue eyes widened impossibly further when I crowned her in silver and bluebells.

“I thought this was a tradition for your family?” she asked quietly.

“That’s right.”

She gave me a dazzling smile. “I suppose I’m a fairiefiddle now, too?”

“Are me and my siblings fairiefiddles?”

“No, just you. And Percival and Mr. Weasley of course. It’s in your ears, you see. You’ve got
moon bee footprints kissing your earlobes.”

“And so do you!” I said brightly, interpreting this as a compliment, and perhaps as a categorizing of our colors. Me, Percy, Dad, and Bill (though Luna never met him) had dominating shades of blue as our colors. “Though, this fairiefiddle’s got to visit the loo — I’ll be back, alright, Luna?”

“Don’t run into any Heliopaths. Sometimes they hide in corners.”

“I won’t.”

The loo was prettier than any train bathroom had the right to be, and I deviated from my straight-path back to the compartment to wind Percy and the demon twins. I entered a few compartments with older years that were friendly; three pretty girls that introduced themselves as Angelina Johnson, Katie Bell, and Alicia Spinnnet looked at me with recognition.

“Ah! You’ve got to be Guinevere, aren’t you?”

As much as the cooing annoyed me, I was curious when they introduced themselves and explained their knowledge as gossip from the demon twins — the best two Beaters in decades, they said. I asked how they knew I was Guinevere and not Ginevra, and they laughed.

“Fred always brags about how he’s a master hairdresser. Your hair’s almost as bad as Harry’s-” A gross over-exaggeration, dammit, my hair is fine! “—and I saw Fred and George practicing their flower-weaving for you. They would only use blue and purple flowers, those sentimental babies.”

Oh. So that’s why they grilled me on the colors of our family last summer.

My blush was shown so obviously on my face and the girls smiled.

“You and Ginny are the Weasley princesses, you know.” Alicia Spinnnet said kindly, “Even Percival gushes on about you. You’ll find him a few compartments down, and the twins a bit further, by the way. We’ll stop teasing you.”

“Though firsties are fun to tease,” added Angelina with a wink.

I laughed, likening those three to big sister figures (not quite of the mine category, of course), and went off to find Percy. I thought he’d probably by the prefect compartment, but maybe he went to check in on Penelope first. My brother was different from the canon character in that he was willing to break rules, if it was for someone important enough.

(I had a funny feeling that Percy was the type that would burn Europe down for those he loved.)

(Maybe it was a fairiefiddle thing? Luna might be on to something here.)

“Oy! Youngest Weasley!”

I turned to come face-to-face with a Hufflepuff upperclassman. I raised a brow. “What gave it away? The red hair? Or the shortness? Don’t tell me it was both.” I know why I’m the only short Weasley but it’s still mildly annoying to have everyone lord it over me. *cough cough FRED AND GEORGE cough*

He grinned — he was certainly going to be a looker in a year or two — and shook his head in amusement. “Everyone knows about your flower tradition. Guinevere Weasley, right? Fred and George moved compartments — they’re near me — poked their heads in to tell us to tell you if you stopped by, but you already had.”
“Oh. Well, thanks. Lead the way, then?”

“Of course. I’m Cedric, by the way. Cedric Diggory. Not sure if you remember me.”

The Diggorys lived close to the Lovegoods and Weasleys; in the early years, there’d be playdates and stuff. I was never one for those, though, and by the time the demon twins went to Hogwarts they found other friends and pretty boy here found his. They drifted, and I honestly forgot about the boy, with all the other things I had to focus on.

Until now. Bloody happy teenagers and their happy smiles.

**Kill the spare.**

“Thanks, Diggory.” I said, nodding.

Fucking Voldemort, no visions! Occlumency! Occlumency!

He smiled. “No problem, littlest Weasley.”

After I’d paid my hello’s to Fred and George and Percy (in that order), I came back to find Ginny in a one-way glaring match with a serene Luna, and endeavored the rest of the train ride to bridge the gap. No doubt Ginny was a bit upset about Luna having a crown — despite the fact Ginny’s was more elaborate — and was trying her best to show displeasure in a passive way.

Luna was really gracious about it, though, and I vaguely wondered how they had become friends in canon. (They had, right?)

A few hours of nervous excitement and lots of chatter, and the sun began to set. The sky was all fire again, not nearly as pretty as the desert dusks that I used to see everyday back in my first life, but close. The colors reminded me of Ron, and I wondered if he and Harry’d passed us in the fantastic Ford Anglia.

Percy dropped by at one point, telling us to get into our uniforms, and the sun sank and we did.

The train shuddered to a stop, and we trailed out and then there it was.

**Hogwarts.**

It all went according to what I expected, but still surprising me with the sheer realness of it all. The boats glided across the water, Luna, Ginny, a girl called MacDougal, and I in one boat. Looking in the water as it reflected the lights of Howgarts, I could believe I was sliding across a particularly golden-starred sky. It was fucking beautiful, Hogwarts, and I almost started crying because I had waited for this moment for 19 years.

The towers rose above the dark roofs, flags of some sort fluttering from their pointed tips. There was that large, tall bridge that spanned a gap in between the huge mountain-hill that the castle was built on. Its arches were thin and straight, barely visible in the dark. It was the lights that drew our attention, their pinprick-size telling of just how huge the castle was. The lake was dark and huge and we were just a tiny fleet in its sheer size.

My hand twitched, and I let my Soothsayer Soothing spell go, I didn’t even mind the vertigo that came when I realized how the castle was singing.

I’d never heard it or seen the golden-white colors. It was a choir of magic, welcoming new and old students in. The golden magic swirled and danced, slipping into others’ colors easily and breathing
life into them. I felt like I could understand the humming and singing, something bright and lively
and home: welcomewelcomelovehomyoustudentsprotectprotectlovelovelovehome…

The vertigo was too much eventually, and I cast my Dī-konden An-drixtā again before we exited
the boats. We walked up as a cluster of anxious first-years, even the obviously pureblood ones
they were trying to look bored and failing utterly). The Great Hall’s doors were closed now, but I
heard the din of voices inside faintly. We were told to wait here, for McGonagall, no doubt. I
squeezed Ginny’s hand tightly, comfortingly.

“What’s with the flowers?” asked MacDougal; she’d been eyeing us the entire boat ride and now
that we were inside decided to ask about it.

Ginny grinned at me proudly. “They’re a Weasley family tradition. My sister makes them, but we
all made her’s. Probably why is isn’t quite as neat as mine and, er, Luna’s are.”

Someone spoke curiously, “What are they for?”

“Are you blind, Harper?”

“Can’t you feel the magic in them?”

“-Beltane ritual-”

“-powerful magic, isn’t it-”

“What’s Beltane?”

“You’re a Mudblood for sure, then-”

“-no need for that, mate, come on now-”

It was ridiculous, but when a severe-looking woman with dark green robes and a ramrod-straight
back showed up, we all shut our mouths. Her hair was pulled into a tight bun, a traditional witch’s
hat perched on her head neatly. Just her presence cowed us into silence.

A speech about Sorting, whatever. Ginny was indignant that Fred and George and Ron had been
trying to trick her into thinking it was a magical test, where they’d put our most treasured things in
danger and see if our accidental magic would save whatever it was. She’d been fearful of her diary
and new wand, especially. I have no idea where that came from, or why they wanted to scare her so
much, but I’d kept silent and was smirking unrepentantly as she looked at the famous Sorting Hat.

It wasn’t until McGonagall called out, “Weasley, Ginevra!” that I let her hand go.

(Luna had, of course, gone dreamily into Ravenclaw.)

My big sister trembled as she walked down to the Sorting hat, her crown having been slipped off
after the boats and clutched in her hands — it was a good thing I sheared off all the thorns of the
roses or she’d be in a lot of pain right now, if she wasn’t too nervous to ignore it.

“GRYFFINDOR!” as expected; I beamed at her just as I did to Luna, who was sitting at the
Ravenclaw table and looking very unfocused.

“Weasley, Guinevere!”

As I walked down, trying not to let my nerves get the best of my rational mind, I looked at
Professor McGonagall and grinned in delight. Another flick of my fingers, and I was concentrating
on her ghostly core. Her colors were leaning more towards violet than indigo, and rather than my darkened edges hers were green, but she seemed very similar and familiar to my own indigo-silver-blue.

She smiled warmly at me (no doubt expecting another addition to her House) and motioned for me to take my own crown off, to be replace by the hat in her hand.

“Oh, sorry, Professor!” I said laughed, giddy with excitement, “Shall we exchange, then?”

With no further ado, I swept my magnificent flowers off my dark crimson hair and placed it gently on McGonagall’s greying brown (though she was much taller than me, she had leaned forward to place the Sorting Hat on my head and it was just enough for me to reach). I grinned as she smiled and only grazed her fingers across the flowers before simply standing in wait, hands folded in front of her and a crown of my colors on her head. I sat on the stool before her, greeting the Hat amiably.

Hello, I said mentally.

Minerva has never been so pleasantly surprised at a Sorting, it replied in my head.

She’ll be rather un-pleasantly surprised when you Sort me, though.

You don’t believe you’ll be a Gryffindor?

I… Oh. Can you not get through my Occlumency barriers?

I could, but it would be rather rude. Impressive Occlumency, especially for your age. Would you allow me entrance?

As long as everything you see and hear is confidential.

Of course.

So I lowered my Occlumency shields, and closed my eyes. I traced the Sorting Hat’s progress through my head; it was less than a second, really, but it felt like forever. It — he? — was diving into my organized mind with practiced ease. I had no doubt he was forming judgements already, based on my memories.

Interesting, it said as it finished processing my mind, though I have no doubt that you know where you belong. You have had this suspicion since your previous life, haven’t you?

A suspicion. I thought maybe my Gryffindor family tempered it out of me, though.

You were born into this world with a fully developed personality, Miss… Weasley? Or should I call you-

Weasley, please. Guinevere Lysandra Weasley is who I am.

As you so desire, Miss Weasley. A woman named for a queen. And a queen’s ransom you possess — you’ve certainly been gifted in this life. A Clairvoyant and a Soothsayer? Incredible luck.

Is it luck?

Or is it fate?

I was hoping you’d know. Everyone always makes you out to be some wise old thing, some sort of…
all-knowing entity.

I am just a conduit for Sorting, I’m afraid, Miss Weasley. It sounded almost tired when it said this. I couldn’t manage to bring up any surprise — it was as old as the school, and not nearly as protected. Children grabbed and groped its once-fine cloth, and now it was nearly in tatters and barely anyone knew that it once donned the face of the Lion Founder. Old and all but forgotten.

An itch in my head. I let the vision flit through my mind, and I knew the Hat saw it too.

I smiled.

You are a bit more than that, I think. An echo of Godric Gryffindor... a secret Assessor, as powerful as Ollivander. More so, of course. Godric Gryffindor didn’t use his Sight just for his art, if he had any.

Hm. Was I Seeing this correctly?

Haha! Yes, indeed. You’ve trained your Sight well, young one. You’ve done everything you could to gain more power — knowledge, resources, even the connections you make.

My eyes narrowed underneath the hat’s brim. Was this some sort of test? Would it judge me based on my answer, even as it poked through the contents of my brain? Fucker.

My friendships with Luna and Harry are not products of ambition. I will never pretend something as important as love.

Oh? And yet you conceal your status as a realized reincarnation.

It changes nothing! I thought viciously, my grip on the stool seat tightening my knuckles to white, I am who I’ve been since the day I was born. Just because I was a the middle child of Muggle parents once doesn’t mean I am not the youngest daughter of Arthur and Molly!

...I know your mind, young reincarnation. Does it surprise you, Miss Weasley, that you are not the first reincarnation that has worn me?

I tensed. Another reincarnation? I’d read a story, once, about a reincarnation in Voldemort’s time — they almost fucked everything up with their shit. What if they had changed something, changed the Horcruxes, changed their locations? Shit, shit, shit! What if they were out there in the Hogwarts crowd NOW, looking for me? I had to be careful-

They are long dead now. But they changed much in this world, they helped shape the Ages, just as you mean to do. You play a dangerous game.

It’s not dangerous if I keep my head down. I replied sullenly. It was like no one trusted me, honestly.

You mean to play God.

I bristled at the implication. I am NOT a god. I am a human, a selfish being. I mean to do my best for me and mine, and do what’s fair for everyone else.

I had the feeling that the Sorting Hat smiled at those words. He was no doubt perusing through my memories and bypassing the Occlumency barriers I’d built. Watching events from both my lives, watching visions of every time and place and person I’d seen. I flinched as he dug up the face of
Your heart is in the right place. You were thrown into this world without reason or rhyme, but you’ve done your best not to charge into Fate, but work within and around it — to manipulate its flow through gentle ripples rather than strong-armed splashes.

A Slytherin approach. I reasoned, smiling; there were whispers in the Hall because we’d been speaking for so long. The Hat seemed to know it was running out of time, and I knew he’d send me to the snakes soon.

Indeed. You know... you have very Gryffindor-like qualities. Godric would like your sense of honor to those who show you honor in kind, your determination to protect yours, and your bravery in the face of a world new to you and a fate unkind to those you love. I would not mind sending you forth as a Lion.

For a moment, I could See it. The call of Gryffindor, the roar of the Lions in welcome of the last Weasley. Ginny would be tearing up, so happy to be with me again — she was worried because I’d taken so long. The twins would dance around me, and Percy would smile and give me another hug. Red and gold would surround me, warm colors, and slowly my magic would brighten into a magenta over the years. I would be able to keep tabs on the Trio and my family easily, and I would be able to spit insults with the Slytherins and feel justified as the Hufflepuffs and Ravenclaws approved.

An easy seven years, surrounded by people who loved me.

Yet... as it was and would’ve been, Slytherin would fade into Darkness and the netural children — the neutral families — would have no choice but to bow to the Dark Lord. No escape, no outlet into the Light to possibly change sides. Maybe this was idealistic, hoping that I could draw a bit of the good Dark out — because Dark and evil were not the same thing, obviously — but it wasn’t like this choice was entirely unselfish.

I would grow, but I’d grow slowly; there are so many things that need attention. Ginny would suffer under my shadow (for it was a large shadow), and I would coddle her, rationalizing it as protection. As much as I loved my family, I was a grown-woman that valued her independence; in Gryffindor, I’d be famous as the most-sheltered Weasley, and treated accordingly.

It would be a comfortable seven years. An easy seven years. Surrounded by family and quietly influencing things — my voice might be lost as I forgot how to fear. I might be lost in the brightness of the red and gold.

Keep your friends close and your enemies closer, was the saying. Because if you held your enemies at arm’s length, you’d forget about them — that’s why Draco Malfoy was able to take Hogwarts in the sixth book.

(Besides. I love feeling powerful.)

But I would be able to accomplish my goals through Slytherin, wouldn’t I?

Yes. You would grow exponentially under the banner of the snake. I am no Seer, Miss Weasley, but you are quite a reactive, balancing person. Surrounded by cunning, you will become the most cunning of them all.

Then you know where I’m going. It was good talking with you.
Likewise. A warning, however. Speak to me privately, in Albus’ office. There are answers I hold to the questions you ask. Come see me again, Guinevere Weasley, when the summer months return.

Why?

I will explain then. Good luck, Miss Weasley.

“SLYTHERIN!”

The Slytherins were silent as I stood and smiled at a stunned McGonagall. The entire Great Hall was silent, really, but I saw Alby’s eyes twinkling with mirth behind those glasses, and Snape’s face pale even further as I approached the table of Snakes. When I glanced at the Gryffindor table, Percy looked resigned and even a bit knowing, the twins looked flabbergasted, Ginny looked horrified, Hermione looked a bit curious and confused… And Ron and Harry still weren’t here. Must be because they crashed into the Whomping Willow. I’d think about them later. At the Slytherin table, there were open mouths; wide enough to catch flies, really.

I smirked. Breaking brains already, and I was just barely Sorted. This was going to be fun.

…

“Is this honestly happening?” sneered the little ferret, backed by henchman no. 1 and no. 2, “Has the greatest House in Hogwarts really lowered itself to accept pathetic bloodtraitors?”

My indigo-silver flickered with irritation; there was something very unsettling about seeing your least favorite character growing up actually being alive now. It didn’t help that he was the spitting image of his father, and I hated his fucking father.

“Are you honestly blind? Has the Malfoy family’s inbreeding really produced an heir with such a physical deformity- Oh, wait, sorry, that’s just the way your face looks, isn’t it?”

There was a smattering of nervous laughter from the lower years and snorts from the upper years, whose gleaming, calculating eyes watched the exchange with interest. Slytherin dorms were in the dungeons, dark and cozy to my life-crossing nyctophilia; green lights hung from dark chains and the windows, black criss-cross lattice and thick glass, were tinged with the green of the lake. Everything looked high-class and expensive and to a lesser soul it might be described as cold.

I loved it.

“You’d better watch yourself, Weasley. My father is of infinitely higher station than yours; step out of line and you’ll find your pathetic family in a hovel — not that you wouldn’t be used to it, of course.”

I felt anger surge in my stomach, a red-hot ball of iron, but I slammed my Occlumency barriers down on it and mentally shushed the bristled edges of my indigo-silver magic, its humming more like hissing. Stupid little baby Malfoy.

No one insults my father, fucking brat.

“Careful there, Malfoy — I’m not sure if little boys with Daddy-complexes can afford to make
idiots of themselves arguing with even littler girls. Though... knowing you, I suppose when you write back to Daddy-dearest you’ll honestly feel proud that you could verbally spar an eleven-year-old.”

Bet it’s a surprise, I thought, smirking at his barely pinking cheeks, to suddenly be accosted with someone you really can’t measure up to. Ergh, but I feel like I’m bullying him — I’m bloody thirty years old, dammit!

“Might want to step back, little Malfoy,” some older year — a Slytherin prefect — said, her brown eyes glinting with amusement, “This one’s got a wit of razor and an even sharper tongue.”

Malfoy acquiesced in the saving presence of an upperclassman, and the girl stepped up to me, smiling a cruel little smirk.

“Nice to see a witch who knows what she’s doing. Josephine Zabini, sixth year prefect.” she introduced herself with a courteous pureblood bow.

I returned it, grinning at her. She was dark-skinned and curvy, beautiful in every way with her black hair straightened into silk; but her colors were fierce but cool (now that I wasn’t in the Great Hall, I just wrestled my Mage Sight down to translucent wisps of color), and I could see her liking of the fierce little first year that dared to stand up to idiot boys who thought they owned the place. She was in my shoes once, and she had a hard time of it... Now, though? She was the queen of her yearmates.

I think I found my first potential ally.

“Guinevere Weasley. Pleased to make your acquaintance, Zabini.”

“Likewise. Now hush, firstie, our Head of House is about to enter.”

She wasn’t wrong, and I stood with my tiny year cluster to listen at attention. Severus Snape billowed in, his robes amazingly not using magic to do so. He rolled his eyes over the first years (seven boys and only one girl — guess who?), sneered a little, then began to speak.

He was pale and dour and cold, just as I imagined, and I found he was a stunning doppelganger of his movie-counterpart. Though his hair was greasier, he was a bit thinner and taller, and there were scars all over his hands, most likely from potions.

“You have been placed into the House of Salazar Slytherin, the House of cunning, survival, pride, and power. As members of this House, you will be viewed by all others in suspicion, fear, and most importantly, envy. As such, for the duration of your seven years at this school — under my responsibility — you will show unity to those who would fear you and lash out in the name of their pitiful justice. What trifling arguments and little rivalries you carry within the House, stay within the House; before the rest of the school dunderheads, you present a united front... this rule is not negotiable.”

Obsidian eyes passed over me and Malfoy, and I nodded slightly. I wouldn’t be able to do anything to him when there were non-Slytherin eyes on us, but if he so much as touched my siblings or Harry or Luna, there was nowhere in this school he could hide. I hope I conveyed that enough with a tilt of my head. Satisfied with our near imperceptible agreement of truce, the Potions Master went on:

“The only rules you will strictly be expected to adhere to are mine. Tutoring schedules and extracurricular activities are posted on the Commons notice board. Prefects will escort first years to
and from classes for the first week; you will be expected to memorize your schedule by the end. There will be no mixing of dormitories — the left corridor will house only females and the right only males. Do not think I will not know. You will adhere to the punishments of your prefects and potesta leaders, and inform me personally of any punishments given by others — I will not be pleased if this happens. Outside of these rules, you are responsible for yourself. You will NOT be caught breaking Hogwarts’ rules.”

Was that a free pass for rule-breaking, I heard?

Slytherin sounded so fun already.

“Are there any questions?”

Cue some questions from the first year boys — Tristan Harper, Julius Rookwood, Nathaniel Wilkes, Dietrich Bastion, Lucas Vaisey, Edwin Rosier, and Sebastian Flint — while I looked around at the Common Room some more. I dreamed that I spoke to the Giant Squid through the windows once, and I wanted to try it, since I was entirely unsure whether that was a dream or a vision; it and the mermaids, if they deemed to say hello. I could try it tomorrow, it was Sunday tomorrow... classes weren’t ’til Monday. Oh, but I wanted to use tomorrow to explore and familiarize myself with the layout of the school — maybe if I begged Prefect Zabini, she wouldn’t force the escorts and I’d be able to go off on my own...

My mind wandered and I nearly missed Snape’s curt dismissal until he called:

“Miss Weasley, see me.”

I obeyed and stood before him, feeling very short (a relic of my old life, as Ginny was taller than me) and blinking at his faded colors: a deep, sorrowful blue tinged with black and silver, streaks of very, very dark purple and green throughout. It was like looking at a particularly pretty sky, if I were feeling suicidal that night.

“You are aware you are the only female Slytherin of your year.” he said.

I nodded. “Because of the war?” I said quietly.

Snape’s eyes flashed. “Yes.”

No one wanted to be having children at the height of Voldemort’s power. So many families and family branches were wiped out... So many people were killed in the most horrible of ways... No one wanted children, especially if they were involved in any way with the war. Which most were. My year group must’ve been the smallest in centuries, there were only eight Slytherins, all of them purebloods.

“There are six Slytherin girls in the year above, three to a room. You may choose your room, and I will inform them and have the castle add a living space to whichever you prefer.”

I frowned. “I can’t live by myself?”

He raised a brow imperiously. I really wanted to learn how to do that. “You do not object to a solitary room?”

I shook my head. “I’d rather sleep alone than with older girls...” Who already have established groups and therefore might target me.

Snape seemed to understand, and nodded curtly. “You will be on the first floor. It will be the first
door on the left. This is a privilege. Do not abuse it.”

“I won’t, sir. Goodnight.”

“...Goodnight, Miss Weasley.”

...

I was sorted into Slytherin, Tom.

*Congratulations, Guinevere. I’m sure you’ll do well in my old House.*

*Ginny probably hates me. Ron, too. The twins won’t hate me but they won’t be happy, either.*

Draw him in... let him think I was a lonely girl who needed help, pour fake history into his ears and watch as true history comes from his lips... Because, surely, if there was anyone who was a good source of information on a certain Dark Lord that’d rise in a few years, it would be Tom Marvolo Riddle? Not to mention, the man had been a genius. I could benefit from that.

(Had to channel my Slytherin somehow, right?)

*You’ll always have me, Guinevere. Or aren’t I better company than some foolish Gryffindors?*  

*And more convenient, too. A pal in my pocket, I daresay — sure we can’t market you?*  

*I’m quite sure.*

Damn. We’d make a killing, Tom. I’d split the profits, of course.

*You’re teasing me.*

That’s what friends do, Tom. They tease. But they don’t mind because that’s all it is. On another note, my idiot brother somehow stole the car and is in enormous trouble for flying to school that way. I’m actually not sure if he knows that I’m a Slytherin.

*If your brother is that imbecilic, I would not be surprised if he is oblivious the entirety of the year.*

I had to laugh. Tom Riddle probably meant it seriously, ’cos he was a fucking arsehole and all that, but I took it as a joke — Ron was a right oblivious idiot, all right. Maybe a bit less so when he was concentrating on something, like chess or protecting me and Ginny or Quidditch strategies, but otherwise? Yep, that was Ron.

I decided to play a bit more timid, though. *Should I apologize tomorrow?*  

*Why apologize for being superior?* 

Snorting, I replied, *Don’t make me laugh, Tom, I’m trying to calm down to sleep.*

*That would be for the best. You should sleep soon, Guinevere. You’ll need your strength for your first classes on Monday. I can tutor you in anything you have trouble with, if you’d like. Though, really, you’re too clever to have any trouble with first year curriculum.*
Flatterer. I might talk to you a lot throughout the year, though, Tom. Is that alright? I’m not really quite sure what you do all day.

I don’t mind. I simply look at my own memories. Why would you speak to me more than usual?

Well, I am a bloodtraitor in Slytherin. That, and I have no female roommates.

Hm. A shame. You are wonderful company, when you aren’t in a teasing mood.

I’m wonderful company all the time.

Arrogance is unbecoming, Guinevere.

Look at who’s teasing now. Alright, I’d better turn in. Goodnight, Tom.

Goodnight, Guinevere.

I closed the diary softly. I had been in a state of constant paranoia ever since I nicked the thing from Ginny’s books before she’d even realized it was there. There had been no visions that warned me, though, so it seemed I wasn’t going to die from going against Fate like this. But I was still waiting, because honestly, the Basilisk fight was pretty much an entire book/movie.

But nothing came.

And what would I do even if it did? Give it back? Allow Ginny to be possessed? Scarred for life?

That wasn’t going to happen.

What’s best for me and mine, and what’s fair for everyone else.

I touched my heart, remembering the feeling of steel and home. No one was going to touch my family if I could help it. Ginny, my innocent sister that liked flying and writing and watching me do magic for her, was not going to be possessed by a teenage Dark Lord. I would never allow my sister to go through something like that.

Am I going to be possessed instead?

Maybe. But then I’ll understand what’s going on. And I’ve already taken precautions not to allow the bastard into my heart. I Occluded heavily every time I was near the diary, let alone writing in it. And I never forgot what Tom Riddle was, what he could do, and what he did do. I could glean what information I could from him, try to get him to teach me how to destroy him, and then I’d lock it away. I’d keep it hidden and under tight wards — which I was planning on studying this year, extensively — until the day the Horcrux hunt began, then I’d give it to Harry and grin as the thing was murdered.

It was okay. It was better me than anyone else, taking this risk. So that was settled.

When I went to sleep, lulled by the sound of the lake’s water, I dreamed of the Chamber, empty.

And when I woke, dreamless, I grinned to myself, because this meant I wasn’t going to die because of how I destroyed canon in its entirety like that. My Clairvoyance would warn me if I was going to die because of what I did; it would preserve itself, and as it originated from me, it would try to get me to live as much as possible.

So then it was Sunday, and time for me to explore.
I was up early, dressed neatly despite the obvious wear and tear of the secondhand robes, and I strode out the Slytherin dungeons alone. I technically wasn’t supposed to be up and about yet, but I enlisted a nearby portrait to tell the prefect or whoever else wanted to know that I’d gone on ahead to explore — quite nice, these portraits, as long as you were polite. Wandering through Hogwarts was relaxing and I listened to the sentient, golden-colored magic that flowed through the stone like blood, my Mage Sight tuned down to the lowest I could so that I wasn’t stumbling around vomiting profusely.

As I put my body on autopilot, asking portraits about themselves and directions to the Great Hall, I opened my magic to a vision — I had to have one or two every day for an even decently okay amount of sleep, nightmares or not. I couldn’t just depend on Occlumency, not with my Clairvoyance this bloody strong.

*Pale pink petals scattered against the sky — lit up like beacons because of the moonlight — the peach tree they fell from standing alone on a grassy cliff — a silhouette underneath its blushing shade, lifting a cup of clear liquid to the moon — “First, my soul. Second, the moon.”*

> Stop.

> A twirling wand — silky blue ribbons bursting from its tip — drawing fleeting patterns in the air.

> Stop.

> “So... why?”

> “Why what?”

* A blurry image — dark — Shadows all over the walls — “It’s almost like Tolkien, isn’t it? The first owner was abandoned. Why?” — a gentle laugh, more of a huffing chuckle than anything — not used to laughing — a sigh.

> “You would think of Tolkien here, wouldn’t you?”

> Stop.

I opened my eyes, feeling better. Letting the visions wash over me felt nice. Cathartic, almost.

The Great Hall was predominantly empty — go figure, it was morning and it was Sunday — and I sat at the end of Slytherin table and was delighted when I asked for toast and butter, and it actually appeared. My eyes lit up and everything. I loved toast for breakfast; it was just the best way to start the day, really.

> “Ergh, what are you eating?”

I almost spat out my toast and showed him, ‘cos that was fucking Ron and it was six in the morning and Ron was up and alert at six in the morning.

Swallowing hastily, I choked out, “Who are you and what have you done with my brother?”

> “Har har, Lyssie, now budge over, surprise snake.”

> “Surprise sn—? The entire bloody table’s empty, Ronald!”

> “G’morning—“ an interjected yawn, here, “-Lys.”

> “Oh, hello, Harry.” I said, smiling at a disheveled Potter sinking into the seat across from me; then
I eyed Ron, who was shoveling newly-appeared scrambled eggs and bacon into his mouth, “Didja see that, Ron? That’s what manners are, see.”

“Guh’ ‘ornin’ ‘Is.” he replied.

“You’re disgusting, Ronald.”

I wasn’t blind to the last member of the Trio eyeing me strangely, and turned to face her as she clambered onto the bench next to Harry. “Hello, Hermione. Nice to see you again. Wish we could’ve talked more, Ron wouldn’t shut up about you over the summer.”

She smiled, blushing just a little bit. “Pleasure to meet you.” she said shyly; then, apparently remembering her Gryffindor courage, “You’re a first year, aren’t you? Ron got us up so early to come check on you, he knew you’d wake up early, and we’d be happy to show you around to your classes for tomorrow- that is, after breakfast.”

“Awww. Ronnie, were you worried for me?” I asked, batting my eyelashes.

He shoved my face away, blushing to the tips of his ears. “Come off it, Lyssie, I’m trying to eat in peace.”

I laughed, wondering if this was a butterfly effect or if he really did this for Ginny in the books, off-screen.

“Is Gin coming, then?”

That sobered up the mood more quickly than Malfoy.

Harry muttered the answer. “Erm… Ginny’s a bit… upset right now. With you.”

Ron rolled his eyes. “She’s barking mad, Lys.” (Hermione gasped, admonishing, “RON!”) “I think she scared the magic out of her roommates; I asked if she wanted to come last night but she said she didn’t want to see you. Mind, Harry and I didn’t know you were a Slytherin so we were right confused.”

I groaned. “And this, Ron, is why I didn’t warn her.”

“Hey, don’t look it me, Lys- She’ll cool down in a few days, always does.”

Hermione interjected here, “I can talk to her, if you’d like, erm, Lys?”

I smiled at her, knowing she was confused. No one had explained why I was called Lys even if my first name was Guinevere. “It’s for my middle name, Lysandra. Dad’s grandmum, I think.”

Harry looked offended. “Wha- So Hermione gets to call you Lys straight away and I had to work for it the entire summer?”

Good save, Potter. I thought, (the conversation on family didn’t seem to be working, with Ginny hating me at the moment) smirking and replying, “It’s different between girls, Harry. It’s the Code.”

Ron blinked at me. “The Code?”

I nodded. “The Code. Secret set of social rules and traditions passed from female to female. I’m not allowed to tell you any more, though — you males have your own Code. Right, Hermione?”
The other witch held back her giggles and nodded quite seriously, which had a mystified Ron and a skeptical Harry believing my bullshit right away. We ate breakfast like so, my spouting off about the Code and then acting scandalized that they’d never received their rundown of their own Codes from their male relatives, and offering to adopt them into female society for the sake of honor. Hermione was trembling with withheld laughter, which was good. Before any Slytherins came in to see three Gryff second-years surrounding their only female first-year, we had gotten up and left, so the three could show me around.

Hermione excitedly took the lead, dragging a much calmer Harry with her, and I pulled Ron back to speak of more serious things.

“Will she really cool down in a few days? Or is it a George-worthy grudge?”

I refer, of course, to the unfortunate incident in which we Weasley children were introduced to the demonic temper of Ginny. It was when she and I were really, really young; three or four, or something. The demon twins decided to prank the female twins; Fred got me and George got Ginny, and oh *Merlin* it was the worst toddler meltdown I’d ever encountered. Fred dumped a bunch of fake insects in my bed, which I had screamed at and run from until realizing that I’d been gotten and laughing… but George, upon making Ginny’s dolls burst into confetti, had been subject to a tantrum and a grudge that lasted until nearly half a year.

(They never touched Ginny again, needless to say)

Ron looked a little glum, and gave me the answer I expected and dreaded. “George-worthy, I think.”

I sighed, running a hand through my hair. “Did something blow up?”

“She managed to keep her temper until we were all in our dorms.” mumbled my youngest big brother, “I heard the first year girls’ dorms windows shattered.”

We both looked down, a bit embarrassed for her.

“Keep an eye on her? I asked Harry to already, but now I’m *really* worried.”

“Would it have killed you to have warned her?”

I glared at him. “Don’t put this on me!”

“Blimey, Lys, I’m not blaming you! I’m just saying. Soften the blow, y’know?”

I was a bit irritated, but the genuine concern in Ron’s face convinced me to just sigh. “Yeah, I should’ve. But then she would’ve been sulking the entire train ride and that’s not how your first Hogwarts experience should go. And it’s not like no one saw it coming!”

“Heh. ‘Saw it coming’.”

“Oh, shut up, Ron.”

Within the family, sight and eye jokes were *everywhere*. Fred and George were the worst, but Ron liked to mutter his own damn puns whenever he could. I usually just rolled my eyes, but it’s been years. I think I’ve heard every pun there was and could be.

He sighed. Then he ruffled my hair playfully. “C’mon. It’s your first day at Hogwarts and you’re *moping.*”
“I’m not moping.”

“Are too.”

“You’ll be moping when Mum and Dad get that letter from Dumbledore.”

Ron paled rapidly, obviously having forgotten about the fucking car fiasco last night. I shook my head at him in pity. He mumbled to me faintly, “Y’know my wand was snapped by the Whomping Willow.”

I stared at him. “Mum’s going to kill you. I’d kill you if I were Mum.”

He shook his head of his thoughts and I could almost see him shove it to the back of his mind for now as he turned to grin at me. “But you are moping.”

Dammit. My distraction tactic was a fail. Onto aggressive maneuvering. “Yeah, and now I’m hexing you.”

“Wha- Put your wand away, woman! Merlin, no-”

“Rictumsempra.”

Hermione and Harry turned in surprise as I took Ron down with the Tickling Charm. I was very smug when Hermione took my side (“Honestly, Ron, if your sister’s been doing wandless magic for so long, don’t you think you ought not to provoke her?”).

I supposed that it was a good start. Even if Ginny was furious with me, it would help her become independent and mature. Hopefully. I honestly think I spoil her too much. Best that I don’t mention that to Tom, though, I’m really going to have to play up my helplessness if I want to get into his head this year.
Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

As always, thank you for kudos-ing/commenting/bookmarking, to those who did. I almost forgot to update today, since I worked and then I had lab. Bleh.

Enjoy!

...

Classes were easy. Ridiculously so.

I’m so bloody BORED, Tom. Why do we need an entire WEEK to learn the wand movement to Wingardium Leviosa? I bet I could do it wandlessly by now.

As if I couldn’t. Even if Alby had to stop our lessons because he needed to concentrate on other things, I was smart enough to figure out wandless by myself. I’m rather sure it made my poor elder-and-dragon-heartstring a little moody when I did, though.

Perhaps. Not everyone has talent in the wandless arts, however, Guinevere.

Is that a challenge?

I trust you not to lie to me.

Do I get a prize if I can perform a wandless Levitation Charm? Also, of course I wouldn’t lie to you. This can only better myself, and you’re my agent of motivation. Silly Tom.

Flattering. If you prove that you have talent in wandless magic, I would be glad to tutor you ahead of your classes. First year, correct? I am more than adequate in the major areas of magical studies, Guinevere.

That’d be nice, thanks Tom. I better get to practicing, then.

I look forward to your results. Pleasant day, Guinevere.

I’d say ‘You too’ but you’re a book.

Watch your snark, Miss Weasley. If what you’ve told me about your Professor Snape is true, you would really best learn to curb your temper.

Can’t help that I’m a ginger, Tom. We’ve got tempers. It’s genetics.

Classes were easy, but that helped me get closer to a certain Horcrux. Also, it seemed that my
professors were baffled by my mastery of most of the first-year curriculum. (The twins and Ron probably set the bar rather low for Ginny and I…) After I silently cast *Wingardium Leviosa* for Flitwick, he’d asked me to come to his office. He began to go through the textbook, which I performed with ease.

“Professor?” I’d asked, just before leaving.

“Yes, Miss Weasley?” he asked, rather excitedly. Flitwick was just an excitable person, I think.

“How long d’you think it’d take me to learn how to do all this wandlessly?”

Alby would get a kick out of this when I showed him the memory later. Shame that he cut down our lessons. I’d miss my grandfather-figure and his fantastic lemon drops. Well, the Hat wanted to talk to me at the end of the year; I’d show Alby then, he’d laugh.

The Charms Professor looked surprised. “Wandlessly? That’s quite advanced.”

I frowned. “It’s just a thought, Professor. I’ll consult someone more versed in magic before I start going anything interesting.”

Flitwick grinned. “Well, with your talent, I would say a month or so.”

*I’ll tell Tommy-boy two and a half weeks. That’ll catch his attention.*

I smiled gratefully. “Thanks, Professor.”

“Of course, of course. Oh, and- excellent job on your last essay, as well, Miss Weasley. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

I bobbed my head in a sort of casual-polite nod, and then I was off. Cackling inwardly, as usual.

That pretty much set the scene for the rest of my classes, sans Astronomy and History of Magic. Astronomy was a lot more practical and we were still in the beginning stages, and Binns wouldn’t be able to remember my name to save his after-life. But McGonagall, salty as she was at my Sorting, was still impressed with my skill in Transfiguration; Snape almost gave an approving look at my first Potion and my very neat notes; Sprout was very happy that I was polite and not afraid to get my hands dirty (she can cheerfully blame the demon twins and Luna for that); and Lockhart, the irritating git, didn’t quite count either, but was oddly respectful of my quiet and polite (the snark passed right over his blonde head) nature. I had only deemed to speak once, when I asked him about why there was a Defense against *only* Dark Arts and not the Light ones.

Huh.

Actually, I didn’t mean to speak at all in this bloody class, but seeing as I was born with a natural Dark core, it was just irritating to see the stigma here. I think I gained some points with my fellow Slytherin yearmates for that, too; at least, the competent ones.

Speaking of, I wasn’t friends with any of them. There were seven boys in my Slytherin year group, me being the only female. All of them were purebloods, though only a few of them were heirs. They all *fucking annoyed me*, actually. Six of them were ganged up on the last one, Dietrich Bastion, presumably because he was actually a foreign student from Germany; he roomed with Lucas Vaisey, Julius Rookwood, and Nathaniel Wilkes, and Lucas Vaisey was the little ringleader — a mini-Malfoy, only his hair was caramel-colored and he wasn’t quite as sharp.

It grated on my nerves, really, how I would see the straight-faced Bastion walk around with proof
of his bullying all over him. Nothing that other Houses wouldn’t notice too easily — scuffs on his
shoes, missing homework, ripped things — but enough that the more wary-eyed would catch.
Snape didn’t seem keen on interrupting (Bastion was foreign, and the others were big-name
purebloods, some of which were very obviously Death Eater names; this wasn’t even taking into
account the incredible independence Slytherins as a whole had), which had me watching them all
with quiet disdain.

The boys didn’t dare touch me, even though I was quite obviously the one with the lowest social
standing. Bastion must’ve just been convenient.

_It’s none of your business, you know. Guinevere, This Bastion child, he would do well to make
some allies in the older years or fight back._ was Tom’s advice when I ranted to him about the
situation, a week or so later.

_This, I wrote furiously, THIS is why I hate little brats. They don’t know how much their words
hurt._

_Do you not count as a ‘little brat’?_

_I would never lower myself to such childish tactics on someone who didn’t deserve it. Bastion
barely speaks, he’s never there at meal times, and his grades are suffering because they either
keep destroying his homework or keep hiding his textbooks. The boy was perfectly polite when I
asked him to hand me my quill yesterday, what on EARTH are they targeting him for?_

_Why not him? He is foreign, he has no connections, and he is not academically superior._

_They rigged it that way._

_Such are the tactics of a Slytherin._

_The only reason I’m not in Bastion’s place is because I’ve got a plethora of brothers._

_Connections, dear Guinevere. Why do you want to help this child, anyway? What use is he to you?_

_I was very tempted to say, ‘It’s the fucking right thing to do’ or something similar, but that would
just make Tom think I wasn’t a good Slytherin. I wanted to paint a weak picture of myself, but not
an anti-Slytherin one. I was already too ostensibly fussy for his tastes. Too Gryffindor-ish, too
Light-minded even if I wasn’t Light-cored (not that he could tell)._ 

_It wasn’t bloody right, though. Fucking bullying Dietrich Bastion just because they could. And
Luna, too, I knew that her bullying was getting worse, but it was even more difficult for me to
watch because she was in an entire different House. What Ravenclaws I did catch, I quietly made
their lives harder and tried to make Luna’s easier, but I just… there was so little I could do for her,
especially since I was already being snubbed at every corner by my own House. Snubbed, not
bullied, but they did block me off on all sides._

_I didn’t want to think I was a bloody hero, but this sort of shit… It pissed me off, and if I wanted to
be very heartless about it, if/when Dietrich Bastion left, I’d be next, brothers or not. My Britishness
was the only thing saving me from fending off attacks right now. But should I really step in? He
could buy me quite a bit of time to befriend Prefect Zabini and earn myself protection that way…_

_Well, it all played out the way it wanted to nearly three weeks into the school year._

_I was meditating and Occluding in a very quiet corner of the school (Tom was helpfully pointing
out shortcuts and such, the lovely Horcrux bastard) when Dietrich Bastion himself came barreling
through.

“Merde! Va te faire enculer!” he snarled, slamming the door of the empty classroom open with enough force to have dust cascading down the ceilings.

I blinked. I was under a Notice-Me-Not, actually, which I’d forgotten about — instinctive casting of that particular Charm was necessary in the chaos that was the Weasley household. This was a disturbance I wasn’t really expecting, though. I was fairly sure that the first word was a cuss, which painted a somewhat clear picture of what the rest of the words were.

“J’en ai plus rien à foutre, j’en ai ral le cul!” he went on, whipping out his bag and dumping ink-soggy papers out. The bag itself must’ve been nice once, but it was all patched up now. I was sure it was new on the first day of classes.

Quietly, I flicked the Notice-Me-Not off my person. Bastion was still trying to salvage his things.

“I thought you were German.” I said casually.

He must’ve jumped a foot straight in the air. Another slew of French, then he turned to face me. His clothing was rumpled, hands blackened with ink. He used to look quite neat and orderly, but ash-blond hair was tousled and grey eyes were rimmed red and glassy. I stiffened at the sight of that — Oh god, not emotions! — but tried to keep myself loose as I sat cross-legged on the abandoned classroom’s desks. Bastion had actually been crying recently.

Shit. I was so bad at comforting. Teasing and not teasing insults were my forte.

His eyes narrowed distrustfully, but the rest of his face was as blank as if he were an Occlumens. (Which he might be, who knows?) “Weasley. What do you want?”

A light French accent, barely there if you listened. It probably got worse when he was distressed.

I shrugged. “I was here first- Oi, you don’t have to leave, Bastion, I don’t own the place. Merlin. Here-“

He almost — almost — flinched when I hopped off the desk and walked towards him. That wasn’t bloody normal; was that a thing before the bullying? Or had it gotten so bad that he’d developed some fucked up reactions? It pissed me off, but I locked those emotions down tightly and gave a friendly smile instead.

My elder-and-dragon-heartstring started clearing up the dripping ink, cleaning out the bag, repairing what needed it. Bastion watched rigidly.

They call him a statue, I’d told Tom, because he doesn’t make facial expressions.

How stupid. Snape didn’t really, either, and did anyone deny he had emotions? Idiotic children.

“There, a bit better, isn’t it? We haven’t got class for an hour or two, though.”

Bastion was stiff-backed and very suspicious. “It would be foolish of me to have returned to the Slytherin dormitories.” he bit out, his French accent not strong, but certainly quite there.

I raised a brow. “Probably.”

An awkward and tense few seconds passed.

Then I sighed, running a hand through my messy hair. “Listen, Bastion-“
“Ferme ta gueule,” he hissed, interrupting me, “I don’t want to hear it, Weasley.”

With that, the kid was gone. I was left standing there, bewildered. Then I crossed my arms and thought about it. Slytherin was the House of pride, yes? And Bastion was actually one of the several in our year that was an heir to his house. Which meant the boy had a lot of pride, and I suppose my sighing was a bit pitying.

Pity is not a mercy in Slytherin House, Guinevere. Tom explained as I took out the diary and wrote down my thoughts — I needed the Slytherin of Slytherins to explain, and damn the consequences — I would go as far as to call it an insult. It means you are weak.

I thought so. Damn.

Why ask?

Because I’d really like to know how not to piss people off.

Language, dear Guinevere.

As if you actually care. Aren’t you sixteen?

Oh? How did you know?

I feel like you would’ve bragged about being Head Boy if you were a seventh-year, and you don’t sound young enough for any other year. Too much of a head on your shoulders, especially for being a boy, you know.

Well, well. I suppose you aren’t too infuriating for being a ‘little brat’ and a female.

Oh, sod off, Tom. I’m off to Potions with the Gryffs — care to bet how many times Ginny’s glaring will distract me?

Twenty-seven.

Eleven.

Confident, are we?

I’ll have a very different distraction this time.

I’m sure that sitting next to Dietrich Bastion and partnering with him would be quite distracting. I’d be fending off stray ingredients and foot-trips and whatever else all class period. Hopefully, though, it would be worth it in the end. And, besides, classes were ridiculously easy; perhaps this would up my environmental awareness or something.

…

“Your sister does not seem to like you,” observed Bastion one day.

He had, quite surprisingly, gotten very used to partnering with me. In every class. Part of it was, yes, we usually did magic in duos. The other part was his distinct lack of textbooks because of wanton destruction. And, I would bet, a part of it was that the boy was damn lonely and when
someone comes up to you that is both academically ahead, magically gifted, and perfectly friendly… Well, no Slytherin would look a gift-horse in the mouth. Not obviously, of course; we were Slytherins. I had no doubt he investigated me as much as he could, to see if I wasn’t pulling a Lucas Vaisey and pretending to be friendly only to screw him over later.

(Yes, that child did that; no, it was not his idea. I was willing to bet it was Flint and Wilkes, those two were always plotting something.)

I must’ve passed inspection, however, because Bastion was perfectly content in our little… alliance, I suppose I should call it. Friendships in Slytherin required more than a few days and kind-ish words to go through. And even then, it was an iffy thing. Damn mistrustful lot, these children, and Bastion was especially so.

“Very sharp of you to notice,” I drawled in a very Malfoy-esque manner, “Really, Bastion, it’s not as if she glares at me every ten seconds or so. In between the very pointed ignoring and indignant sniffing.”

Bastion gave me a flat look.

Though, to be fair, all his expressions were deadpan; there was the occasional eyebrow-raise, the tiny glare, the rapid blinks of surprise, the downward tilt of his mouth when he was concentrating, and the ever-rare double eyebrow-raise, which indicated massive shock. Like, Fileh prancing in a tutu around the halls shock. Or, surprise surprise, me telling Lucas Vaisey to piss right the fuck off or I’d hex him into gooey pieces. Not in those words, of course, but the message was the same.

“I was precluding my question.” he said, “Why does your sister not like you?”

“Because I’m a snake and she’s a lion. She got it into her head that one means good and one means evil. Guess which is which? Oh, and she’s probably lonely.”

“Prejudice? Against her own kin? Mon Dieu, you British. Strange.”

“And you ignore the lonely part. Also, I thought you were German.”

Bastion gave me an almost disgusted look. “I am half. Mon père is French, meine Mutter is German. We live in her ancestral home in Germany, since mon père was not originally the — what is the word? — ah, Paterfamilias of La Famille Bastion.”


Ah, a rare expression! It was just a lighter version of his glare, though. “I am half.”

“So m’I. Half-mad with boredom and hunger.” Oh, how Ron would be proud if he heard me now. “Don’t you think finishing first year curriculum before the month is up is rather… ambitious?”

“We are the house of Slytherin, non? Ambitious describes us.”

“True. But still, you — quite literally overnight — rose from last in the year to second.”

“If I were so inclined, I would surpass you as well.”

“Oh, so the student turns on the teacher, is it? I can and will duel you, Bastion. Fake-French git.”

“Weasley, for the last time, I am HALF-FRENCH.”

I cackled at him. It was nice, because after the first time I snickered evilly at the fact that Bastion...
managed to perform Wingardium Leviosa, Lumos, and Alohomora perfectly first try, the kid didn’t question me. In fact, I think it rather amused him; which was a far cry from my disturbed siblings, when I acted a bit more Dark than was normal in our household (which was, not at all). It was… nice, I suppose, to have a Slytherin friend who I could snark with on even ground. I felt like Tom had been a breath of fresh air, but to have someone who was physically real? Fantastic, really.

(I hadn’t realized, until now, just how utterly alone I’d been.)

(Of course, my family was close. I loved them, yeah? But they were not like me. Dad was, with the whole burning Europe to the ground bit of our bonding, but that’s a very different story. It was hard to connect when I was too busy keeping my head above the water here. Which sounds pretty angsty, but the only annoying thing about it was that it kept me from seeing to my family more.)

When Bastion finally said he was satisfied, we walked to dinner. In the kitchens, that is; it was where he was more comfortable eating, with how the others targeted him. I was simply intrigued by the House Elves, and quite alright with the solitude. And he didn’t mind me sitting at the Ravenclaw table on Wednesday evenings, so I could remind the Ravenclaws just who Luna Lovegood’s childhood friend was, and what I could do to them if I saw that she was upset or injured or even slightly frazzled in any way. (Tall order, Luna was a very serene person…)

“Ah, I forgot to mention something.”

I rolled my eyes. “For the last time, Lumos Solem will wait until tomorrow, Bastion.”

He gave me an irritated glance. “Not that.” he said shortly. “One of our dear Slytherin yearmates approached me for tutoring.”

“Oh?”

“Tristan Harper.”

“Dark curly hair, part Egyptian, big blue eyes, smiles a lot?”

“The stupid hyperactive one. Yes.”

“I don’t recall him being too hostile.” I said thoughtfully.

Bastion shrugged. “He has less opportunity, as he does not share my dormitory room, and is too afraid of me to do so.” Bastion’s eyes sharpened here, and I thought I caught a flash of pain. “The most he does is watch and laugh.”

My mouth thinned into a pale line. Hmmmm… “And he approached you?”

A narrowing of grey eyes. Hmmmm… “And he approached you?”

Bastion shrugged. “He has less opportunity, as he does not share my dormitory room, and is too afraid of me to do so.” Bastion’s eyes sharpened here, and I thought I caught a flash of pain. “The most he does is watch and laugh.”

My mouth thinned into a pale line. Hmmmm… “And he approached you?”

A narrowing of grey eyes. Hmmmm… “And he approached you?”

“Vaisey is the ringleader. He’s the one kissing up to Malfoy.”

“Like most of them, oui.” agreed my friend, “But he is stupid. He will not remember that to approach us is to turn away from Malfoy. I tell you this for a reason, however. It is likely I can overpower them. Shall I?”

I raised a brow. “Why do you ask me?”

He copied my expression in that special Bastion-way. “I assumed you were trying to topple
Malfoy’s throne. The little child never hesitates to insult you, and you never hesitate to return his sentiments.”

“I was not aware you were going to defer to me.”

Bastion was quiet. “…You are not the worst Slytherin to bow to.” he said hesitantly.

I blinked. Then I nodded, sighing. “I don’t know if I love Slytherin politics or if I hate them.”

Bastion snorted. “The former, obviously. You are too bored not to enjoy plotting.”

I laughed. Only a few days into this whole friendship thing, and he knew me so well! “That is also true. Is this the portrait-door to the kitchen, then?”

“Hm.” he hummed in confirmation.

We passed our meal like that, both of us very much casual in spite of our agreement to become a powerhouse in Slytherin. We might as well have been talking about the weather or how boring Charms was, honestly; I suppose, as Slytherins, a passing agreement to destroy our enemies through manipulating the stupid ones into our power was simply normal.

God, how I love it.

…

You are much too gleeful about this to be a normal child.

Tom, you wound me! I’m simply laughing at the fact that Bastion’s old bullies can’t even touch him anymore with me around and the threat of my brothers over their heads. Oh, and of course, how could I forget, they’re going to walk into our sphere of influence because they’re too bloody stupid to realize it!

Much too gleeful. I am glad we are not enemies.

Is that a compliment? A compliment from THE Tom Riddle, prefect and soon-to-be Head Boy? Oh Merlin me, what am I to do?

Your disturbing exuberance is verging on irritating, Guinevere.

Oh. Well, apologies for that. I AM very excited, though. I never thought Slytherin politics was this bloody exciting. And I did it by myself, Tom! I only meant to help Bastion out, and now we’re practically planning revolution together. In a very casual sort of way, I suppose.

Casual destruction of authority at eleven. Dear, dear, Guinevere, what are they going to do with you?

Oooh, you’re in a good mood now. Care to share?

Perhaps yours is catching. I wouldn’t mind helping you, Guinevere. I was the leader of the Slytherins in my day. You can imagine how much work it took.

Riddle was, after all, a conspicuously NOT pureblood name. Just as Weasley was a conspicuous
name for bloodtraitors. Still, the offer brought my glee-levels down a tad; I had to start thinking
now, rather than just ranting to Tom because I could (and I knew petty children’s troubles would
annoy the bloody hell out of him).

*It’s alright, Tom. Merlin knows it would be easier if I accepted, but I’d like to do it on my own. More satisfying that way — after all, wouldn’t it be impressive if an eleven-year-old bloodtraitor girl took down the prince of Slytherin?*

*No one would know you weren’t alone if I helped.*

*You and I would know, and that’s one too many.*

*One too many? Which of us would you rather not know?*  
*Me.*

It was the first time I’d seen the book’s colors, actually. When I saw it first, in Ginny’s room — shoved in her Transfiguration book — it’s sluggish colors looked black. Carrying it around in my pocket all day, I could see lazy, weak blurbs of the same shade of black. But today, the weakened colors seemed to flash a deep, deep burgundy; its sudden energy something akin to laughter.

*“Why are you staring at your diary like it’s going to explode?”*

I snapped my eyes up.

Tristan Harper was a small child with honey-colored skin, dark brown curls framing his face, and doe-like eyes a startling shade of blue. His uniform was just a bit oversized, there were freckles dotting the bridge of his nose, and he often lost his wand (pine with phoenix feather, 11 and 1/2 inches) though it was frequently found tucked in a pocket or his sleeve or, in a very Luna-like manner, behind his ear. He was extremely hyperactive, very easily distracted, and often careless about deadlines and misplacement of his things, which was entirely his own fault.

A child in Slytherin that actually acted like a child. Huh.

*“Pay attention, Harper,” snarled Bastion irritatedly, “You are the one who came to me for tutoring. If you would be so kind as to act like you were interested in your own academic failures, we would move along.”*  

I grinned at Bastion over Harper’s head. That was almost Snape-like. Bless him.

Movement across the Great Hall caught my eye.

*“Bastion, I’ll be back. Any of the gits bother you, I’ll be right over with a Bat-Bogey.”*  

*“Good. No, Harper, I will not be teaching you that.”*  

With that, I popped up from the Slytherin benches and trotted across the Hall, drawing a few curious eyes as I did. Not every day that a snake slithered over to the lion’s table. But there was a certain group of redheads that I’d been missing for a while, so it was into the lion den I went. It wasn’t until I was halfway past the Hufflepuffs that one of my brothers — Fred, I was sure, even minus the Mage Sight — looked up and saw me, his face splitting into a wide grin.

*“Well, here she is! The Slytherin Weasley!”* he announced cheerfully.

George brightened at the sight of me. *“My counterpart! Finally! I always thought I was more*
sneaky than my identical git here—"

“Oi!”

“-and here’s the proof.”

Percy was a lot more composed, though he was no less happy to see me. “Hullo, Lys. You’ve been busy these past weeks, I take it? Of course you have. Hogwarts education is no joke, even as a first year, and I know you take your education seriously—”

“C’mon, Perce, Lyssie came here to talk about fun things. Possibly giving a hint as to where the Slytherin dorms are?” George asked hopefully.

“Not on your life, brother dear.” I said cheerfully, forcibly plopping down in between Percy and Fred, who protested half-heartedly at my taking his place at the table. “What’re all of you doing eating together?”

“Well, we try to a few times a month, don’t we?”

(Well, that wasn’t canon. I didn’t think. Was it my influence? Or were the Weasleys just more tight-knit in this alternate universe?)

“Not that Gin-gin’s here."

“Right pissed off, our little Gin-gin—"

“-which isn’t really your fault, Lyssiekins-”

“Of course it’s not your fault,” Percy protested vehemently, “I, for one, knew exactly what House you were going to be Sorted into, Lys. I do believe Charlie lost a few Galleons to Bill, who knew just as well as I did — not that I gambled, that sort of thing is completely unethical-”

“Oooh, with my little quirk, do you think I’d be any good at gambling?” I asked.

The twins looked at each other, and their frankly demonic smirks contrasted quite nicely with Percy’s paling face.

“Lyssie-”

“-dear sister-”

“-have we ever told how much we love you?” they finished together.

“Not at all, no.” I said dryly.

“Well-”

“There is to be no underage gambling! As prefect, I won’t allow it!”

“C’mon, Perce-“

“Who’s gambling?”

I turned to Ron, who had just sat down next to Fred with Harry and Hermione following him. They gave me little smiles and greetings, and Hermione’s eyes flickered worriedly to the end of the table; Ginny was sitting there, in a gaggle of first-year Gylffindor girls. She was pointedly not
looking at me, like usual. I shrugged, saying soft hulos to the two brunettes, though my greetings were probably barely heard with the irritated lecturing of Percy, the protests of the demon twins, and Ron’s clueless prodding for information.

It was just like home, really, and I felt very happy surrounded by them like this.

(Hard to get homesick, right, when my home was sitting right here, a few tables away. I suppose the only thing that might’ve completed the picture was Mum’s cooking and Dad’s soothing presence, his blues and her candy-reds wrapping around us like we were treasures to be protected.)

“How are you doing in classes, Lys?” Harry asked politely, ignoring the din that was my brothers.

“How are you doing in classes, Lys?” Harry asked politely, ignoring the din that was my brothers.

“First in my year, if it interests you to know,” I said, shrugging and stealing Gryff food.

Hermione smiled. “Well, if you’ve been doing wandless, it’s not to surprising, is it? Nice to see another girl being the first in her year.”

I frowned. “You know, Zabini said something along the lines of that too. Are girls treated badly?”

“Zabini?” Harry asked.

“Josephine, the sixth year, not the one in your year. They’re cousins, I think.”

Hermione answered huffily, “Well, when you’ve got people like Malfoy going around and treating girls like breeding-cattle or idiots, it’s a bit difficult to forget. I hope the boys are better in your year, Lys, the Slytherins in ours are just… not nice.”

I snorted. “Next time Malfoy decides to insult me, I’ll tell him that he’s ‘not nice’, just for you, Hermione.”

Ron was suddenly present, looking furious. “Malfoy insulted my baby sister? I’ll kill him.”

“Shut up, Ron, I get him back just as bad. Probably worse. He’s a little prat, but he’s not at my level yet.”

My littlest big brother grumbled. “Stupid Malfoy…” he muttered under his breath, stabbing his potatoes with more force than strictly necessary, “Git… just one good hex… targeting my sister… stupid git…”

I helpfully pointed out, “If you keep using the same insults, they’ll be less effective, Ronniekins.”

“Ronniekins!” the demon twins crowed.

Ron went pink. “Bloody hell, Lyssie, did you have to remind them? I swore, they almost forgot…”

I snickered. “Sorry, Ronniekins.”

“You’re not sorry at all.”

“No, I’m not. Well- Oh, bloody buggering hell, those little gits. I’ll talk to you all later.”

Harry blinked. “Are you alright, Lys?”

I snarled as I extracted myself from the table. “Bloody Slytherin brats. To answer your question, Hermione, the Slytherin boys in my year are squabbling little wankers, and they bully my best mate a lot, and there they go again. Excuse me as I hex them into oblivion.”
Hermione looked horrified. “You’ll get detention!”

“Yes, well, Bastion will help me and then we’ll have detention together so we can plan their downfall.”

The twins laughed.

“Slytherin sounds fun—”

“—why on earth weren’t we Sorted here?”

“To spare Professor Snape the aneurisms.” Percy replied dryly.

“Wha- Bloody hell, Lyssie, what sort of magic do you have that makes Percy joke around you all the time?” Fred called after me.

“It’s called not driving him up the wall, Fred-dear.” I called back, whipping out my wand and going through my mental list of harmless hexes. Lucas Vaisey and the rest of them besides Harper were all gathered around Bastion, which made me suspicious.

In the end, they ended up with boils all over their faces among other things, and Bastion and I got that detention. Snape didn’t look happy about our lack of united front, which was one of his most important rules, so it was three hours of cauldron-scrubbing after classes for us. For whatever reason, Harper — the lovable idiot he was — cheerfully showed up to his dungeon and helped us despite his conspicuous lack of detention, and I suppose by the end of it, Bastion and I were in a good mood. Idiot or not, Harper had an infectious sort of energy, and I appreciated that he thought my brothers were quite interesting and was very confused by Bastion’s slips of French into his speech.

(“I thought you were German, Bastion.” “I am.” “So why’re you speaking French?” “He’s a Fake-French git, don’t worry about it, Harper.” “Weasley, do you want to die?” “So you’re pretending to be French?” “Shut up, Harper.” “Need I remind you three that you are serving a detention?” “I’m not serving a detention, Professor!” “Harper.” “Yes, Weasley?” “Shut up.”)

(We served an extra hour for the next three nights of detention. If I knew detention was this bloody fun, I would’ve had less of a stick up my ass in my last life, honestly. Bastion didn’t share my opinion, however.)

...
Dietrich Bastion walked with his head held high, pride in every edge of his posture. His eyes were bored, grey — ash hair groomed back — even as he limped ever-so-slightly — Vaisey pushed him down the last few steps of the moving staircase — “Freak. What did you come to Hogwarts for? Don’t you bloody Germans have your own schools?” laughed a voice — the dormitories — parchment soggy with ink, he could not salvage it.

“Bastion, really,” said Wilkes — his eyes were narrowed behind his glasses — cruel smile on his lips, in his voice so filled with damning pity — “Why do you even try?”

Bastion was surprised — he didn’t show it. “Why are you sitting next to me, Weasley?”

“Leave, Wilkes.”

“I don’t think I will. I want to know why you’re here, actually.” — grinning, like a skull — white bone and masks and green, green light — dark brown hair hanging down his face — tall and thin and dangerous, Dietrich Bastion knew Wilkes was a threat — “Aren’t you tired of being a freak? You’re bloody weird for how you don’t feel anything.”

“Leave, Wilkes.” — forcefully — anger underneath the blank mask.

Watch their eyes, they show what they are watching. Watch their feet, they show what they are going to do. The man lunged — opponent was ready, spinning around his tackle easily — a traditional martial arts outfit, done in dark blue with a bright yellow belt.

His braid was wrapped around his neck. He breathed, in and out and in and out and in and out — quick sliding feet, bare on the tatami, cross his opponents and push — in and out — they fell hard, and laughed at their defeat. A good sportsman.

“Your win again, my friend! What’s the trick?”

“Watch the eyes and feet.” — “Oh?”

“Do you even feel anything, Bastion?” — laughter — clenched fists, tight enough that the nails were digging into his skin.

“Because I’m horrible at Potions, and I know you aren’t.” — “You don’t know.” — “If those gits stopped chucking things in your cauldron, you would be. Don’t worry, I know the Shield Charm. And the Boil Hex.” — she smiled, laughing — Bastion was perplexed — afraid — “Go away, Weasley.”

She laughed. “Nah, I don’t fancy it.”

He hoped — hands clenched under the table, white knuckles — Wilkes laughing in his face — “You’re gonna be alone for the rest of the year, don’t you know, Bastion?” — dark crimson hair
all messy and wavy, blue eyes blinking up at him. She grinned again — “Come on, Bastion, do me a favor. I’m pants at practical Potions.” — “Don’t drag me down, Weasley.”

Another laugh. “Promise.”

Stop.

I opened my eyes, reaching blindly in the dark for my wand and casting a quick Tempus. Oh, perfect. I love being up at six o’clock in the morning for no fucking reason. I suppose the only upside was the fact that it hadn’t been a nightmare. Just a bunch of random shit, which accounted for most of my Clairvoyant visions.

I smiled to myself, just a little bit. Dreaming of the early days — which weren’t that fucking early, thinking on it — of Dietrich Bastion and Guinevere Weasley, hm? He was really such a distrustful puppy. But no wonder, if that fucking Wilkes messed with him like that. Those were cruel fucking words, for a child.

It was early morning and I wanted to speak to someone, about this; my brothers wouldn’t do — I didn’t want them barreling into my aid, really, it would make me look weak; they were more affective as a threat — and I didn’t want to trouble Luna. Harry and Hermione weren’t that close to me, and the only other friend I had was Alby (just… NO.) and Dietrich Bastion himself.

Well. That left one person, and since it would annoy him and I was currently Occluding, it should be fine.

Tom, do you think I did a good thing?

Good morning to you, too, Guinevere.

Don’t get snarky with me. It’s too early for that, honestly.

If you are referring to Dietrich Bastion, I suppose morally, you ‘did a good thing’.

Do you always mock my colloquialisms?

Yes. I don’t know why you ask about Bastion now. You cannot take your alliance back, unless you wish to destroy the child completely. Which I highly doubt you’d like to do.

I don’t regret helping him. He’s very intelligent, and he amuses me. He’s currently getting Harper on our side — and yes, ‘our’ side. Bastion agreed to be loyal to me for now, though I know he might betray me later, no need to lecture me about that, Tom.

Alliances are more dangerous than anything. They break so easily. You need to make him devoted to you.

I’m not looking to rule over anyone.

Foolish. You’re looking to be free, are you not? The only way to do that is to rule over others.

Are we getting into a philosophical debate at six in the morning?

Perhaps you should think about that next time to prattle to be about your first year dramatics.

Wow. That is possibly the meanest thing you’ve ever said to me. Are you not a morning person? I didn’t even think that you slept.
...I do apologize, Guinevere. I didn’t mean to be rude.

Nah, it’s alright. You’re grouchy in the mornings, I can deal with that. Percy’s like that, too. Shall I talk to you later? You can… sleep or whatever it is you do that’s the equivalent of sleeping.

While I ‘sleep’, I suggest you begin learning how to knock that Vaisey out of authority.

Why thank you, o wise one. I wasn’t thinking about that at all.

Irritating child.

Git-in-a-book.

When I put the quill down, I blinked at myself. Then I laughed nervously. I was suddenly very glad that Voldemort wasn’t in contact with his Horcruxes directly, because otherwise he was going to torture me to death for calling him a git-in-a-book and being generally sassy to him. I mean, it was tempting! Tommy-boy had to be nice to me because he wanted to possess me — not that it was happening, of course — so it was a beautiful opportunity to push his buttons.

In fact, it surprised me that he groused at me today. I was willing to bet it was a slip-up of epic proportions; if it were Ginny, he wouldn’t dare to say anything like that. But I was mature and I often instigated the annoying back-and-forth — witty banter and insults were just so fucking fun — so I suppose eventually he’d mess up. Especially if, apparently, he wasn’t a morning person.

(That was damn hilarious, actually. Who would’ve thought?)

Sighing, I got ready for the day. My uniform was comfortable, if a bit rumpled and big on me. I’m sure I didn’t look like a normal Slytherin, disregarding the entire Weasley thing. My hair was a rugged mess that I usually got done via Fred (tradition since I was ‘an ickle toddler’); I rolled my sleeves up to my elbows, wore leggings under the skirt — it was above my knees and with my paranoia of having short fucking legs carrying over to this life, well… — and didn’t even bother with loafers. Beat-up sneakers, all the way; they used to be white, but Luna and I drew all over them and I eventually just chucked a semi-permanent Stasis Charm on the outermost layers, so, yeah.

Speaking of Luna! I really felt like going to go see her. Ravenclaw was in a tower, I think, and it’s not like there was an infinite number of those laying about. So, halfway to seven in the morning on a Saturday in the middle of September, I was wandering Hogwarts. Tower-to-tower, hands in my pockets. I didn’t stop wandering until I spotted someone.

I was probably getting close, because that person could be no one other than the Grey Lady.

Silvery and translucent, her colors were so faded in my compressed Mage Sight — gave me a headache after a while, but it was early yet — that they were barely there, just quiet, depressed blues. Her dress was torn and dripping with darker silver, no doubt blood, and the robes on top were no better. She was beautiful and tragic, just what I expected from this sort of person.

She noticed me, and we blinked at each other for a few moments.

“I’m looking for Ravenclaw Tower.” I said, deciding that it was too much trouble to pull a Tom Riddle and get on her good side. It’d be difficult, anyway, since she already told Tom all her secrets; she’d be wary of Slytherins now.

The Grey Lady tilted her head to one side, her hair shifting just slightly, and just enough so that I could see the beginnings of a very violent wound on her chest. I focused on her face, though; it
wasn’t as if I didn’t have manners, after all.

“Why seek the seat of knowledge, when you already den in the seat of cunning?”

Ergh. Too poetic for a Saturday morning.

But I smiled a little. “Why restrict students to one characteristic? I can be cunning and knowledgeable, can’t I? Besides, this is a more Hufflepuff situation. I’m looking for my friend, Luna. She’s in Ravenclaw.”

“You will expose the safehaven of all Ravenclaws.”

“Says who?”

“The silver and green you wear, young snake.”

I raised a brow. “Rather rude of you, Grey Lady. Just because I’m a Slytherin doesn’t mean I enjoy cruelty. If I exposed Ravenclaw’s entrance, then my friend would also be in danger. That is something I will avoid.”

“…You are not like other Slytherins.”

“I hope not. Gryffindor-raised, you see? That, and not all Slytherins are the same anyways.” I shrugged. “Will you help me or not? I have all the time in the world to look, I’ll find the right tower eventually.”

She nodded hesitantly. “If you are so dedicated, then who am I to stop you?”

*Only Ravenclaw’s ghost. I guess that doesn’t really matter, though.*

Luckily, the Grey Lady led me to the right tower quietly and without any further need for persuasion. She must’ve been bored. Or maybe my friendship thing actually moved her? Whatever the case, I was at the door. It was nicer than the Slytherin one, which was just an intricate Celtic-esque weaving of serpents around the frame of a mirror. The mirror itself was dusty and disused, stained with age, but if you whispered the password, the glass would slide away. Very different from canon, I think; a lot cooler, for one thing. The Ravenclaw one, on the other hand, was all bronze Baroque work done in eagles and ravens — wow, shocker! — with a dark wood door covered in a very pretty gate with bronze leaves. There was a knocker in the shape of a bird’s head, its eyes closed.

When I approached, the knocker’s eyes opened.

“How far can a fox run into a grove?” a slightly effeminate voice asked musically.

I blinked.

“Oh, goddammit- Wait, that’s not my answer, I assure you. Let me think.” I sighed, crossing my arms. “I forgot about the riddle…” I looked at the eagle, which didn’t seem to be all that sentient, but there were cool colors barely skimming its surface. It was alive, in a way. “Are you allow to let anyone in as long as they answer the riddle?” I asked curiously.

*Ravenclaw is the seat of knowledge, within a school that perpetuates knowledge. We turn away no one who wishes to learn.*

“Oh. So that’s why the Grey Lady was rather nonchalant about leading me here. You ‘Claws
aren’t discriminating at all.”

“We shall take that as a compliment, young snake.”

I grinned. “Can you repeat the riddle?”

“How far can a fox run into a grove?”

Well, it wasn’t an actual distance. That’d be stupid, and very subjective; foxes were presumably a bit different, and it wasn’t like the riddle would give me a question to solve without everything I needed to solve it. So age and health didn’t really factor into the fox. So it didn’t really matter that it was a fox, did it? It was a something running into a grove. Did it matter that it was a grove?

Ergh. Picking apart a riddle for its words. At least I’d be awake after this- Into? Fox and grove are distracting. The word is ‘into’. Hm.

“Halfway. Then he’s running out of the grove again.” I said slowly.

“Well done.”

Heh. Score.

It was a very library-esque common room, with bookcases lining the round walls. Dark blue carpeting was dotted with little pale stars, just like the ceiling. The walls — what wasn’t covered in books — were pale, crowned with white molding. A statue of presumably Rowena Ravenclaw stood on the opposite side of the entrance, two doorways behind her probably leading to the dormitories. It was high-ceilinged and the windows made it bright, and the furniture looked cozy. A perfect reading place. If I didn’t love the cool dark of Slytherin’s dungeons so much, I might be jealous.

“Huh. Nice acoustics.”

“What is a Slytherin doing in here?” someone shrieked.

I looked at an older Ravenclaw girl, dark hair and pale, acne-covered skin and a really outraged look on her face. Her voice annoyed me.

“Taking a stroll, obviously.” I said dryly.

“GET OUT!”

“I find it very telling that both your ghost and your door let me in with minimal questioning but you’re ready to boot me out without any.” Good Lord, that dry, British sarcasm was really catching onto me.

A boy next to her tried to placate her. (They were the only ones down here.) “C’mon, Lizzy, she’s just a firstie. That Weasley Slyth, remember? She’s not doing anything.” He turned to me, putting on a friendly smile. “Roger Davies,” he introduced. “Did you get lost?”

I recognized the name vaguely. “Guinevere Weasley. I was exploring, and when I came across an interesting door that challenged me, I couldn’t very well say no.”

Davies smiled. “Accidental, then?”

I grinned. “Well, I might’ve been looking for my friend Luna Lovegood, but really, it’s not like anyone told me that Ravenclaw’s common room was in a tower.”
Truth. No one told me. I read it, long ago.

“Huh. Odd luck — maybe the Weasley Beltane flower thing. Well, Lizzy here wouldn’t mind going to fetch your… er, friend. Looney?”

“Luna.” I corrected, eyes narrowing.

He nodded. “Yes, Luna. Sorry. Lizzy, please?”

The girl looked petulant. “You’ll leave if I fetch your little friend?”

“Probably.”

“And you won’t tell anyone where our tower is?”

“Probably not.”

Because, honestly, it wouldn’t benefit me to tell anyone where my friend’s dorm was. Luna had a target painted across her back with how people were unnerved by her, and I wasn’t about to give her semi-sanctuary away. Semi, because much of the bullying was internal. I’d fix that up as soon as I established a foothold in Slytherin properly, of course. Luna understood that I would have to work to build myself up there; it was why I didn’t partner with her in the Slyth-Claw classes, since I needed to work with Dietrich Bastion.

Still, though; outside classes, I’d be trying to see her.

Miss Priss left, going through the right-hand staircase, and when she returned a few minutes later, Luna was trailing behind her and I was talking about 3rd year Transfiguration curriculum with Davies. He seemed surprised, whatever-her-name was irritated and sulky, and Luna was just as collectedly calm as always. I brightened at seeing my friend.

“Luna! Want to explore the forest or something?”

She brightened. She loved being outdoors. “Will we search for a Crumple Horned Snorkack?”

I nodded, standing from the extremely comfortable, somewhat Greek-inspired lounges. “If your heart so desires. Maybe we can go see the giant squid or something — we can grab breakfast from the kitchens, of course.”

Davies looked at me dubiously. “You know where the kitchens are?”

I grinned unrepentantly. “I get around.”

Luna all but skipped towards me, and I indulged her cute hand-holding habit as I waved goodbye to a bemused Davies and a scowling side character A. We made a detour to the kitchens, where I taught Luna how to get in and out and also asked her to keep it a secret, which she agreed to easily (“Lots of secrets for the snakes, isn’t it? Especially this year.” — I was half-convinced she had a bit of Seer blood in her, of course). She was happy with some scones and I was pleased with perfectly toasted bread and butter; our compliments to the House Elves were met with embarrassed glee and tearful acceptance. With breakfast in our hands and half in our mouths, we were at the Black Lake by around eight-thirty or so, and after searching for gulping plimpies for a bit, we wandered into the forest.

“I’m glad you came to fetch me today.” Luna said as we trudged through barefoot.
(We ditched our rainbow-marked sneakers at the entrance of the forest which we were technically not allowed into. Which was ridiculous. It was right there. Why wouldn’t you go explore it, right?)

“So am I. I’m sorry we won’t spend lots of time together anymore.”

“It’s alright. You’re going to become the snake queen, aren’t you?”

I laughed. “I don’t want to be the queen. I just don’t want to be attacked all the time. You wouldn’t believe how they show their little insults throughout the day. I think I’ve been snubbed fifteen different times in one passing period.”

Luna looked at me in concern. I waved her off, laughing.

“Are you gathering your knights?” she asked.

“…knights? Do you mean Bastion and Harper?”

“Lieutenants for the queenbee. The cloud has nice ears. There aren’t any wackspurts anymore; there used to be, you know, but they all went away because you make them happy. The little fawn still has lots, though.”

I laughed again. I loved this girl dearly. “We’ll see, Luna.”

She smiled. “It’s okay that you haven’t got lots of time. It’s going to be difficult, I think.”

I nodded, agreeing with that even if I didn’t feel like I understood. “I daresay it will.”

“It’s alright,” she said decisively, nodding to herself. “You’re having fun.”

“Ah, that I am,” I replied, “That I am.”
Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

AGH SORRY! I totally forgot to update yesterday. My bad. On another note, I just finished writing the third arc and am now on break, so perhaps that's why I forgot. Welp. Just yell at me next time if anyone was waiting irritatedly/impatiently.

As always, thanks for checking me out! Enjoy!

... 

“You are an idiot, Harper.”

“What?” said the boy defensively, “Wouldn’t it be wicked, though, Dietrich? You’d charm all the owls with bits of bacon and whatever else, and then they’d all like you! So then maybe they’ll bring you free things!”

“Dead rats and mice.” I interjected from my place curled up on one of the farther couches of the Slytherin common room. The three — I gained a new follower in one Julius Rookwood, a shy boy with really lovely rosewood-colored hair that was longer than mine, he was quite a sweet kid — were seated at the coffee table on the floor, going over homework.

“Exactly,” said my self-appointed right-hand man, “Like cats-”

“Evil little gits, all of them.” I muttered.

“-they will bring presents, but nothing remarkably useful. You’re an idiot, Harper.”

“Gah! Julius, Dietrich’s being mean to me!”

I raised a brow at Bastion, who collapsed in the spot next to me heavily. Harper was bothering Rookwood now, who seemed flustered at the armful of hyperactive he suddenly had. The boy — Harper, that is — was a ball of energy, and it was infectious but tiring at the same time. I removed myself pretty quickly, since it’d be a nice review for Bastion to tutor the others without my input. Said-tutor was rubbing his face in exhausted irritation; amazing, really, how he still managed to school his features into a perpetual poker-face despite the many emotions displayed on his body. It was like he actually had emotions, you idiot bullying fucks! Wow!

(Shit. I was a little bitter, for Bastion’s sake. Heh.)

“And since when do you let Harper call you by first name?” I asked.

The surname thing was a Brit thing, I’m pretty sure. America wasn’t like this. In light of this
Bastion sighed. “The brat needs no permission to do what he wants.”

I snickered. “Well, he got that part of Slytherin down right.”

An amused glint in grey eyes. It was difficult to spot, if you didn’t know Bastion that well. Which was also rather difficult, just because Bastion was very careful and distant when he needed to be. He needed to be a lot.

“The name is open to you as well.” he said so quietly, I almost missed it.

But I didn’t, and I blinked. I looked up from my book (on Warding, interesting shit, that). “I… Are you sure? That’s quite a show of trust.” For a bullied Slytherin.

“I am already your Second,” he said, shrugging. Then he muttered, almost as if he were embarrassed or something, “We are friends, non?”

I grinned widely. “Yeah. We are, Dietrich. Call me Guinevere, then?”

“Guinevere’s a mouthful!” piped up Harper, popping up out of nowhere.

“Call me Gwen and you’re going to have a mouthful of feathers and tar.”

Harper grinned. “So I get to call you that, too?”

I nodded, rolling my eyes. “Yes, yes, we’re all friends. Get back to work, Harper. Julius, would you please make sure he stays on task?”

Rookwood — Julius now, I suppose — nodded. It was a shame he never looked people in the eye; the green wasn’t as unreal as Harry’s, but it was a really lovely jade shade. He’d approached us for help in the theory portion of most classes; his practical knowledge was enviably astounding, but he was pants at theory. So, with just a glance of deliberation, Basti- wait, no, Dietrich and I took him into our tutoring group which was really just a front for our political camp.

Slytherin politics was ridiculously intricate for being composed of children; I suppose it looked worse, though, because Josephine Zabini had a stranglehold on the 5th’s to 7th’s, and it was just the 4th’s through 1st’s that were important to me right now. Malfoy was no doubt making sure people looked down on me, and with how fucking irritating that was and how much I wanted to just fight this stupid brat, I was rather set on at least establishing myself as a powerful neutral entity.

(The entire purpose of my Sorting, after all, was to test myself and offer a refuge for the pureblood neutrals. To carve myself a place here that no one would look down on, that could actually be a powerhouse… that would be ideal, and I needed that done rather soon. As in, by next week or so. Shame I needed more people in my camp to actually be considered a camp.)

Bastio- Dietrich read my thoughts, or so it seemed. “Four is too small.” he muttered.

Might’ve been that I was sending glances towards the center couches, right in front of the main fireplace. Josephine Zabini — who was ostensibly friendly to me, but who I was sure was testing me first to see if I could actually create a place for myself in this House — occupied the favorite seat of the magna potesta (her 5th’s through 7th’s). But the court of the parvus potesta was by the windows, brightly lit and cool and comfortable, and that’s where Malfoy and his camp (Crabbe,
Goyle, little Zabini, Parkinson, Davis, Bulstrode, little Vaisey, Wilkes, little Flint, Rosier, and occasionally Nott and Carrow) liked to haunt when he wasn’t taking the magna place if Josephine Zabini wasn’t there. It was a bold move, honestly, to sit in the place reserved for the magna potesta leader, but it was a statement that I had no doubt would be true.

God, Slytherin politics. Why the fuck did Salazar think dividing his House in two regimes would be conductive to a learning environment? Oh, right, because it was practice for real-world politics later. Amazing, really, how intricate Slytherin was. I hoped that the other Houses were just as crazy on the inside, because otherwise I was going to ask the Hat for a refund.

“You, me, Julius, and Harper, huh? That is a bit… lacking.”

“Harper?”

“He doesn’t feel like a ‘Tristan’, it bothers me.”

Dietrich accepted this rather easily, nodding. “Vaisey will come soon. His letters from home are as close to Howlers as a Slytherin would receive. Paterfamilias Vaisey does not appreciate the near-last ranking he possesses, especially as his brother, Edward-“ He pointed at a bulky probable-Quidditch player lounging off to the side, away from both potestas positions. “-has an acceptably mediocre rank.”

I snickered. Dietrich had a very dry sense of humor, which complemented his deadpan face so well, really. “Who else would we want? Should we stick to our year or spread out?”

“Malfoy controls his year too completely for anything else.”

“Revolutions often start small,” Julius said softly, revealing his shameless eavesdropping.

I raised my brows at the gentle-natured boy. “Oh?”

He nodded, brushing his cherry-brown hair back behind his shoulders. “I’ve seen Vaisey’s letters. His father expects more. Malfoy won’t help, so Vaisey will have to… well, er, go behind his back? Prefect Zabini has completely divided the magna and parvus because she’s still furious that Malfoy bought off her 4th’s.”

“I wondered why it’s called the magna if it only has three yeargroups.” I said, watching Prefect Zabini laugh at someone or other. She reminded me of a large predator; relaxed and friendly, but only because she wasn’t hungry. There was always that element of danger in her eyes, and in the way she smiled too sharply.

Harper piped in, having gotten bored of his homework — no surprise there — already, “I heard about that! Malfoy’s all rich and such, his dad paid off the 4th’s families to make their kids defect to the parvus. Zabini was right pissed off, but she didn’t have any holds in the parvus to do anything.”

Julius nodded. “So none of hers will tutor Vaisey, and none of Malfoy’s either.”

“Why?” Dietrich asked, raising a single brow. “It would be in his best interest.”

“He only wants very smart and powerful people in his inner circle, and all the rest are paid to shut up,” Harper said in a moment of rare wisdom.

‘inner circle’ gave me very bad memories. An itch in my head prodded at my barriers, but I refused it. I didn’t want to see any fucking Death Eater meetings right now, especially not in company that
I didn’t quite trust with that sort of information. But, really, what the *fuck* was wrong with Malfoy? Did he not know what Voldemort’s Inner Circle did?

…Goddammit, I bet he didn’t. Ignorant little shit.

“So Vaisey is ours.” I said, watching the chestnut-haired boy. Then I glanced at Dietrich. “Will you be alright, working with him?”

Dietrich snorted. “No need to *baby* me, Guinevere. It is not *I* who will worry when he defects.”

“What about Wilkes?” asked Julius softly, “He… did very cruel things.”

The others may not have noticed it, but Dietrich’s knuckles whitened, fingers gripping the sides of the couch. He said something or other, probably dismissively, but my protective instincts were snarling inside. He may not have been a true ‘me and mine’ category, Dietrich, but he was helping me plan out my crusade for power, which would make my years in Slytherin a lot more comfortable. Whatever Wilkes said or did, the little shit was going to pay.

Again, Dietrich proved his almost mind-reading skills when he gave me a look. “He is… useful.”

I scowled. “*You* are the Second here. I’ll hex him to pieces if he thinks he can waltz over to my camp and pretend nothing’s wrong.”

There was a satisfied look on Dietrich’s face that he probably thought he was covering up well, but not to my well-trained eyes. “We will see. Wilkes, Flint, and Rosier may very well stay in Malfoy’s good graces.”

I looked at the *parvus potesta*. Malfoy was gesturing wildly, a sneer on his face. I would bet he was mocking Harry Potter or my brothers or me. Maybe all. It made me irritated, seeing a little brat like that. Especially since he resembled his father so much, the fucker that literally haunted my nightmares for years.

“This is going to be a pain.” I sighed.

Dietrich shrugged.

…

Thursday after classes, and I was tired of this passive-aggressive bullshit Ginny was pulling. She could either come up to me and *bloody fight me*, or leave me the *fuck* alone because I was dealing with TOO MUCH SHIT. Slytherin politics, Tom Riddle, my private studies on Warding and Healing and core theory, trying to write to my brothers and parents on a regular basis… I could not add little annoying glares in Potions to that, I really could NOT.

At the same time, though, Ginny didn’t have as much shit going on so my ‘abandoning her’ might’ve been a very impactful thing. She was a child, and I suppose she was entitled to her own little tantrums.

With a sigh, I glanced at Dietrich.

“Better try, Guinevere.” he said quietly, his eyes softened and his slow-pulsing colors
understanding, “Especially here, where Malfoy will give you no grief for it.”

I nodded.

“The Git Lord will probably be wondering where you are if you don’t show up soon, but we’ll cover you, Guinevere.” Harper said cheerfully.

“When did you start calling him that?” asked Julius in horror.

“I heard Harry Potter and Guinevere talking!”

“Where do you have time in between all the tutoring I give you to listen in on private conversations?” Dietrich hissed.

Harper laughed. “It’s not like I don’t run away lots of the time, Dietrich!”

“Harper.”

“Yes, Dietrich?”

“Shut up.”

I rolled my eyes. They were all secretly idiots, I swear. “I’ll help you with Wingardium Leviosa when I get back, which shouldn’t be too long if she’s still mad and won’t be long at all if she’s really mad.” I said, earning some snorts and a laugh from Harper.

I had to run a little to catch her, but it was a secluded hallway and that was good.

“Ginny!”

“Go away!”

Oh boy. Nope, wouldn’t be long at all. I fucked up, big time.

But I had a stubbornness in me — we were twins, after all — and I wanted to get this out of my system before I lost my motivation to end this already. That happened a lot, actually; I’d build and build emotion or will, and then let it flood out when I needed a bit of courage on impulse. Probably why the Hat wanted me for Gryffindor. (This also helped in my early stages of wandless magic practice; building emotion and intent was a fantastic way to start fucking shit up with my lovely indigo core.)

So I cut her off, blocking her way with an outstretched arm, and before she could snarl and push past me I blurted out quickly:

“Look, Ginny. I’m sorry, yeah?” I tried to sound more… apologetic, but the frustration was eating at me. “I know you were excited about the whole ‘being in a dorm together for seven years’. I know you really look up to me and wanted to be able to be all Fred-and-George in Gryffindor. I should’ve said something. I get that. You’re probably going to be right pissed for a while longer—“ and that’s okay, I can deal with that… “—so when you’re less angry with my insensitivity, we can talk like before. I don’t care what the other snakes’ll say, family is family. That’s it.”

And then I spun around and began to walk off.

“Lys!”

A tiny, baby surge of hope, which I proceeded to squash down out of practicality as I turned back
around, having crossed most of the hallway before I heard my twin call out my name again. (I had watched this girl grow up. She used to and still did put flowers in my hair, and held me at night when the nightmares were bad. Of course I was hopeful.)

She looked angry and sad and confused, but mostly she was hurt and lonely. Her colors were a bit wilted, and I made a note to kick Ron’s arse for not looking after our sister better.

“I… I have to think. It might be a while, I’ve never been half as clever as you... but when I’m done thinking, we’ll talk, okay? Before the year’s out.” she said slowly, looking unsure.

(Must’ve been a big thing, a big change, that suddenly the person who you thought would be there forever broke away. I could understand that. That was fine.)

A small smile, and I nodded and headed back down to the Slytherin Commons.

I hoped that Ginny was growing up a little, without me. It took a bit for me to realize that she was a bit of a brat because of me. Canon Ginny had grown up all alone — a girl in a house of boys — and it probably hardened her somehow, strengthened her. But with Guinevere Weasley thrown into the mix… well, it gave her a crutch — one she became far too used to, even if I wasn’t as close to her as I probably should be. Not that I got myself into Slytherin just for her benefit, but it was one of the good points of wearing the green and silver tie.

... 

That being said, though I understand her childish reasoning, it was quite annoying.

I’d imagine so. You’re better off without her, don’t you think? It’s a sort of betrayal, the way I see it... she was supposed to be your twin, the one who understood you the most... and yet she’s turned her back on you just because you understood yourself better.

You’re actually kind of nice, aren’t you, Tom?

When he’s pretending to care, of course. Bloody lying bastard.

Did you ever doubt that I was? I’m hurt, Guinevere.

Ha! And I’m still Pansy Parkinson.

You’re just saying that because I can’t see your actual face. I’d be able to tell if you were really hurt if I were speaking to you in person.

Oh?

Dear Merlin, here was the gamble. It had been a long while since I had the diary, and the bastard wasn’t giving anything away! So I had to give something... something not that important. The Clairvoyance was too powerful, so not that. The reincarnation thing was definitely off the table. Anything to do with Harry or my family would endanger them.

I’d already told him about the first Wizarding War, about Voldemort, about his fall. I didn’t tell him how or why, though, so he wouldn’t even know about Harry Potter. Wouldn’t be interested — that’d keep Harry relatively safe this year. It was peacetime he knew now, so there was really
nothing that would interest him that I was supposed to know but...

It’s a power I have. I can sometimes see what you’re feeling, if it’s an important feeling enough. It’s less emotion and more…

A sense of who they are, perhaps?

That fits it better, yeah. But mostly I see the colors you have, how they move.

Colors? That sounds very interesting. Do the colors do anything, the way they move?

Oh, come now Tom, you get to know everything about me and I barely get anything out of you!

Ah, yes, then… How about a trade? What about a secret for a secret, Guinevere?

That’s right, you tricky bastard. I’m soooo starting to trust a sentient book that wants to know too many things. I’m starting to trust you, so you should start to trust me... or at least, give me more goddamn information.

Real Slytherin of you, Tom. I want a hint of your secret, since you’ve got a hint of mine.

Hm... how about a secret within Hogwarts? A secret buried within since the age of the Founders?

The Chamber of Secrets? Really? Fucking Tom, trying to give me something that won’t help anyone but a psychopathic Parslemouth. The sneaky bastard.

I’d rather pick your mind, actually. How much do you know about warding?

Quite a lot, if Dumbledore’s fucked up hand in the 6th book has to say anything about it. Could be useful, getting him to guide me through my own private studies.

I know quite a bit. Is this your price, Guinevere? Your secret for tutoring in warding?

Funny. You don’t even want to know why I want the warding instead of your secret.

I assume that you value warding above a secret that may or may not be useful to you.

You didn’t hear it, but I actually gasped aloud. You know me so well.

I aim to please.

It’s called Mage Sight, by the way.

Ah. Your secret.

Yes. So I see colors, all over the place. They hum, too. Your colors — the colors of this book — are hard to see, though. Dulled. I’ve been wanting to ask about it; does it mean you’re fading? Can I help?

You’re already helping, Guinevere.

He says as he believes to be sucking away at my life force and magic. I bet he thinks he’s clever, doesn’t he? The Great Hall was clearing out, though, with it almost being time for class — everyone was jittery and excited for Friday. I had DADA with Lockhart, the sparkling menace, which I wasn’t looking forward to... it was honestly more fun tricking a teenage Dark Lord out of information. I might skip. Lots of practicing skipping classes in college, before I died.
Throughout the entire day, however, I spoke to Tom. It reminded me of texting, honestly; like we were two kids sneaking messages in class. And then after, too. I just had to pretend he wasn’t actually present inside his fucking book, and it’d almost be normal.

*Am I actually helping, though? I dunno, I did spill an entire inkwell on you yesterday. Sorry.*

I wasn’t sorry at all. I wanted to see what would happen. It all vanished, and I hoped that the Horcrux was doing the equivalent of drowning in ink.

*No harm done. Malfoy again, I suppose?*

*Yeah, the bloody git. Pushed me. Or his lackey did. We’ve been sniping at each other since day one… speaking of which, Vaisey’s due to approach us any time now. His grades are atrocious and no one else will help him without making him look incredibly stupid to Malfoy. Oh, hold on a sec, Harper needs help with his Levitation Charm.*

*The boy is an idiot. When your followers expand, demote him.*

I rolled my eyes at such a Dark Lord comment — I think he thought I wanted to be a Dark... Lady or something — and stood to walk Harper through what he was doing wrong. Tristan Harper was an idiot, honestly, but he refused to ask for help in class where Flitwick would see; that prideful mask came down when it was just us (Dietrich, me, and Julius), and he suddenly became something reminiscent of a puppy, eagerly watching as I directed his hand and searching for praise when he did something right.

Oh, Harper.

I sighed. “Harper, no. Don’t flick *then* swish.”

“Like this? *Wingardium Leviosa!*”

“No. Harper, you *just* had it a moment ago, why- Dietrich, can you help him?”

“Wha- Why is he ‘Dietrich’ and I’m just *Harper*?”

The boy in question just sighed in his French-accented voice, “Harper, you absolute idiot.”

“I resent that!”

“Maybe if you spend more time watching your wand and less time watching Guinevere *write in her diary*, you’d have it again. You idiot.” replied my stoic friend bluntly, rolling his eyes at the several failed spells.

Harper muttered, “Why is it you’re from Germany but you’ve got a French accent? You Fake French git!”

There was going to be a murder, if Dietrich’s face was any indication. But while those two squabbled like children, Julius and I straightened at someone approaching our usual corner of the common room. The stranger shuffled forward uncharacteristically, one hand on his schoolbag and the other scratching his butterscotch hair. It was almost *sheepish*, the expression on Lucas Vaisey’s face.

(I rather wanted to cackle inwardly.)

*Guess who showed up to the party, Tom?*
Do be nice. It is always easier to gain loyalty if you’re kind to someone downtrodden.

I know that, thanks.

When Lucas Vaisey was right in front of me, I raised a brow. Dietrich was aware of him, but he continued whatever conversation/argument he had with Harper, who was not as aware as the rest of us. Julius looked a bit tense, like he was in fight-or-flight mode. I tried to emulate Prefect Zabini’s relaxed predator thing, tilting my head to one side and smiling sharply, keeping my eyes cold.

“Need something, Vaisey?”

He glanced at Dietrich. Then back to me, meeting my eyes. “Tutoring.”

Though I commended him for the eye contact, I got a little bit irritated at the one-word answer and that dismissive look at my second-in-command. “Funny, Vaisey. Normally, when you do something rather irritating to another, you apologize for it before you beg for their help.”

“I didn’t do a thing to you, Weasley.”

“Mess with my lieutenants, you mess with me. That’s the way it works here, Vaisey.”

Dietrich snapped his face towards me, looking as alarmed as he could without changing his expression too much. This was, quite obviously, not what we’d planned. But I knew that Vaisey was arrogant, and I needed to put him in his place while he remained in this camp. He needed to learn that this was not a free pass to becoming a leader again. He was not good enough for that. The sooner he learned, the sooner I could build him up into a — if not trustworthy — competent lieutenant.

(I was thinking way too fucking hard about these children’s politics, I swear.)

Vaisey looked conflicted, fidgeting in place. Then he turned to Dietrich, and gave a short half-bow. “I’m sorry for the way I treated you, Bastion. Please tutor me.” he said stiffly, but not… well, not exactly petulantly. Not that he meant it completely, but he wasn’t trying to save his dignity at all.

Good.

“We’re working on Charms.” I said curtly, snapping everyone out of their reverie — it wasn’t everyday that you saw a bully apologize to their victim, after all, especially between purebloods here — “Harper’s absolute pants at Wingardium Leviosa, so at least you won’t be the worst here.”

“I resent that, too!”

“Shut up, Harper.” Dietrich sighed.

They went to work, and I grinned. And then there were four. My firsties. My minions-

Whoa, whoa, whoa. The fuck? I’m not a Dark Lord, dammit.

“Wingardium Leviosa!”

“Merlin. He actually got it.”

“Good job, Harper.”

Rolling my eyes as all the boys — Dietrich clapped, though — cheered at Harper’s first success, I settled back into my corner and dipped my quill. As a joke, I’d nicked a few wells of color-
changing ink to blind Tom’s eyes when I spoke to him. He was irritated at first, but I think he gave up. Today’s color was bright magenta.

Poor Harper. If I hadn’t shown up, Malfoy would’ve destroyed him.

The boy’s not even put together in the first place. Did he finally succeed in elementary spell-casting?

He just did... Never mind, the feather shot straight up Vaisey’s nose. I wish I could draw well with ink, I’d show you how utterly stupid they all look, running around with feathers chasing them. I think Harper’s an accidental genius, that’d be a fun spell. Back to warding, though, I’ve got a lot of books that all the greats say to have.

Oh?

Yup. I tricked my friend into getting a Restricted Section pass...

Yes, it was Harry. He asked Lockhart for the required permission form and all that. I actually had to go through Ron to do it, haven’t seen the Trio around much. Too much Slytherin plotting. (I’d have to fix my neglected relationships after I found my feet in this goddamn House; they’d understand, I hoped.) Back to Horcrux trickery.

“Aegis” by Faralda Machvise and “The Beginner’s Guide to Wardworks” by Hestia Jarring, I presume?

I’ve also got “Fortifications of Magic” volumes I-III.

Hm. Well done, Jarring’s book will aid you in the theory of warding, and “Aegis” will show you how to integrate curses and traps into your wards. The Fortifications series is mostly an index of recorded, working wards — possibilities that have been proven, and creative fodder for your own designs.

Excellent, I’ve got the tools at my fingertips, then, yeah? How will we judge that I’ve got the practicals down, then...? Am I going to throw you at my wards?

Don’t be ridiculous, Guinevere.

It’s an honest question! It’s not like you’ll be hurt by that.

Not like I’ll be hurt by being thrown... You threw me, When?

...Don’t worry about it, Tom. Now, wards?

Sometimes, I could almost believe that Tom and I were friends. I think it was my own style of writing cluing him into how to appeal to my modern mind, but he seemed almost casual now. But I shook my head — I wanted the guy’s know-how, not his friendship. Even if it was nice to be able to point out patterns in colors and music of magic to someone who wasn’t Dumbledore.

Alby never made time for me anymore, it was a shame. Must’ve been ‘cos of Harry; the kid would need Dumbledore, that’s for sure.

“Guinevere.”

I looked up to see a frazzled-looking Dietrich. There were feathers in his hair, stuck at odd angles. He looked like he was at the bad end of a pillow fight, and I was proud of the fact that I kept my
“Yes, Dietrich?”

“Harper is an idiot.”

I laughed. Thursdays were good days.

…

“Fred and George, what’re you doing so close to the Slytherin dungeons?” I asked, brow raised.

The demon twins twisted around in surprise, but upon recognizing me grinned and swept me up into individual hugs. I hummed happily, letting George cling onto me casually; I’d daresay that the indigo in his edges was my colors, therefore he’d missed me the most. Him and Percy, I reckon, since their colors were very similar to my own.

Fred ruffled my hair. “Well, well, well-”

“-we just wanted to see our little snake of a sister.”

“Didn’t we, George?”

“That’s right, Fred. So suspicious.”

“Already! A true snake.”

“It brings a tear to my eye.”

I rolled my eyes at them again. “I don’t know how you do it, but stop. I’m getting dizzy.”

George stiffened.

I smacked his arm. “Not a dizzy spell, idiot. Merlin, me. What are you two actually doing down here? I’ve got a House to conquer, you know. Once that’s done, I’ll have more time for your Gryffie tendencies.”

“I’m hurt, Lyssie.” George said dramatically.

“Absolutely hurt.” Fred added in, even more dramatically.

“We just wanted to know if you wanted to play some Weasley Quidditch!” they said together.

“I’m garbage at flying.”

They glanced at each other. I narrowed my eyes. Something about this was strangely familiar, actually… Ah, that was it! I hadn’t seen this sort of behavior and those sorts of expressions since I was, what, four? Five? When the family discovered my Clairvoyance. Fred and George were, for some odd reason, worried for me. And trying to cheer me up.

(Their manipulations worked back then. I was a bit too engrossed in Slytherin to not automatically spot it now, though.)
“What’s wrong?” I asked, arching a brow at them.

Fred blinked, then grinned sheepishly. “It’s right scary, how sharp you are, Lyssiekins.”

George nodded empathetically.

The older twin — which was Fred, by the way — sighed. “Heard you talked with Gin-gin.”

I frowned. “I’m not the one with problems.”

“No, but you’re not exactly comfortable approaching Gryffindor when she’s making it difficult, are you? Haven’t seen you about much, you know.” George pointed out rather accurately.

Oh. Hm. I didn’t think they’d notice, honestly. Canonically, I didn’t really think the Weasley siblings were all that… close? In the books, at least, Fred and George never really hung around Ron that much. And Percy was so isolated, he actually pretty much disowned himself. Even Ginny was a bit of an absent character, despite her marriage to Harry Potter later on. I sighed to myself; I still kept acting on what I knew, and not that I observed. Silly Lys.

“Sorry,” I muttered, “but, really, I’ve been… struggling.”

The demon twins’ eyes sharpened. (Sometimes, I thought they were probably considered Slytherins; with how utterly sneaky they were, along with how bloody intelligent they could be, it was a surprise that their ties didn’t match my silver-and-green one…)

“It is that Malfoy brat?” George said quietly.

“We can get him for you, Lyssie,” Fred added viciously, “No one bullies our baby sister without answering for it…”

(May I just point out that it was weird as fuck to see the eternally cheerful demon twins being all serious and shit? It’s probably because of remnants of my first world, but it was… strange. And comforting.)

I grinned at them. “I’m taking care of it. It’s why I’ve been absent recently. But yeah, I’ll come with and watch you all fly for a bit. I’ve got nothing else to do, really.” Just meditating, but honestly, I can do that later.

The twins beamed, and both slung an arm around my opposite shoulders.

“The whole Gryffindor Quidditch team is playing.” Fred remarked casually.

“Along with Ronniekins, of course.” George added.

I smiled. “I’m convinced, I’m convinced. Should we-” I blinked. A thought occurred to me suddenly, actually. “Can I bring some of mine along?”

“Luna?”

“She means snakes, Fred, you idiot.”

“Ohhhhh. You want to bring some ickle snakes into the fold? Will Mum be knitting sweaters for your ickle friends?”

But where Fred teased, George actually looked a tad concerned. “Yours, Lyssie? Are they??”
Me and mine, it was one of my... catchphrases? Verbal ticks? Mental ticks? Whatever the case, my family — mine — knew about my tendency to... be protective. Or possessive. Whichever it is, they knew that I called those that I would defend with every vicious bone in my body ‘me and mine’. That circle only extended to my immediate family, Luna, and — very tentatively — Harry Potter and Hermione Granger at the moment.

I rolled my eyes. “They’re not... like that. They still call me Guinevere.”

“Oh. Good.” George sighed.

And then was promptly slapped in the back of the head by Fred. “No, not good! Our Lyssiekins is all alone in the house of sneaky buggers!”

George blinked. “Not good. Merlin, Lyssie, but you want to bring them...?”

I wanted to hit my head against the walls, but I didn’t think Hogwarts would like that. Instead, I gave another sigh. “They’re not me and mine, but they’re my responsibility. Slytherin politics and all. They’re my... supporters.”

“Minions.” George concluded very astutely.

I smirked. “They’re my firsties, how about that? I help them academically and whatever, and they watch my back so I can kick Malfoy’s arse.”

Fred laughed, ruffling my hair. “You sound like you’re having fun, ickle Lyssiekins.”

I smiled. “I like my House.”

“Too bad your Head of House is a slimy git.”

At that, I had to glare. “Snape’s perfectly nice.”

George gagged into his hands and Fred gave me a disgusted look. “You say that because he favors Slytherin.”

“Of course I do. What else would you expect from a snake?”

“Speaking of, are you going to show us the way to the common rooms?”

“No, actually, I’ll be going to fetch my firsties — Merlin knows Harper and Vaisey are bored of homework already — and you two will be going to the pitch. The day you get into the Slytherin common rooms is the day the world ends, demon twins.”

“You’re no fun.”

“Au contraire, I am very fun. Or didn’t you see what I did to those ‘Claws who thought it’d be a good idea to hide Luna’s shoes?”

“Merlin, that was you???”

I’d forgotten how much I loved my family. I think I did that a lot; not forget about them, but just get lost in the here and now, and forget about everything else. I grew obsessed with things, I couldn’t stop myself from it. Right now, my mission was Slytherin-domination and power-grabbing, so that I could influence decisions and protect my family that way. A bit round about, but that’s the idea; one that I probably distracted myself from, in trying to get to that power in itself.
I smiled, sandwiched between Fred and George. Yes, I’d forgotten how much I loved them, even if I hadn’t forgotten that I was going to do everything I could to protect them. It was a good thing they were all so skilled at reminding me. (As if it was skill. Who wouldn’t love the demon twins and an overly-concerned-but-trying-not-to-be Percy and Ron?)

…

Tuesdays were absolute hells on earth.

“Shit, shit, shit, shit, shit!” I muttered, upending everything in my dorm room.

Gone.

The diary was fucking gone.

Tom was gone, and this was very, very bad.

“BLOODY HELL!” I finally shouted, exhausted from making a mess of my dorm.

Who stole it? I always had it in my pockets or sitting on my desk, in my dorm — my dorm where it was just ME, ALONE. I didn’t have fucking roommates that I could blame, only the entire female population of Slytherin. Every single girl in Slytherin, most of which I was not allied with, since I was the only bleeding FEMALE in my entire YEAR. ALSO, how the bleeding fuck did they get past my wards??

Granted, they were beginner’s wards — the most punishment you’d get from them was a very strong Stinging Hex (or several) — but I had an alert on one of the layers (Thanks, Tom.) and I should’ve been informed of an entry.

Fuck!

Tom was a goddamn menace! He was charismatic, manipulative, and whoever had him now was probably going to die. It didn’t matter that he only had a little less than a month to get into their head; he’d probably fucking do it, the charismatic fucker. He knows how Slytherin works, he knows how children in Slytherin work; he can trick them so much more easily than me, just by offering secrets and quietly siphoning their trust and life force.

And I know I said I wouldn’t take needless responsibility for things, but that death would be on my head. All because I put the diary down for a second to talk to Alby about something and I didn’t want him to sense the Horcrux in my damn pocket! Bloody buggering fuck, Tom was going to kill someone because I was playing games.

If this was Fate’s middle finger to my plans and Ginny was going to almost-die, I was going to kill something.

Really.

“Okay, okay, okay. Let’s think for a moment, shall we?” I muttered to myself, sitting in the mess of my room.

Not a boy — they can’t get in here. Sevenths and Sixths and Fifths are strictly out of parvus potesta
issues, and Prefect Zabini wouldn’t be so petty anyways, not to a neutral and unknown entity like me. 4th’s are honestly too chicken-shit to do anything right now, they’re currently the bone in a game of tug-of-war between the potesta leaders. Thirds? Not really likely, but perhaps… Malfoy’s court… Pansy FUCKING Parkinson!

That stupid bitch. If Tom took her soul she might deserve it, the simpering little pug-faced-

“Calm down, Lys!” I hissed at myself, “She’s twelve, not a monster…”

Okay.

Okay okay okay.

So I’d check the third and fourth-years first- No, I’d ask Prefect Zabini- NO, Parkinson first. Any of the second-years first, actually. If it was some sort of bullshit test from the Thirds, I wouldn’t get a straight answer from them. Prefect Zabini would ask for something in turn, and I’d be less respected for running to an authority figure first. No, I’d have to trudge on alone for a bit.

I was okay. As long as Halloween passed without incident — fucking writing on the wall and all that shit — all was well.

But first.

“Reparo! Scourgify! Scourgify! Stuosa! Ordina!”

There. Room nice and neat again, though a little clumsily made. Ah, well, quick work was sloppy work. (Oh Merlin, Dietrich’s tutoring is even drilling itself into my mind…)

I strode down to the common room, and the room’s eyes turned to look at me. I was a social pariah, after all; bloodtraiter and all that. There wasn’t a day past when someone would make snide remarks at me in the hallways or the common room, when I didn’t find some sort of stupid graffiti on my door, when my things weren’t just a bit pranked; one of the only reasons I didn’t really care was that I knew how to avoid it, with years of experience with the demon twins. (That, plus these were little babies trying to bully me. Babies making me into a pariah, what a laugh.)

But more than that, people were looking at me because I was fucking furious and my indigo magic was rolling with irritation — I was too angry to feel the impending Mage Sight headache — seeping into every corner of the room with predatory grace, silver threads crackling.

My firsties were in their corner, and as I nodded to them, Dietrich’s eyes flashed. The kid had fantastic instincts, because his cobalt-and-grey magic stirred in interest and inquiry, twisting in with my own colors curiously; he knew something was wrong and was ready to back me up. The other three (Harper, Julius, Vaisey — the child apparently figured out that there was no turning back after coming to us, heh) followed his lead, and nearly as one, they turned to the small group of second-years taking up a few leather couches when my own eyes narrowed at them.

The Thirds and Fourths stood back in interest, but Prefect Zabini’s lot were tensing; the dark-haired Prefect herself looked at me and my quarry and a feline leer spread across her pretty features; her crimson magic was excited at the prospect of — finally — a direct confrontation between two warring parvus potesta powers of Slytherin.

“Parkinson.” I near-purred as I reached the second-year circle.

The girl stiffened and hid herself behind her dark, dry hair; she clutched onto Malfoy and whimpered, just a little bit. Henchman no. 1 and 2 (Crabbe and Goyle) stood and sneered at me, but
a vicious glare and a wand in my hand — it was hissing with my anger — deterred them... they retreated to back Malfoy, who glowered at me.

“What do you want, Weasley?” he spat.

I humored him with a cursory glance. “Nothing of yours, Malfoy, thank Merlin. My business is with your girlfriend there, and the... marks on her face.”

Parkinson finally faced me, and her hair fell back to reveal red, painful-looking lines across her cheeks — trailing up to her forehead and eyes. She had been crying recently, and I reveled in it because now I knew for certain the dumb child stole from me, which was more dangerous than she or anyone else realized.

“You filthy little bloodtraitor-”

“Quiet while the grown ups are talking, Malfoy.” I snarled. Then to Parkinson, “If you do not return what you stole from within my rooms and wards, I will crush you like an insect, little girl.”

“I did no such thing- And you’re the first-year here, bloodtraitor.”

My indigo-silver snarled, its song rumbling, and my wand spit out angry sparks; I breathed deeply, trying to keep cool despite the fact that I was pissed, scared, and about to have another vision at the most inopportune time. If my Occlumency weren’t so locked onto my Clairvoyance, I’d be spacing out about now.

Dietrich near-silently slipped behind me, to my right, and Harper flanked my left.

(I smiled inwardly; would it be shitty of me to say that I’d trained them well?)

Outwardly, my face was a mask of cold fury and I almost smirked at the fear in Parkinson’s pathetic salmon-colored magic.

“I dearly hope you don’t think you can match me, Parkinson.”

“It’s hard to stoop that low, Weasley, so I think you’ve got nothing to worry about.” snapped Malfoy; I turned my gaze on him.

“I have no quarrel with you, Malfoy.” I said, icily polite, “All I want is what Parkinson stole from my rooms — don’t claim innocence again, Parkinson, because I warded my rooms with overpowered Stinging Hexes, so the proof is in your miserable face.”

Her face turned ugly and I realized she was attempting to scowl. “I heard your fat mother tried to have your magic bound, Weasley.” she sneered, “But your pathetic father got you out of it. Pretty sad, don’t you think, that he was proven wrong?”

There was a booming silence, and the entire House seemed to hold its breath at once.

*You should’ve had your magic bound.*

One of the gravest fucking insults in the world, and the entire Slytherin House knew it.

“I will enjoy watching you flounder your way through a duel, Parkinson.” I said primly; the insult didn’t affect me as much due to my first upbringing as a Muggle, so I was cool-headed. “The Dueling Corridor, midnight tonight. Dietrich-”

“I am your Second, Guinevere.” he replied immediately, looking angrier than I’d ever seen him.
My entire group looked angry, come to think of it, and that was weird because Rookwood was usually too shy to be angry. And Vaisey… well, he’d only realized a few days ago that he was stuck with us, so he must’ve just been disgusted that someone said something like that. Magical bindings were a serious insult, after all.

Perhaps one day I’d thank Parkinson for this.

She straightened, turning to Draco-

But he glared at her, grey eyes narrowed in disapproval. There was a jolt in her magic, a deep hurt that almost made me pity her, and she looked to Tracey Davis instead, who nodded quickly.

“I’ll be your Second, Pansy.” she murmured.

Straightening my tie, I nodded and held out my hand to shake. She took it, stepping out of her comfortable circle of 2nd years, and I took the opportunity to hiss to her quietly, “Do not write in it, or I will set your fucking owl on fire. And you will watch its blood as it boils.”

(I wasn’t even that bothered that I threatened to kill an animal in front of a child. I probably should’ve, since that was quite obviously the sign of a budding sociopath or something. Good thing I was already grown-up… right?)

There, that struck the fear of me into her.

Good.

I turned around and stepped away in one fluid movement, and was fucking proud to see my first-years gracefully follow. There was an empty classroom a few turns away from Snape’s office and near enough to the abandoned corridor all Slytherins dubbed ‘The Dueling Corridor’ for me to practice. I’d have to practice with all of them; Dietrich for his spell repertoire, Harper for his creativity and strange luck, Vaisey for his solid defense and strategy, and Julius for his agility and quick feet.

As we walked, Dietrich muttered, “You’re going to win. The girl was trembling as we left.”

I smiled. “If this doesn’t gather us respect, I think I’ll set the common room on fire.”

Harper laughed. “Snape would kill you, Guinevere!”

“Wouldn’t dare. My father is a force to be reckoned with when pissed.”

Vaisey raised a brow. “I’ve always heard about your mother’s temper, actually.”

I gave him a sanguine grin. “We Weasleys are all cowed by our mother, sure, but if our father was angry… Let’s just say that Europe would burn to the ground.” I turned to Dietrich, who looked very impressed — for him, anyways. “I inherited that from him, actually.”

“I’d suggest against murder by immolation.” he said, “I do not think it would be conductive to our power play.”

“Ah, you ruin all the fun. Shall we duel, boys?”
Hello! As always, thank you to old readers and especially those who bookmarked/kudos/commented! This here duel is pretty short, seeing as they're all younglings, but I hope you have fun reading it anyways. Lyssie gets very playful and sassy here, for some reason. Welp. Enjoy!

Several feet away stood Pansy Parkinson, and even from here I could see that she thought this would be easy. Don’t know why, of course; the girl was trembling in fear last time we saw each other. Perhaps Malfoy gave her a courage-building kiss...

Ew. Pansy Parkinson kissing anything made me want to hurl.

(Jesus, I was so much meaner in this life. Must be the Malfoy-influence. Or maybe I was always fucking mean, but now I had the eloquence to put words to it. Huh. Maybe it was the whole ‘being a kid again’ thing. I was a rude-ass kid, first time around.)

We bowed, and she slighted me with just a presumptuous, shallow nod. I could hear Harper whispering furiously at the sight, probably to a sympathetically nodding Julius. The second-year Slytherins (Malfoy, Crabbe and Goyle, Davis, Bulstrode) were snickering. All other spectators — which was literally everyone in the Slytherin House — watched stoically, though I noticed there was an odd tension between second-year Blaise Zabini and his prefect cousin...

Hm. Little Zabini, I had assumed, backed Malfoy; but he was standing with the more neutral Theodore Nott and Daphne Greengrass, looking to be at odds with Josephine... Ah, no I see. He did back Malfoy, but his older cousin had forced him to stay neutral for the duel because Prefect Zabini had no doubt I would win. (I mean, if one can almost make one’s opponent pee by shaking their hand, there’s a good chance one will win.) If Zabini were seen on Parkinson’s side, he’d take a hit...

Nice of her to look out for her little cousin.

Because I was going to win, and I didn’t need my damn Sight to know that. It was almost sad, because this was technically a duel between a 30-year-old and a 12-year-old. I was much more collected than she would be, though her spell knowledge might outclass mine; she’s old, pureblood money, after all...

“Begin.” Josephine Zabini called calmly; and she didn’t even flinch when the first spell was screeched out.
“Incendio!”

Ah, fire. Cute. Must’ve remembered my threat to her precious owl.

I side-stepped with grace, though my heart with pounding with adrenaline and I’d never been in a fight in my life. Either lives, really. Verbal spars were one thing — fun — but dueling was a bit...

*More fun.*

A grin threatened to distract me; I hoped it was as frightening as Zabini’s.

“*Expelliarmus!*” Parkinson screamed again.

I laughed as I spun out of the way on my heel, wondering if I were a little too Dark (for Alby’s tastes) because I was enjoying her face twisting into desperation. Silly, really; for all she knew, I was a first year with an arsenal of first year spells. Perhaps the fact that I looked very, *very* condescendingly amused at her efforts was making her doubt herself.

As was the goal, y’know?

“*Immobulus!*”

Really? The *Freezing* Charm?

I ducked under the spell and called out mockingly, “I thought you were a pureblood witch, Parkinson, shouldn’t you know more spells than you have brain cells?”

*God, I’m so clever in this life, it’s fucking BEAUTIFUL.*

A scream of rage and my spidy-senses were *tingling.*

“*Protego. Protego. Protego.*” I cast in rapid succession, my indigo-silver *purring* with satisfaction; it was meant to be used to help me, it had felt trapped when I was angry and scared and I wouldn’t let it out, with visions and nightmares. Now it was set free.

Her spells bounced off my shields and she gaped, and that’s when I moved.

“*Expelliarmus! Flipendo! Rictumsempra!*” I cast slowly at her legs, trying to tie her up. It worked, and she was still for a moment, trying to regain some balance. “*Furnunculus.*” I hissed with glee, watching as she screamed and painful boils sprouted all over her body.

She stumbled towards me (“*EVERTE STATUM!*”).

I dodged and cast. “*Impedimental!*”

She managed not to trip and screamed out, “*Locomotor Mortis!*”

It *reeked* of desperation. I almost wanted to let it hit me, see how weak it was, but it would be better if I didn’t take a hit at all... I wanted to cripple fucking Malfoy’s reputation, after all, and Parkinson had given me an opportunity to do so in one swift motion. Or, at least, get others to look at me with something more than the ‘Ew-it’s-the-bloodtraitor-shall-we-wrinkle-our-noses-and-plan-needless-revenge?’ sorts of glances I was used to (ignoring).

“Oh, you’re not even making this fun.” I muttered under my breath, jumping over the curse and shouting out, “*Incarcerous, dammit.*”
Ropes shot out of my wand and tied her legs together, and I didn’t even need to use the Disarming Charm because she dropped her wand and it rolled off to the side. I looked at Zabini, but she shrugged — Pansy was neither unconscious nor dead, so she needed to yield herself — and I walked forward, feeling eyes on me as I did.

“Yield, for Merlin’s sake, Parkinson.” I said, rolling my eyes.

She hissed at me, “Not to a Weasley! Your kind’s worse than Mudbloods!”

I frowned. (Since Hermione was my friend and future sister-in-law, I didn’t like the word.)

“I mean I knew you weren’t smart, but really? Will you yield if I break your legs?”

“You don’t know the curse for that, bloodtraitor!” she yelled, her eyes wild.

I shrugged. “No, I don’t.” (relief in her eyes, her weak, exhausted magic sagged with it) “However, your legs are currently tied down. Want to bet they’ll break if I mutter a little Tarantallegra right now?”

A shiver passed through the entire Slytherin student body. I saw Zabini’s eyes gleam when I glanced back at her, and I knew she wouldn’t stop me if I followed through. Parkinson apparently saw the same and she flinched away from me as my eyes turned back to her. I was almost surprised that no one looked all that horrified at the fact that I was going to break a girl’s legs; then again, the magical world seemed to shrug off such injuries, as there were potions to right little things like broken bones in a heartbeat. The spoiled little fuckers.

“Don’t! Please- I yield.” she whimpered.

With a smile, I looked to Zabini. She grinned at me. (Was she some sort of vampire or something? It was the scariest smile I’ve ever seen on a human, really… it wasn’t natural. I could see why she was a queen of Slytherin.)

“The duel goes to Guinevere Weasley.” she announced properly, though unnecessarily.

My firsties whooped and I could see a collective agreement pass through the 3rd’s and 4th’s; the upper years cleared out with many impressed congratulations called to me, which I gave nods and polite smiles back to. I locked eyes with the representatives of the three’s and four’s for a few seconds each, and they nodded to me respectfully. They wouldn’t be treating me like garbage anymore, at least, after this. To do so would just be… stupid, honestly. I’d fired off spells from their year. Obviously I was more threatening than they thought, so they should be very careful.

With that high note, the Slytherins cleared out and suddenly I was facing Malfoy’s little parvus potesta with my firsties — Vaisey, Harper, Julius, Dietrich — at my back, all of them looking rather smug (even though Dietrich still had that poker face, I could tell).

Parkinson was being fawned over by Davis and Bulstrode, Malfoy standing behind with Crabbe and Goyle. Wilkes, Rosier, Carrow, and Flint were eyeing me contemplatively; Wilkes especially was observing me, and as creepy as his stare was, there was a pure note of curiosity in his slow-pulsing, very Dark colors. I waited until Parkinson looked at me, and felt only a little bad when I saw fear in her eyes.

“Where is my diary, Parkinson?” I asked quietly, dangerously.

“Don’t lie.” Dietrich said suddenly, probably feeling empowered by the result of the duel, “We will know.”
Parkinson just shivered. She was crying, and I felt a bit more bad about that... I felt like a bully, a 30-year-old bullying at 12-year-old. She sniveled, “I-I don’t have it anymore! I got rid of it — I didn’t write in it, honest — but I s-saw you with it all the time and thought it would hurt you if I th-throw it away! It’s gone, I dumped it in the Black Lake!”

I closed my eyes. That wouldn’t destroy him.

Then I nodded. “That’s all I wanted to know, Parkinson. We could’ve avoided all this if you’d just told me while I was asking politely. Solutus.”

The ropes slackened — something the second years had been trying to get them to do unsuccessfully — and I walked away with my friends. I didn’t look back, my jaw tight and my grip around my wand a little painful.

“That was nice of you.” commented Julius as we walked quietly back to the dungeons.

Vaisey was a bit more malicious, however. “I wouldn’t have freed her. She’s a stupid cow.”

I rolled my eyes. “True, but rude. We’ve defeated them, no need to insult further.”

Dietrich raised a brow. “I thought you hated them.”

Hate. A Dark emotion, toying with Madness. An emotion that led Tom down the path of Voldemort. I shook my head. “That’s too strong a word for me. I exaggerate, I guess, but I don’t really hate them. I don’t want to become them.” I don’t want to become HIM, when it would be so easy to...

Julius patted my arm. “We won’t.”

Entering the Slytherin dungeons, I separated from them and headed towards the left fork, to my dorm... I’d have to organize everything the way I wanted it to, and I’d have to redo my wards. Then I’d plan out how I was going to find the damn diary — Stupid Tom, you stupid fuck — in the lake before this shit became more dangerous than it already was...

But a thought entered my head, and I paused before I left them.

“Thanks for helping me practice.”

They all halted a little. Dietrich gave a nod, one that meant he wouldn’t have NOT helped. He might have a bit too strong of a poker face and he might like going off alone all the time, that boy, but he was a loyal one. Practice-dueling Dietrich had been fun, because the kid was nearly on third-year material and he was smart; he knew how to trick me, and used just the right order of spells to fuck with your pace.

Harper, for his part, grinned and laughed. Harper might not have been the sharpest tool in the shed, or have the most spells memorized, but what he did have, he used creatively; it was him who gave me the idea to use elementary spells to break Parkinson’s legs. It’s not like he’d ever use such a combination, or do that much harm to someone with as little reason as I did — the insult kinda didn’t matter as much to me, who was a Muggle once, as it did to others — but still. Frightening mind, Harper.

Julius was a ridiculous monster of dueling; the perfect combination of speed, strength, observation, defense, attack, you name it. He was so well-versed in battle, and knew all these strategies that dueling masters used. Very deceptively strong, this one. When I looked at him in gratitude, he flushed a little — Adorable! — and nodded.
Vaisey, though. Vaisey had only been with us a bit, but I think ever since I dragged them all to play Quidditch with my family, Vaisey was a lot friendlier; Quidditch-nut, of course. But he knew the customs of dueling, and he had raw power behind his spells that forced me to learn how to damn-well dodge, because otherwise his fucking spells were gonna wreck me and my shields. He was a more physical dueler, less reliant on spellfire, and that is what made him a dangerous and unpredictable opponent. And he looked nervous as I thanked them all. As if he wasn’t sure if he quite belonged here.

I grinned at him, at Vaisey.

“You can call me Guinevere, I think.”

Vaisey’s eyes, an odd hazel-blue, seemed to light up with hope. “Really?”

I didn’t miss the fact that he glanced at Dietrich after smiling at me. Dietrich’s slate eyes flickered towards Vaisey, then locked on to me. A small, curt nod and a warmer expression later, and I smiled again at Vaisey.

“Yeah. I guess I’ll call you Lucas?” When his colors shrank a little at that, I shook my head. “No, I think I’ll call you… Lu.”

“Wha- But that’s a girl’s name!”

“Too bad. And Julius is Jay now.” Because I didn’t miss how Julius flinched at his name, either, though it took me until now to really zero in on it.

Julius, rather than protesting, nodded acceptingly. “I’m alright with that.”

“You would be, your name’s not girlish even if the rest of you is!” Vaisey—Lu argued.

A month ago, that would’ve made Juliu—Jay flinch and flush in embarrassment. (There was no arguing those delicate features and that rosewood-colored hair that went down to mid-back, after all.) And Lu would’ve had a nasty sneer on his face, and some boys behind him backing his stupid insults. But Lu was grinning good-naturedly now, and Julius smiled a little as Harper beamed and Dietrich rolled his eyes fondly.

“Well, that’s that. Lu and Jay and Dietrich and Harper—” I, again, ignored Harper’s protests at his last name rather than his given one; he just didn’t feel like a Tristan, dammit! “—good night. Tomorrow will be much better, with all the respect we’ve gathered from tonight.” I said, waving. They seemed to light up at the reminder. I laughed inwardly at their very pleased faces. When they joined my camp, I don’t think any of them knew — besides Dietrich — just how isolated I was. (I mean, why else would I be talking to Tom nonstop, if I had really no one else?) It wasn’t outright bullying, it was just… sneering remarks, judging glances, smirks when I did wrong, ignorance when I did right; all the things that made up a pariah. But that would cease now — at least, the negative stuff would — because I’d just declared that I was powerful and ambitious and I would be better than them, so they should be lining up for my favor. Or they should think about it.

I really was the leader, wasn’t I? Everyone would treat my firsties as they would me.

“G’night, Guinevere!” Harper chirped, leading the onslaught of polite goodbyes.

“Good night.”

“Thanks for the girly name, Guinevere. ‘Night.”
“Good night, my friend.”

That last one was Dietrich. He only called me that when he was very happy. It had me grinning into my pillow as I went to sleep, and I was able to forget that the diary was missing and I’d have to look for it tomorrow.

As it happened, the sneering stopped. In the place of sly smirks (when they pranked me) and cold glances (when they thought ’Bloodtraitor’ in their heads) were considering looks, neutral observations, even the rare nod of greeting. In Prefect Zabini’s case, she actually outright smiled at me and we got to chatting about fifth-year curriculum. Of course, Malfoy and his camp seemed even more pissed at me than usual; but that might’ve been because they were shown to be so much weaker, especially weaker than a bloodtraitor first-year.

Pathetic, really; or so the rest of Slytherin was thinking.

(Pansy Parkinson was still in the camp, but even I could tell she was being treated frigidly.)

So the next day was a major success, and my camp — starved of the respect they’d had before they threw their lot in with me for the sake of their academic success and now, hopefully, at least pleasant companionship — were reveling in it. In Dietrich’s case, he seemed to just be moving up in the world; elevated from the bullied foreigner kid to the friend of the oddly intelligent bloodtraitor to the second-in-command of a rising parvus potesta powerhouse.

Politics, honestly.

(Times like these, I really missed Tom for some reason. I’d be able to complain about the politicalness of the House but also brag about my work, but also laugh at just how silly it was that we were all children… Maybe I just missed someone I could bounce ideas off of properly, as we were more alike in mental age than, say, me and Dietrich.)

“Hello, Luna!” I said cheerfully; it was Herbology in the greenhouses, Luna and Dietrich and I were the usual three-group. “You’ll never guess what I did last night- wait, no, you probably will.”

I swear to Merlin, she’s got Seer-blood.

Luna gave me a tranquil smile. “Something that makes others fear you?”

I blinked. “Merlin, Luna, you make me sound like an aspiring Dark Lord.”

“Are you not?” Dietrich muttered under his breath.

I glared at him. “Not funny, prat.” Seriously; I did not want to be a Dark Lord. I consorted with the son of a bitch waaaaay too much as it is already!

We got to working on our Spiky Bushes and Luna giggled.

“You’ve found a painting to brush your colors on.” she said, her voice a little sad.

I was immediately alert, and grabbed Luna’s hand. “We’re still fairiefiddles together, Luna — just because I’ve found some boys without too many nargles doesn’t mean we aren’t still friends. As
soon as I topple Malfoy, we’ll go back to running around the woods together and such.”

Lu, next to us and having switched groups with a rather relived ‘Puff, made a retching noise.

I heard Harper mutter about ‘gross girl things,’ too, right before somehow dropping dirt all over a protesting Lu and a quietly resigned Jay.

Luna giggled at my glares towards the both of them, then raised her pale brows in pleasant surprised. “Oh! You’ve become the alpha of your swarm! Does this mean you’ve found an Umgubular Slashkilter for the pale lordling? He’s probably infected now, the poor thing…”

“Infected? With that? Who’s infected?” Harper chirped, not even slightly abashed at his obvious eavesdropping. I rolled my eyes at him, giving up. The kid was a fucking idiot, honestly. But a lovable one. And a strangely creative dueler.

“Loser’s Lurgy,” Luna explained serenely, “The boy. The pale boy. He might be a moon frog ancestor, now that I think of it.”

“Malfoy,” I clarified to Harper, wincing at the Spiky Bush stabbed at my forefinger and middle finger. I yelped and shoved those fingers, bleeding profusely, in my mouth, grimacing at the taste of dirt and-

“You forgot your gloves, Guinevere.” Vais-Luca-LU called out unhelpfully.

(He just wanted to use my new name; he was way too proud that he’d gotten its usage recently.)

“I think I’ve just poisoned myself.” I murmured, chewing lightly on my digits.

Dietrich’s eyes widened. “Lemon and—"

“Iron? Yeah. The bloody bush stabbed me with it’s poisonous barb, and I just swallowed it. I’m an idiot, I know.”

Lu offered to walk me to the Hospital Wing — the bastard just wanted to get out of Herbology, since he hated it — but I declined and made the climb back to the castle myself. Professor Spout had looked at me in bewilderment, probably surprised that I’d made such an uncharacteristic mistake (Seeing made a perfectionist out of me), but sent me out with her bubbly blessing. I savored the coolness of October on my skin, though I wrinkled my nose at the smell of coming rain, and I was sat down in a hospital bed quickly enough.

Madam Pomfrey had me drink a minor antivenin (“What were you thinking, trying to handle dangerous plants without gloves!”) and I experienced fear of a hospital nurse as she forced me to lay down and let the antivenin potion run its course. Honestly, the Spiky Bush poison was minor — the most I’d get was rashes in uncomfortable places — but I enjoyed a moment of mindless staring at the ceiling, marveling at the fact that I’d been longing for this castle since I was eleven, a lifetime ago.

Nearly thirty years ago, now.

Strange. I should probably be missing my other family, but for some reason, I can’t bring myself to...

It was heartless of me, maybe. But none of them had been crushed by metal and leather and asphalt, they hadn’t bled out slowly holding someone else’s cold hands... they’d be perfectly fine as soon as they accepted my tragic and accidental death. Maybe pissed at drunk drivers everywhere
for killing their daughter/sister, but... well, they were alive. They could move on. And at the end of it all, we’d meet again. My college debt wasn’t even that bad, with all the fucking scholarships and shit I’d snatched up. Maybe insurance or something could cover that.

I left my family in a time of peace and modern technology; we would meet again. (That’s why I wasn’t sad for them.) Then I was born into a family of magic and love; despite the war, there were plenty of reasons to love this world. (That’s why I wasn’t sad for me.)

“LYSSIE!”

I jolted up, looking around in a panic. “What!? What, who-”

Percy was standing in front of me, red-faced and out of breath, and I hurriedly passed him my glass of water. Chest still heaving (he wasn’t used to exercise, being the bookish one), he collapsed into the chair beside the bed. Madam Pomfrey promptly found us and yelled at Percy for screaming, threatening to kick him out if he did it again, but left us as Percy began to get his breath back.

“Hi, Percy.”

“Lys- I was told- gasp- That you’d injured yourself.”

The damn boys. I’d bet anything it was Lu and Harper, they were always conspiring stupid things, Harper more than Lu. (I think Harper was the ONE Slytherin to lose points in Potions because he just couldn’t resist making shit blow up.) They probably wanted to see a Gryffindor prefect run through the school screaming my name at the top of his lungs. Percy was the protective type, after all. I rolled my eyes at their antics. They were entirely too emboldened by the power increase last night. They had to be careful.


“What about my adventures?”

I grinned as the Golden Trio showed up, curious looks on their much calmer faces.

“Your friends said you were dying in the Hospital Wing. Ron almost came charging, but I told him little Slytherins were still Slytherins.” Harry explained bemusedly, Hermione rolling her eyes.

Ron glared half-heartedly. “What? They called her Guinevere! That’s a serious sign of trust!”

I groaned. “They’re being idiots. My camp had a bit of a victory last night, and I managed to make Malfoy’s circle look like idiots. They’re giddy, suddenly being hoisted from Slytherin outcasts to at least respected entities in the Slytherin spectrum.”

Hermione looked mystified. “What exactly goes on in Slytherin, Lys?”

“Nothing you’d be remotely alright with, I assure you.” I murmured under my breath, but smirking anyways.

Ron made a face. “Oh Merlin. They’ve corrupted you. That’s a Slytherin smirk!”

Percy sniffed. “I rather think that’s the demon twins’ smirk.”

Everyone seemed to pale a fraction, except for me.

“That’s even worse!” Ron moaned into his hands. Harry gave him a pat on the shoulder.
sympathetically.

Hermione just huffed. “Well, seeing as Lys is, in fact, not dying a gory death, we should be going.” she said snappishly to her boys, then to me with a smile, “I am glad you’re all right, though, Lys. We’ll see you later.”

“Bye, Hermione. Oh, if you see Ginny, tell her I’m fine, yeah?”

*She probably still needs time. She’s confused in a new environment and without me.*

Hermione nodded, and dragged a waving Harry and muttering Ron away. Percy sighed, making no sign of leaving. I eyed him curiously. “I’m alright, you know.” I said to him after a bit of silence, “You should go back; I bet you were with Penelope, weren’t you?”

He blushed a little, but shook his head.

“No, I think I’d like to stay. We haven’t spoken much.”

“I guess we’ve gotten a bit complacent. It was easier when we were writing every other week.” I admitted, feeling a bit bad that I’d mostly neglected my brothers... Especially since, with the last Weasley Quidditch thing, Percy hadn’t elected to come. So I really had seen my favorite the least of my brothers.

But there was so much to do here, at Hogwarts, in Slytherin! I’d just kicked out one of the stabilizing pillars of Malfoy’s camp; or several, really, depending on how you looked at it. Not only did I paint Parkinson as a completely useless idiot, but now there was in-fighting in Malfoy’s potesta. Malfoy would be trying to get his bearings back, and would probably do so by attacking the one who weakened him in the first place. And then, any 3rd or 4th could make a bid for the potesta soon — if a first-year girl could shake the poncy prince of Slytherin, why couldn’t they just swoop in and take up the seat that he didn’t really deserve in the first place?

Still, though... I took Percy’s hand in mine and grinned.

“Better late than never, though, right? Talk to me like you’re writing me a letter! How was first week? How’s sixth year? How’s Penelope? Are the demon twins driving you up the wall?”

Percy gave me a warm smile. “It’s a bit difficult without parchment in front of me.”

I blinked. “D’you wanna start the letters again? We do sleep in different places still, and our paths never cross with you being the big sixth-year Gryffindor Prefect and me being a first-year Slytherin.”

“Will you be alright with that? You might be busier than me, Lyssie. After all, it’s the academics of the first year that begin the pattern for the following. You’d best not neglect your studies-”

“Oh, don’t be so prissy.” I jibed, laughing, “You’re my brother! I want to keep up with you. Which reminds me, I’ve got to send letters to Bill and Charlie. They probably understand, but if I’m falling out with you, I’ve probably neglected them even more.”

One thing I regretted from my previous life: I hadn’t kept in touch with my siblings, much, not after going to college. Didn’t want to make that mistake here, not now that I’d been given new ones. Even if Ginny was being a little distant at the moment.

He nodded thoughtfully. ‘Perhaps I ought to write them myself. If only to remind them that not all of us have forgotten their existence. I’d say that Bill might have some advice for getting the Head
Boy badge…”

Oh, Percy.

Scholarly like a Ravenclaw, ambitious like a Slytherin, and protective like a Hufflepuff.

Now I really wanted to get Ginny’s boyfriend and Percy to have a showdown. Oooh, and after a big couple fight of some sort, so Percy had reason to duel him to death if I didn’t kick his arse too hard the first round.

Wait, wouldn’t the boyfriend be Harry? Shit. I had to rethink this, it wouldn’t do to have the savior of the wizarding world get killed by Percy.

“Let me know when you send your letters? I’ll send mine along with Hermes, postpone Errol’s death by a few years.” I said, getting a chuckle out from Percy; it was a point of pride to me, that where the hilarious Fred and George mostly irritated him, I could make Percy laugh easily.

“The antivenin potion has probably finished its job.” Percy said softly, “Shall we go?”

“Mm. Wanna walk around after class, catch up? I think it’s going to rain.”

“You hate rain.”

“You don’t, though.”

We walked out, with me hugging my big brother’s arm and chattering away.

…”

I was a bit nervous. After all, this was just a guess. Also, Snape was scary.

But honestly… I was concerned.

Harper was an idiot. Wait- No, no, he wasn’t really. He wasn’t really an idiot. He just couldn’t pay attention, he just couldn’t sit still. He was distracted easily, he got bored easily, he liked going off and running around and yelling when faced with being trapped with me and Dietrich in a tutoring session. But it wasn’t that he didn’t like school; he did, he thought magic was amazing and would sit beside me quietly watching me experiment with charms and spells, blue eyes wide and gleaming with interest. He wanted to be good at school, which was why he came to Dietrich and I in the first place; but even when he wanted to be good at school, he still got distracted so easily.

So here I was, in front of Professor Snape’s office.

Knock knock knock.

No going back now, I suppose.

“Enter.” was called from inside, the voice low and regal.

I did just that, quickly shutting the heavy dungeon door behind me. Snape’s office was just like the Potions labs, filled with shelves of odd things. A heavy desk sat in the middle-back of the room, some elegant seats in front of it and next to the fireplace; papers were flying around with magic,
and I assumed he was marking essays by the irritated scowl on his features.

He looked up at me and there was a flicker of interest, and one brow raised on his dour face.

(I couldn’t tell if he had been expecting the bullied little Weasley in Slytherin to have come sooner, or if he’d been expecting the new parvus potesta potential to not have come at all. Whatever the case, he didn’t expect me.)

“Miss Weasley.” he greeted curtly.

I nodded. “‘Lo, Professor.”

“Did you need something?”

“I just… wanted to know something. About Harper.”

At this point, he put down his marking quill and straightened in his seat. Full attention, then.

I fidgeted a little.

“Erm… I don’t know how to put this… Is Harper… Is there some sort of magical equivalent to ADHD or something that he has?” I asked quickly. Then I fiddled with the frayed ends of my robe sleeves, feeling stupid. “Dietrich and I are tutoring him, see, and he really wants to learn but it’s really hard for him to concentrate and he keeps daydreaming and he just bounces off the walls sometimes, which drives us barmy, but I wondered if I could do anything to help or-”

“You’re babbling, Miss Weasley.”

I felt myself redden a little. Snape was intimidating. “Sorry, Professor.”

There was a flicker in his ghostly colors. I’d turned the Mage Sight down quite a bit because the migraines that they brought, along with the Clairvoyant headaches, were just too much sometimes. So there was barely color, just a dark sort of mist, but I saw it move with interest; a little surprise, maybe, by the bristling of the soft, golden threads.

Snape blinked at me, then motioned for me to approach. Which I did.

I stood in front of his desk, feeling dwarfed and intimidated, but Snape nodded decisively.

“It is not a magical equivalent. It is simply Attention Deficiency Hyperactivity Disorder.” he said.

I blinked in surprise. “There’s no… We haven’t cured that?”

“Mental disorders are too complicated for even magic to cure, Miss Weasley.”

Ah. The brain and its chemicals. Just too delicate a balance, I assume.

When Snape nodded, I realized I’d been speaking aloud.

Then I frowned. “Can I help him?”

Snape gave me a steady gaze. “Perhaps. I am not a Healer, however.”

Madam Pompfrey. She’d know how I could help Harper out for sure. I smiled brilliantly at Snape, and then nodded. “Thanks, Professor. I’ll get out of your hair, now.” I said happily. After all, he’d just indirectly given me a way to help one of my firsties, one of the pillars of my power… Oh, who
was I kidding?

Harper was my friend. It was ridiculous that he was a Slytherin at all, with how goddamn happy he was all the time, how energetic and childish and enthusiastic and earnest he was. With us, anyways, Harper could be a right sassy, annoying bastard to anyone he disliked, which included most of the main parvus potesta, underneath Malfoy’s wing.

“Remember your meditation, Miss Weasley.” Snape called in goodbye.

I nodded to him just before I ran out the door. Snape- Well, actually, all the Heads of House were privy to my little Seer secret. And Madam Pomfrey. They needed to be, just in case I got an attack from a vision or from a magical backlash related to a vision or lack thereof. I needed to meditate at least five hours every week to keep the visions from bombarding my Occlumency shields. But I couldn’t sink too deep into my visions that the magic would reject my foreign presence in the realm of Time and Space (or whatever the fuck the proper terminology was). If I did either, which is was quite easy to fall off-balance in this regard, my organs would start failing and I’d be bleeding all over the place. Which required teachers and the Mediwitch to know what the fuck was wrong with me, even if they had to sign a very powerful magical contract in order to do so.

(I think the contract was for Snape’s sake; so that he really couldn’t tell Voldy about my power. When the fucker inevitably came back, that is.)

Anyways, back to my firsties.

They were… my friends. I guess. I mean I wasn’t sure how much I was allowed to be friends with them, since we were all Slytherins. I wasn’t too big of a social butterfly in my first life, I was actually an introvert. And then all the politics and alliance bullshit of Slytherin mucked up my views on relationships a bit more. But, really, I counted them my friends. Dietrich was a fantastic Second, always there to back me up and bounce ideas off of and count on to help me. Jay was shy and quiet and sweet-tempered, and I was teaching him how to draw while he tutored me in Defense Against the Dark Arts since Lockhart was an idiotic ponce. Lu was relaxing to be around, a slice of normality with a hint of Quidditch-nuttiness that I was just used to, and he always made sure we were alright and not stressed and not irritated with each other. Harper… Harper was a ball of energy and brightness, which he could sometimes get carried away with, but he was a good kid and it sucked that he wanted to learn but just really couldn’t.

I helped Dietrich out of his isolation, and though he doesn’t express it openly, he was so much happier with someone to return and call friend than being alone forever; he liked independence, but he didn’t like loneliness, and that I helped him become a bit happier made me glad, because he deserved it. I helped Jay in the same way, in that Jay no longer had to be a bully just to fit in and not be made fun of for his hair and his delicateness. I helped Lu, too, I think; because even though he was the ringleader, he was just… Well. No one wanted to go up to him and tell him he was stupid for being a bully, and I suppose I was that someone he needed.

I’d help Harper, too. He made friends easily, but it was hard for him to be on the same level as many because he just didn’t understand things as well, didn’t learn things as quickly.

This is why I was here, wasn’t it? To help people. A specific group of people — my family — of course, but that’s why I was here.

I think.

(I’ve put my research on Helvynya Prevett on hold, with Hogwarts and Tom Riddle and all. But I just had this feeling that my Clairvoyance and Mage Sight had something to do with her, had
something to do with the upcoming war.)

... “Er… do we really have to do this in the common room, Guinevere?”

I didn’t look up from my work, answering, “Don’t worry about it.”

I could already see Jay blushing, despite the fact he was sitting on the floor in front of me, back against the couch. He was all curled up and timid-looking. I suppose any boy would be, when their hair was being combed thoroughly and braided by a girl. (But I mean, his hair was longer than mine was — in both lives — and it was soft as fucking heaven, so if I didn’t braid it, I was going to go mad.)

We were in the common room, of course. Not the parvus potesta seat by the windows, Malfoy still technically had that, but in our own little, cozy corner.

“Do you think we can change the parvus potesta seat to be here? I like this couch.” I muttered.

Harper barked out a laugh. “I bet we could! But it’s not very powerful-looking, it’s all in the dark and to the side.”

Dietrich sighed, sitting beside me. One of his hands was holding open a book so he could read by candlelight, and the other was holding out hairties for me. He was such a bloody good Second, honestly, this boy.

“At least people won’t be watching…” Jay murmured.

Hm. Definitely blushing.

I grinned at the poor kid, though only Lu and Harper — sitting across us and paying attention — could see it. “Oh, don’t be embarrassed, Jay. You’re having a hard time with your hair all over the place, aren’t you? Don’t think I don’t see you blowing it out of your face all the time.”

“I mean- I- I suppose, but Guinevere, my hair… Everyone says it’s so girly…”

At this I frowned. There was a very quiet thrum of hurt in his magic, which was just a misty shadow to my eyes, but it was there. Logically, I could assume children were really rude little fucks; at some point or another, every single one of my friends had been told something cruel once, including the quiet and soft-spoken Julius Rookwood, little Jay. I could guess what they’d say, and the thought of one of my friends being made fun of for being girly or gay or whatever else pissed me off a little.

“Your hair is lovely. There’s nothing wrong with it. Or you. Anyone else who says otherwise can cheerfully piss off.” I declared, still threading his hair into a rather intricate braid.

(The practice I had with Ginny, all those years, was really paying off right about now.)

There was a beat of silence.

“Sebastian Flint, right? He was calling you things? I’ll beat his face in.” Lu said casually.
“Wh- What- Wait, no, Lu, you don’t have to-“

Jay’s protests were spoken over by Harper happily, “Oh! I can help! I made a potion that makes your eyes so dry that you start crying and you can’t see, it’s really really easy to make! Professor Snape was almost impressed!”

“He would’ve been more impressed if you made the Wideye Potion like we were supposed to.”

“Aw, but where would be the fun in that, Dietrich?” I said, grinning.

Dietrich looked up from his book and glared. “We are never letting you and Harper partner in Potions ever again.”

A collective shudder ran through Lu, Jay, and Dietrich at the thought of that incident. Say what you will about Harper and his inability to follow his common sense, but the kid was creative and it showed in Potions class. And though I was a good student, I was a bit bored, which often resulted in me doing extra reading or playing around. Disinterest in consequences + Harper’s accidental genius creativity + my knowledge of Potions ingredients? It was a match made in hell, or so Dietrich muttered in our five-man-detention the next few days after that. (Even though it was just Harper and I destroying things and laughing manically, Lu was cheering us on, Jay was trying to write down what on earth we did — just in case — and Dietrich was put in detention by association.)

Lu snickered, though, despite the bad memories of the fury of Severus Snape. “When did you mess up the Wideye Potion enough to make it some sort of weapon?”

“When he partnered with me.” Jay’s voice went softly.

“Wait, that’s why you were crying that entire day? I thought it was because Guinevere and Harper somehow partnered up in Charms and managed to set your robes on fire.”

“I’m sorry about that, Jay, really!” Harper whined.

“Shut up, Lu, we said we’d never speak of that again.”

I rolled my eyes at all of them. They were alllllll idiots. My hands twitched; I don’t really suppose I did a good job of Occluding from the Tom Riddle diary, because it was like I was itching to write in it. Like I was having withdrawal symptoms or something, really. Right about now, I’d be writing in the diary and telling Tom about what was happening and laughing as he said derogatory things, because even if he meant them, I didn’t really, and said lightly they were rather hilarious.

*Man, you really fucked up. Maybe it’s a good thing Tom vanished, he would’ve possessed the shit out of you,* I thought with a sigh.

A hand on my shoulder.

I looked up at Dietrich, who was as stone-faced as always, though there was a slant to his brow that meant he was glaring. “You and Harper are never. Partnering. Up. Again.” Dietrich commanded slowly.

Shite. They were talking about all of me and Harper’s adventures in magical experimentation.

I gave him a sheepish smile. “We know what not to do, right?”

He sighed and pinched the bridge of his nose, book forgotten. (Though he was still holding hairties
“Why am I a glorified babysitter? What did I do to deserve this?”

Jay reached up to pat Dietrich’s knee comfortingly. “It’s okay, Dietrich.”

Ah, back to topic! I looked at Harper. “I want some of that teargas potion, Harper. We’re chucking it at Sebastian Flint and Nathan Wilkes.”

“Why Wilkes?”

I snarled a little, thinking about the kid. “He’s the scary one, always knows what to say to piss you off or put you down. Smart little bastard, prick. Flint can think he’s Malfoy’s firstie leader all he wants, but Wilkes is the dangerous one.”

Didn’t help that the Wilkes kid had some of the Darkest colors I’d ever seen, so.

“Were you about to swear, Guinevere?”

“I have six older brothers!” I snapped, “You should hear Charlie’s potty mouth, it’s ridiculous—”

“The dragon-keeper, right?”

“Mm-hm.”

Lu snorted. “Well no wonder, I’d be screaming bloody murder if I had to deal with dragons—”

“That sounds like a fun job!” Harper interrupted cheerfully.

I rolled my eyes as Lu and Harper descended into some childish argument again. Immature brats. But they were well-meaning now, at least to my camp; which meant all was forgiven in my books. Ah, and then Jay’s braid was done and that was forgotten, too.

“Jay, your hair is fantastic now, take a look! Specufio. Wingardium Leviosa. Geminio.”

Two mirrors floated, angled so that Jay could take a look at the back of his head if he wanted. I watched in the mirror as his jade eyes widened, then crinkled as he smiled. He turned back to look at me as I dispersed the mirrors.

“Thank you, Guinevere.”

For helping me. For defending me. For giving me these friends I wouldn’t have had otherwise.

I didn’t claim to be able to read thoughts or emotions truly, but I knew my friends well.

Smiling back, I replied, “It’s never a problem, Jay.”

It was nice to have a lazy day or two or three after our victory in the duel. I had to start looking for the diary tomorrow, to make sure it didn’t fall to any poor kid’s hands; if it did, that death was on my head.

But for now, I relaxed in the presence of my home-away-from-home, right in the den of the snakes.
Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

I gotta to go lab soon so here's a real quick chapter 12 for y'all. Thanks for reading and commenting! I'm almost at 1000 hits, which is super exciting. :) Enjoy!

I caught Ron on Halloween day.

“Hey! Ronnieskins!”

He jerked, then turned a glare on me. Somewhere off at his table, there were giggles of his nickname; a girl with dirty blonde hair and a bronze-skinned girl, thick as thieves — probably Lavender Brown and Parvati Patil — whispering together. Harry, sitting next to Ron, just snorted a little, while Hermione raised a brow.

“What, Lyssie?”

“Oh, don’t look so annoyed. The more you let people see things affect you, the more they’ll use it against you.”

“That was a very Slytherin statement.” Harry commented lightly.

I flashed him a grin. “I’m a powerhouse in Slytherin, Potter. One day, you’ll see Malfoy sniveling at my feet.”

“Merlin, you’ve become scary. You were already scary, but now you’re terrifying.” Ron muttered darkly.

Turning back to him, I rolled my eyes. “This is the thanks I get for giving a bit of forewarning, hm? When you go to Sir Nicholas’ Deathday party tonight, bring your own food. Ghosts won’t have anything fit for breathers.”

Ron assumed it was a dizzy spell, though it was really just my own foreknowledge. Hermione and Harry, on the other hand, looked a tad confused.

“How do you know?” Hermione asked.

I grinned again. “portrait spy network.”

Harry blinked. “What?”

“I gotta gather information somehow, right? Harper’s a friendly sort, he’s friends with a lot of
portraits, and I’m at least known to the rest of them. They like gossiping, so I just kinda talk to them a lot and I get to learning a lot of things.”


“Political maneuvering worthy of Salazar Slytherin, of course. Information is a very valuable commodity, don’t you know? Oh, speaking of which, have any of you seen my diary?”

The stupefied look was replaced with a horrified one. “You have a diary? You- And you actually write, you know, girly things in there?”

I rolled my eyes. “Oh, yes, it has all the names of all the boys I have a crush on, multiple pictures of Lockhart, and my secret plan to become a rainbow princess, Ron. No, you idiot. It has my notes on wards, Healing, rudimentary Runes and such, lots of points of interest on dangerous entities in Slytherin — Malfoy and Josephine Zabini, namely — and stuff on my firsties. Anyone reads it, they’ll have a bit too much information for my liking.”

Hermione joined in on the horrified look. “You’re eleven, you realize, right?”

“I’m a snake, and a bloodtraitor. I need to be better than everyone else if I want to survive. Don’t worry, Ron, it’s not like I’m failing. I’m a rather powerful entity, now, you know? So? Have you seen my diary?”

Harry seemed to be the most level-headed of them, and I think it was partly because he was a secret Slytherin himself and didn’t seem to mind my insanity. It honestly wasn’t so bad; it’s not like I had control over all of the Hogwarts portraits, just a few. And they weren’t spies, they were just overlooked and I used that to my advantage. Nothing that an eleven-year-old wouldn’t be able to do with a bit of creativity and persuasion/charisma, which both Harper and I had.

So Harry just smiled a little. “We’ll watch out for it, Lys. Sorry you lost it?”

“Ah, no, Parkinson stole it. I told her off, though, but she doesn’t know where it is so I’m resorting to lost and found tactics. Anyways, ta! I’ve got things to do, remember to bring your own food and all that.”

Ron groaned at the reminder of missing the Halloween feast and the other two said rather puzzled goodbyes.

What can I say? It was fun to mess with people.

…

“Didn’t like the party much?”

The Bloody Baron didn’t look at all like what the movies portrayed him as; no curly, crazy hair and a penchant for scaring the shit out of firsties. Instead, he followed the books’ descriptions more closely: pale robes dripping with blood, chains around his neck that clattered as he breathed, long hair disheveled and hanging limply over blank, sorrowful eyes. Ghosts’ colors were pearly and nearly as translucent as they were — the only magic they had was their existence (except for Peeves) — but I could feel an overwhelming grief in his shuddering dark colors, and knowing his story, it made me feel bad for him despite the crime he committed.
Taking a walk around the castle (getting away from the utter madness of the Great Hall in Halloween mode) probably wasn’t the best idea. Dietrich wanted to go with me, but I forced him to stay for the other four. The walk was both to calm myself down and to kick out a few dizzy spells, meditate a little. It was fun to mess with people, relaxing to me, but I was still a pretty stressed kid.

I just didn’t expect to run into my House ghost, was all.

“Young, you are, to hold such power.” the Bloody Baron whispered.

I stiffened, narrowing my eyes. “What do you know of my power?”

A grim, lifeless smile. “You hold the reigns of Slytherin, girl. So young to have garnered so much... ambition.”

Ah, he was speaking of my status as a pillar of my House. I didn’t know that the Bloody Baron kept up with the tiny power struggles in Slytherin... Shit, I bet he gossiped about the duel. Fucking- Alby knew for sure, dammit.

However... what an information network that would be...

No! BAD Guinevere! You never base friendships off of ambition!

The Bloody Baron would have no use for allies, after all. He was dead. He’d want a friend, and I didn’t want to pretend something like that. I felt bad for him already, half-living as long as he had. It didn’t sound like a very productive time, if the Grey Lady was still as pissed as she was at him. Poor fellow.

“To tell you the truth, I didn’t really care for the power at first.” I said, shrugging, “I just wanted to bring the Git Lord down a few notches and keep myself alive. But... well, now that I’ve got the power, I’m not going to let it go easily.”

Another smile — a bit less grim and a bit more vivacious. “Strange. You dove into battle like a Gryffindor, yet triumphed over your enemies like a Slytherin.” he muttered.

I chuckled. “I was raised by Gryffindors, Baron. Not so strange after all.”

The Bloody Baron studied me, silvery eyes drawn to the wand that was clutched in my right hand. “Hm. I look forward to your performance in the parvus potesta, young snake. We shall speak again.”

“If you wish, Baron.” I said politely, bowing a pureblood’s formal goodbye to him.

He sunk into the ground, floating to a lower floor — since I was on the second — and I went on. I probably should have gone back to the Great Hall, to the feast, but it was... nice. To be alone for a while. It had been... I don’t think I’d been alone like this since the trip to Diagon Alley where I slipped around near to Knockturn. Before that, it had been my last life. Surrounded by people... I loved it, I loved them, but it was very, very tiring. Hard to breathe, in a different kind of way than being a Slytherin pariah.

As I walked further, I started hearing little wisps of music that was rather familiar. Well, one was. Bright and bold and sighing, music that I remembered since I was a baby.

Ron?

“Oi! Ron, what’re you--“
I had an annoyed comment on my tongue when I followed the trails of their widened eyes, and felt it die away in my throat.

THE CHAMBER OF SECRETS HAS BEEN OPENED. ENEMIES OF THE HEIR, BEWARE.

There was a stiff form underneath the crimson words, the petrified Mrs. Norris. I almost fell over at the sight of it. Fucking shaking like a damn rabbit looking at the jaws of a fox. Like a coward. Had I been that complacent? Had I thought that someone wouldn’t have fished Tom out of the lake? Had I thought that I’d outsmarted Fate??

Standing behind the gaping Trio, I tried not to break down crying.

(The deep, nearly black red of the painted words almost reminded me of the colors of a certain diary — or rather, of the soul trapped inside)

*I’ve failed.*

…

Who’s going to die because of you, Lys?

I had grilled my boys relentlessly on if they’d found “my” diary; I wasn’t going to kill one of my fucking friends, dammit. After I’d interrogated them all (I couldn’t even muster the willpower to be subtle about it), I’d enlisted Dietrich into rifling through their shit to make sure they weren’t lying. Because possessed people would, right?

I didn’t trust my Mage Sight’s lying detector abilities, not when I was emotionally compromised.

Dietrich had followed my lead, though he was a little disapproving.

“You should trust us.” he said as I cast cleaning and organizing charms to reverse the mess of the boys’ dorm, “You shouldn’t doubt us, just as they don’t doubt you.”

“But you doubt me?” I snapped out, frustrated.

“I’m starting to.” he replied evenly, grey eyes narrowing. “What’s really in the diary, Guinevere? It is not just notes, not if you’re so desperate to get it back. Or rather... to keep it from others.”

*Bloody Dietrich. He knows me well.*

(Which I would normally be a little happy about — it was weird, but in a sorta nice way, right? — but it was a goddamn bother right now.)

He would’ve been a dangerous adversary if things had been different. But as it was, he was my closest friend in Slytherin — my Second — and I couldn’t bring myself to lie to him. It was what I deserved, really, when I made friends so easily with the boys... Allies, I could lie to. Friends,
though?

_I will never pretend something as important as love_, I’d said to the Sorting Hat. There were four loves in the world (storge, philia, eros, agape) and even something like the friendship I found in my five — philia — was still love to me.

*Just because you lie doesn’t mean you don’t love them,* a small part of me whispered.

*But it means I don’t trust them.* my greater self replied fiercely.

*Lies have many uses, Lyssie; sometimes, it’s to protect. Who’s going to die because of you, Lys? Is it going to be Dietrich, your right-hand man? Are you going to kill him because you’re afraid of something as small as lying?*

Great. I was talking to myself now.

Sighing, I went with a compromise. I turned to Dietrich, my blue eyes hardened with the severity of the situation. “I can’t tell you everything — I’m sorry, but I really can’t. But you have to know... Dietrich, that book is dangerous. It might kill someone... the thing could ensnare Harper in two seconds, and then he’d be dead, and I can’t have that on my conscious!”

His magic twitched in acknowledgement of the part truth. “Where did you get such a thing from, Guinevere? Why do you have it- Why have you kep it, if you knew this?”

I shook my head. “I was stupid, Dietrich. I thought I could use it — I th- I thought I could outwit it. And I was! It was never meant to leave my hands, I swear-“

“So you’d only put yourself at risk? How is that fair?? We’re a team, Guinevere! All five of us!”

“But we weren’t!” I nearly shouted, trying to get him to understand. “We weren’t a team at first, Dietrich — I’ve had the bloody thing since summer, and you guys were just allies for the first week and a half... by the time we became friends, I was too-“

“Enchanted?” he hissed.

I snarled at the implication. “I wasn’t possessed! I’m not possessed!”

Dietrich glowered at me. “You act like it’s a drug.”

“Don’t you see, Dietrich, that’s why it’s dangerous!!” I shouted now, a small part of me thankful that I’d cast a Silencing Ward before we started, “I don’t want to have killed someone else because I couldn’t lock a book up!”

“Tell me what it really is, Guinevere.”

“You don’t need to know, Dietrich!” I snarled, frustrated at his prodding. “Just listen to me and help me find it! It’s dangerous to others, someone even half as stupid as Harper could get their hands on it and die!”

“You’re not going to tell the others, are you?”

“Of bloody course not — I didn’t even want to tell you!”

“What are you going to do when we find it?”

“IF.”
“Please, Guinevere.” he near-sneered, eyes flashing, “We’re Slytherins. We’ll find your little 
book. I want to know why I have the feeling you aren’t going to go to Snape to turn it in.”

Because I need to know what he knows! I need to milk out every single piece of information he has! 
I need to study him, learn how to combat him! I need a tutor in magic that won’t hold back like 
Alby and won’t disapprove like my parents because I’m NOT a genius, I won’t be able to fight in 
this war if I don’t get ahead-

I won’t be able to save my brothers if I don’t become just as dangerous as he is.

“There’s no one else,” I whispered to myself, knowing Dietrich couldn’t hear me with the quiet of 
it, “There’s no one else that can give me as much power as him. He’s the best weapon I have-”
And when I use him to take Voldemort down, it will be beautifully ironic.

Dietrich’s magic tightened in anger, coiled tightly like a snake. He gazed at me coldly. “When you 
are ready to tell the truth to me — the whole truth — you know where to find me. I won’t tell the 
others about this little excavation, because it would break their hearts to know you don’t trust them 
at all.”

Dietrich left me in the middle of a mess, and it broke my heart a little, too.

I wondered if I’d made a mistake somewhere.

Fuck you, Tom.

...

I had to turn this over in my mind a bit. After me and Dietrich’s fight, we were noticeably cooler 
towards one another — we tried not to let such a weakness show to the others Slytherins, but it was 
hard to hide dissent in the ranks. The other three were just confused as to why their leader and her 
lieutenant seemed to be fighting, meaning Dietrich really didn’t tell them about my breach of trust. 
Which I should’ve expected — he was a surprisingly honorable Slytherin — but still pleasantly 
surprised me.

If I weren’t so confused, I might thank him and compliment him.

And yes, I was confused.

But I was getting there. It was rather shitty of me to search through the boys’ things, I guess... but 
if they were possessed by fucking Riddle, they’d hide the diary and lie to me about having it. If 
they were possessed. Which they obviously fucking weren’t, all I had to do was look at them and 
know; Harper was still a cheerful idiot, Rookwood was still quietly supportive, Vaisey was still 
outgoing and snarky.

So, yeah, it was on me that time... I should’ve looked at them more, paid more attention to their 
obviously bright colors (though they were a bit droopy, upset with the frigid air surrounding 
Dietrich and I).

Okay. So I should apologize to Dietrich about that. And also let them know that I went behind their 
backs, and apologize for it... promise never to do it again unless under duress. That should fix it, 
right?
It fucking didn’t.

The three were very understanding about it — only Vaisey grumbled about the privacy breach, but perked up again when I sighingly agreed to play some Quiddith with him after classes on Friday — and I thought that was the hard part. My apology to Dietrich was not as well-received and he was insulted when I offered to make it up to him (I think he thought I was trying to bribe him for forgiveness), and it got worse.

Rookwood was upset about it more than the others.

“What happened? Why’s he mad? What’d you do, Guinevere?” he asked worriedly.

I spluttered indignantly. “Wh-what? Why do you assume I’m the offender?”

Harper — Harper, of all people! — gave me a flat look. “And you call me stupid.”

I glared at him. Vaisey was with Dietrich at the moment, they’d lagged behind after Transfiguration. It was the end of the day, about a week since the famous fight, and it seemed the four were tired of it. I was too, but nothing I’d Seen (a few Voldemort-battles, some classes from previous years, magical creatures mid-flight, my parents once or twice) were helping me out... though I was decidedly not going to rely on my Sight for this one, because obviously I fucked up somewhere and I’d fix it without resorting to my cheaty methods. Dietrich was worth at least that.

“Harper... Tristan Harper called me stupid today...” I muttered faintly.

He grinned, looking at Jay. “Should I just tell her?”

Jay glared. “Don’t you dare-“

“Dietrich fancies you.”

“HARPER!”

I think I was in shock from the first one, and then snapped out of it when mild-tempered, blushes-all-the-time, girlier-than-I-was Julius Rookwood shouted irately at Harper. Only Harper or the demon twins could coax out such a reaction, and I wasn’t sure about the latter.

“Er... come again?”

Jay buried his face in his hands and moaned.

Harper — ‘cos he would always just be Harper, no one could call him Tristan with a straight face — grinned at me brightly. “You probably said something insensitive to him, Guinevere. Like, say, you told him you fancied someone else. Then he got mad, then you got mad, and now we’re here.”

I blinked, looking at Jay.

He sported a guilty look. “Don’t listen to Harper — and don’t tell Dietrich you know! He didn’t want you to know! He thinks it’s just a crush, it’ll fade away by itself. Don’t tell him you know! It’ll make everything worse.”

Swiveling between Jay’s pleading look and Harper’s shit-eating grin, I could only roll my eyes and sigh. “That’s not what we’re fighting about.” I muttered.
“It’s not? Bollocks, I just outed Dietrich for no reason!”

“Shut up, Harper,” I replied immediately (I think he heard it every hour from one of us — only one of us, because if anyone else said it, the four of us would go at them like protective Slytherin mothers). “But... it honestly might tie in? I might’ve done something... dangerous. Very dangerous. A while ago. It might’ve been so bad that I wouldn’t be here at Hogwarts anymore.”

Jay and Harper looked curious.

“What was it?” Harper asked, excited. “Sounds wicked!”

I shook my head. “No, it wasn’t wicked, Harper. It was actually really dangerous. I thought... I thought Dietrich was pissed because I lost control of it and I needed help finding it, but he might-“

“Just be angry that you’d put yourself in danger in the first place.” Jay finished.

I sighed and gave a nod. “Yes.”

Harper hmmm’ed, then smiled. “Well then!” And then he slapped the back of my head. Hard. Not like, concussion hard, but I yelped in equal parts pain and surprise.

“What was that for, dammit, Harper?”

He chuckled. “Dietrich’s not the only one who’d be worse off without you. I would be, too, y’know. Me and Jay — him more than me, of course. Why you’d pick up dangerous magical creatures is... well, I dunno, but it’s bad! Don’t do that!”

(Of course Harper made the jump to me picking up a dangerous magical creature. The nut.)

I looked to Jay for confirmation and translation.

“Didn’t your parents ever scold you for doing dangerous things?” he asked.

“No?”

“Well, that’s why you two idiots are fighting!” Harper laughed, “Dietrich scolded you and you didn’t realize it! So you just got mad, and then he thought you were being difficult on purpose!”

Jay nodded emphatically in agreement, but frowned thoughtfully. “How have you never been scolded for doing bad things?”

I grinned. “I never got caught.”

Harper laughed, and Jay groaned in frustration.

“You are such a Slytherin.” Jay muttered.

“You’re also an idiot.” Harper added unhelpfully.

“We’re all idiots, okay? Happy? Merlin... How am I supposed to fix this? Dietrich’s mad that I put myself in danger, probably also worried as hell, you two are telling me he fancies me, and I don’t feel sorry at all! How’re you supposed to apologize when you don’t feel sorry?”

Harper shrugged. “You could lie?”

Jay hit him, hissing, “Dietrich isn’t stupid. He knows when Guinevere lies.”
“He knows when I lie??”

Jay turned to me, looking a little sorry. “Usually. Dietrich’s very observant, you know; and the fact of the matter is, you usually don’t lie. Not to us, at least. It’s always puzzled us, because you’re the Slytherin but you’re also the most honest person I know.”

Clairvoyance. Mage Sight. Reincarnation... “Oh believe me, I’m not that honest.”

They shrugged at me.

I shook my head. “I’ll apologize for worrying him.” *But Dietrich has to understand, I have to find it. I can’t let someone else get killed — I’ll find it, and I’ll turn the little fucker in to Dumbledore... that should appease Dietrich.*

Despite my shaky confidence, I didn’t think it would go over well.

Harper patted me on the shoulder. “He can’t be angry forever.”

I sighed. “He can. He’s eleven.”

“We’re all eleven.”

*True, in a way. But I should be more than that.* I thought.

But I smiled, I ruffled Harper’s dark hair, and he seemed to glow under the attention. I had to stop loading my problems off on other people, especially these two. Too sweet-tempered, both of them, to keep complaining to. Wasn’t fair to them, either. I had to just get my shit together.

“C’mon, let’s find the others. We have to strategize; ten Galleons that fourth-year — Lucian Bole or something? — will make a bid for power this week.” I sighed, changing the subject.

“Vaisey and Bole’ve been eyeing us strangely.” agreed Jay.

“Exactly. Even if Dietrich’s mad at me, he knows we’ll be in trouble if we don’t present a united front.” I said, then I laughed. “Y’know, Professor Snape told us Slytherins to at least *present* to be united in front of the school; now us firsties have to pretend to be united in front of the Slytherins.”

“Fronts within fronts.” Jay murmured, a little sadly.

I looked at him, but beamed and tugged on his braid. He looked at my curiously. “Like Harper said... he can’t be mad forever. Don’t worry. Something as small as a squabble won’t break us.”

“I hope so.”

Harper nudged us. “You girls are so dramatic. Can we go?”

“Yes, yes; stop being so impatient, idiot.”

...
“Did you do something untoward to Finch-Fletchy’s pet? Set it on fire, perhaps?”

Harry gave me an annoyed glance. “Of course not.”

Ron muttered angrily to himself, explaining, “The bleedin’ idiot thinks Harry’s the Heir of Slytherin ‘cos we were there when Mrs. Norris was discovered. After the deathday party.”

I raised a brow. “You’d think they’d suspect me, seeing as I was also there and the only Slytherin actually present.”

“That’s what I said!” Hermione shouted exasperatedly, then guiltily, “No offense, Lys.”

I shrugged. “None taken. It could only boost my rep in Slytherin.”

Ron moaned something about corrupted little sisters. I smirked at him.

Harry looked at me curiously, and I raised a brow at him. I was thinking about making some sort of lewd comment — fucking green eyes made his stares so bloody intense — when he said carefully:

“Lys would be able to help us.”

Ron shot out of his misery, then narrowed his eyes. “No. We’re not dragging my little sister into—”

“Sure, what do you need?”

He gave me a betrayed look. “LYSSIE!”

I returned his look with an unimpressed glare. “Ronnie, I love you, but I go through so much more rubbish than you’d ever dream of, being a Slytherin.”

“Wait- then you really dueled Pansy Parkinson??”

Hermione looked simultaneously excited at the prospect of a knowledgeable dueler and disapproving of breaking Hogwarts rules. I shrugged, emulating Prefect Zabini’s vampire grin.

“Ask me no questions and I’ll tell you no lies, Hermione.”

“Merlin, it’s like looking at a female version of the twins.” Ron muttered.

“At least I’m prettier, right?”

Harry snorted, but he spoke quickly, “We were talking last night in the Common Room — wondering who the real Heir of Slytherin is — and we were thinking we’d like to get into the Slytherin dungeons to talk to Malfoy. We think it’s him, but we want to make sure of it.”

I snickered, then looked at Hermione. “Polyjuice?”

Her brown eyes widened. “How did you—“

“Lys is clever, alright?” Ron interrupted quickly (I rolled my eyes — as if they’d clue into my Sight because of that), “But can’t you just talk to Malfoy yourself? Since we’re involving you and all.”

I groaned, wishing we were sitting at desks so I could slam my forehead down on one. “Ron, you know how I dueled Pansy Parkinson? Malfoy’s bloody girlfriend? And how I won?”
“You won? Nice.”

“Oh Merlin, you’re thicker than Harper.” I muttered, then loudly, “Yes, Ron, I won. So no, I won’t be able to talk to Malfoy because the little git hates me for disrupting his power base by dueling Parkinson into a boil-covered, sobbing mess.”

Hermione gave me a chastising frown. “Furnunculus?” she asked.

I nodded. “Overpowered it a bit, she barely got out any spells after that. And don’t scold me, Hermione — rules are different in Slytherin. What I did was perfectly acceptable in Slyth society, and you should’ve heard the insult she gave me that prompted me to challenge her.”

Ron stopped snickering and growled, “What’d she say to you?”

Sighing, I answered, “It seems she found out that Mum almost had to give me a core binding when I was young — she basically said that I would’ve deserved to have my magic taken.”

He snarled and nearly stormed off, but Harry asked innocently:

“What’s that mean, then?”

Hermione endeavored to explain. “There’s different types of bindings on a magical core; sometimes small children need weak ones so they don’t hurt themselves when they’re accidental magic is too powerful. But the most famous binding is the old illegal types — they were used as punishment, before, a complete binding of magic...”

“Why were they made illegal?”

“It was such a shock that wizards who didn’t die from the loss of their magic all of a sudden usually went insane and blew themselves up, trying to use magic through the binds.” I explained, making Hermione wince at the imagery.

Ron huffed, face red with rage, “How dare that bloody cow- It’s one of the worst insults you can think of, right up there with calling someone a ‘Mudblood’. It’s worse than just telling someone to go die, see, it’s cruel to a witch or wizard. She was practically asking for a duel, ‘cos no one takes that insult without issuing a challenge.” he explained to Harry, trying to calm himself down.

“You shouldn’t call girls cows, Ron.” Hermione said seriously.

My brother’s eye twitch. “Are you serious? The cow insulted my sister!”

She huffed. “Even so-”

Harry looked at me, a little more sympathy in his eyes. “With what you said about magical cores, how is it that a magical binding doesn’t just kill the witch or wizard right off?”

“Smart kids that remember things... so nice. Stupid firsties, they’ve lowered all my expectations for children’s intelligence. Even Dietrich with how... how bloody prissy he’s being right now! (Even if I understood, it was a damn frustrating time, to be on the move for the diary and dealing with children’s drama. I really needed a fucking vacation or something. That last walk around Hogwarts before the Chamber was apparently fucking opened was nice...)

“You’d think it’d be like denying someone air, right?” I asked, happy to explain to Harry while Ron and Hermione were arguing hotly, “Well, see, magic is not just air; think of it more like blood that moves like air does. The blood carries the oxygen, right? You can hold your breath a while
before bad things happen to you, and this is similar. Just longer-lasting, if you don’t die straight-off. The strength of will of the witch or wizard determines how long you endure... so, really, it’s a death sentence, with a bit of torture thrown in before the end for spite.”

Harry grimaced. “And she wished that on you?”

“Parkinson did, yeah. So I dueled her. She started crying after I won, which only made me feel a little bad, but she’d stolen something from me...”

“She stole from you?”

“Mm. My diary. I told you about it a while ago…” I said, wondering how the conversation got so dangerous so fast; bloody Dietrich had accepted my apology but was still a bit stiff with me, and I didn’t want that shit to repeat with Harry — I liked the kid, after all but a young Tom Riddle stood before me.

Voldemort — black robes and pale skin — crimson crimson eyes — Nagini over bony shoulders — graveyard? — Death Eaters...

“Join me.” he said.

“Never!” the small figure replied ferociously.

Tom laughed. It was almost nice to see, if it weren’t filled with such malice — twirled a familiar wand in his hands, thoughts flitting across crimson eyes in rapid succession. He was thinking about something, with a depth that normal people couldn’t touch — of course he could, because he was a genius — a psychopath — smiling — “You are a fool, Harry Potter.”

Tom Riddle’s face shimmered and I wondered why his eyes seemed to flicker blue and his hair seemed to flicker red and suddenly I was staring at the concerned face of my big brother, Ron, who was calling my name and leaning over me. Hogwarts stone was beneath me, I was on my back, and I knew with clarity that with how murky and disturbed that vision was, it was unlikely to pass . . .

“Lys! Lyssie! Can you hear me?” he muttered, shaking my shoulders.

Oh fuck, this was bad.

Ergh.

“Y-yes. Yeah. Hi, Ron.” I said, trying to clear the remnants of the vision away (dark hair red eyes cruel smile pale fingers — I know that wand — small figure — strength in his voice — Chamber of Secrets?) and trying to stand. “Dizzy spell, really bad one... Sudden-like…”

“That’s it, you’re going to the Hospital Wing!” Ron announced, easily maneuvering my much smaller frame into a position he could support, “Harry, Hermione, you go on. She’s, erm, anaemic, I think is the word. And Lyssie’s been stupid and hasn’t been sleeping or eating. Makes it all worse.”

Absolute bullshit. Of course. I loved eating. And I loved this body’s lightning metabolism that just couldn’t put on weight. It was a breath of fresh air after my last life, where I couldn’t build muscle if I ran for a month straight. And I also loved sleeping late; getting up early was a forced habit so that I had more time to do stuff, but I used to fuck up my sleep schedule into two three-hour intervals, once in mid-morning and once in the late afternoon.

Though, the anemia was true. Anaemia and asthma were the curses of my Seer powers, along with
my lack of stamina and difficulty forming muscles. A right pain.

“We’ll come with you, Ron. Lys is our friend, too.” Harry said nobly.

Ron hesitated, but he agreed and the four of us made our way to the Hospital Wing. See, this was why I liked eating. I needed to have as much strength as I could, to not collapse every time I was a bit stressed.

“I’m not bleeding or anything, I can take myself to the damn Hospital Wing-”

“Quiet, Lyssie.” Ron said, rolling his eyes.

I copied the gesture. (A good copy. Ginny and I were twins, but Ron and I shared our father’s blue eyes.) “I’m anaemic, not glass. Don’t you have a Quidditch game to prepare for or something, you and Harry?”

Harry piped up from behind, “It’s not for a few hours.”

“Well, what about class? Hermione?”

“Well, what about class? Hermione?”

“We’ve got a bit of time before History of Magic, actually, Lys.” the girl in question said, only slightly apologetically.

Well, dammit. Concerned little buggers, weren’t they?

“Fine, fine. At least stop dragging me, you long-legged git.” I muttered, pulling myself out of Ron’s hold and ignoring the way he glared exasperatedly at me.

We walked along, then, all four of us until we reached Madam Pomfrey’s domain. The high, arched ceilings and windows were pale-colored and the white of the beds looked a slight unfriendly. It was a bit too clean for me to quite be comfortable; hospitals were always places of anxiety for me. Madam Pomfrey tutted as Ron explained that his sister had a dizzy spell — there was a glint of sharp understanding in her eyes, of course, as she knew that keyword — and as I was led to a bed for bedrest of all things.

“Merlin’s beard, I’m okay. I’ve just been stressed lately.” I muttered mulishly.

Madam Pomfrey handed me a glass of water. “I highly doubt that, Miss Weasley. You’re looking pale and sickly, which isn’t good for a stressed anaemic. Can you breathe properly?”

I raised a brow, even as Hermione and Harry — standing next to Ron, off to the side, who was watching closely with his arms crossed — looked surprised to hear about my physical afflictions. “I have the breath to complain, don’t I?”

The Healer’s lips twitched, but she snapped out, “Don’t get fresh with me, Miss Weasley. Now, sit still. Angoproferor.”

(A Charm for detecting injuries. I should probably learn that.)

Madam Pomfrey sighed. “I think, my dear, you’ll need to take an iron supplement for a while. You are dangerously low. Do you eat properly?”

“She only eats bread.” Ron almost sang.

I glared at him as Madam Pomfrey began to lecture me. Get out of here, wanker, I mouthed at Ron.
Hermione rolled her eyes, sent me a little smile, and then dragged both a snickering Ron and Harry out of the Hospital Wing with only a, “Well, now that’s sorted out, it’s time to get to History. We’ll see you later, Lys!” Madam Pomfrey had me drink a horrible Potion — I argued for whatever the Muggles used for their anaemics, but noooooo… — and then confined me to bedrest. What the hell would I need bedrest for? I had Charms later!

Grunbling to myself, there was little left to do but Occlude and/or meditate.

So.

Malfoy sat with his circle — Parkinson’s face twisted into tears — stinging red marks and the boils. Bulstrode was patting her hand comfortingly — Davis — wand out and trying to reverse the hexes. Crabbe and Goyle looked too stupid to be thinking of anything.

Malfoy looked livid.

Stop.

Handwriting curling and smooth — ink flowing, shaped into letters. Freckled hands — Percy smiling as large, blue eyes watched his fingers write — “Percy, will you teach me how you write?” she asked — begged with puppy-dog eyes. He laughed.

“You always ask me that, Lyssie, Mum said you’re a bit too young right now…” — “But I want to learn! Your handwriting’s lovely.” — Precious, precious child, he knew that she was. In a rare moment of affection — bursting from his chest — arms around her, she sat in his lap and looked at the letter on the desk.

Big, blue eyes. They shared those — used to want differently colored eyes, actually, but…

“Please, Perce?”

Stop.

“Why did you challenge her?” — pacing back and forth — empty Dueling Corridor — “You heard the little bloodtraitor, you should’ve just said something if you were going to tell her anyways!” — “But, Draco-“ — “Did you see the way Prefect Zabini looked at her? I should’ve known, the stupid vampire has been supporting the bloodtraitor since the Welcome Feast. And Blaise just up and left!”


Stop.

Sunset — shining grass — no, wheat. Hands trailing through golden stems — the sky was colored in pastels — fading white clouds — neon green dragonflies kissed her cornflower hair. Peaceful silence on the field, just birds.

Stop.

Tom?

Something on your mind, Guinevere?

Are you afraid of dying?

…Why do you ask?
We just got a letter. Bill was hurt in Egypt. He said he was fine, but it’s dangerous, Curse Breaking. I know my family’s upset with my Sorting and all that, but… I never thought of my brother… just never coming home again.

It’s frightening, isn’t it? How easily death can take things away. Everything you are, gone.

So are you afraid?

If you work hard enough to avoid it, you forget to be afraid.

Stop.

Malfoy scowled. “She’s stolen my position! This is your fault, Parkinson- We would’ve had more time if you hadn’t gone charging in like a Gryffindor! I’d been talking with Bole and Warrington, they were buying us time to make our own attack on her and her stupid little firsties…”

Stop.

“Guinevere?”

I blinked my eyes open.

“And she finally gets up. No wonder you’re always up at ungodly hours of the morning, if you nap like the dead.”

I glared half-heartedly at Lu. “Disturbing Madam Pomfrey’s patients, are you?”

He grinned, slinging his arm around Harper’s shoulders lazily. “Anyone who tangles with that dragon-lady is asking for it, I reckon.”

All four of them were here, actually. Dietrich was in the back — the fucking sod, he was still mad of course — and Jay was nearest to my bedside, sitting in one of the chairs. Harper and Lu were between, standing.

Jay smiled. “Potter told us you went to the Hospital Wing. Anaemia?”

“We skipped the Quidditch match for you…” Lu muttered.

I rolled my eyes. “Oh, what a bloody tragedy.”

“Quiet, you.”

“You never said you were anaemic, Guinevere!” Harper said, eyes rounded with innocent worry. He trotted forward, and put a chocolate frog box in my hand. (A quick get-well present, I had no doubt, the adorable child.) “Are you going to be better soon?”

(I suspected — but couldn’t prove — that Harper was onto me. Our study sessions and long periods of being inside quietly were interrupted, a lot, with walking around or playing around or going outside for Quidditch, which Lu certainly loved. It made him less… troubled, less hyperactive. Just a little. Helped him a lot. I think he knew I was doing it on purpose. But I wasn’t sure.)

“It’s not like she’ll die from anaemia. The embarrassment would do more to her than a silly thing like that.” Lu snorted.

“But she’s in the Hospital Wing! Again!”
“If I recall,” said Jay with a knowing smile on his face, “Guinevere came here for pricking her fingers on a Spiky Bush.”

Harper nodded empathetically. I scowled.

“Oh, out all my secrets, why don’t you?”

“Well, have you seen her brothers? I bet if she stubbed her toe, that prefect one would disintegrate the wall that did it.” Lu said flatly.

“Like how you chucked the broom that almost threw her off into the forest?” Harper asked.

Lu blushed to the tip of his ears. “Shut up, Harper!”

Ah, the normal bickering. I looked at my chocolate frog card and laughed. “Harper, what’ll you give me for a Merlin?”

His jaw hit the floor, and he scrambled out of a headlock from Lu nearly onto my lap. “C-Can I hold it? Please, please, please, please, please, Guinevere — I will do anything for a Merlin.”

He looked at the card reverently, Lu following suit with a bit less fanatic enthusiasm (it could only be born from idiocy, I swear). Jay chuckled and started sketching in a notebook I’d gotten him for his birthday and Dietrich watched all of this going on with disinterest.

I grew a little sad, watching Dietrich; the boys didn’t act any different around me, especially after I apologized several times and went flying with Lu (I was shit at flying, so they got some blackmail material from that), and they tried to do the same with Dietrich... but it seemed it was Dietrich who was pulling away, and I was reminded of the time when we were all just tentative allies, cautiously edging around each other.

Jay said in his soft voice, “I think we ought to finish McGonagall’s essay for tomorrow. I left mine in the dungeons, though...”

Harper and Lu perked up. Strange. Lu especially hated Transfiguration and treated McGonagall with similar distaste. As they trailed out, though, I realized that the little bastards set this up.

Only Dietrich was left, looking rather surprised at the situation.

“I can’t believe Harper tricked us.” I said irritatedly.

Dietrich squirmed a little. “Yes.”

What an awkward silence.

“You’re still angry.” I said.

His face hardened, but he nodded. “Yes.”

I played with the edges of my bed sheets. “I don’t understand why. I’ve tried; I’ve apologized over and over, Dietrich, but I don’t know how to fix this. I thought you were angry ‘cos I was stupid, then I thought you were angry ‘cos you were worried... but now I’ve run out of ideas and I’m going to do the un-Slytherin thing and ask for a hint.”

His eyes lost their rigidness, and he slumped a little. He walked over to the seat Jay had been in, and he sunk into it. He looked tired. “I am sorry. I am weakening our power base in Slytherin, because I-“
“Pants to the power base, and pants to Slytherin!” I interrupted, irritated, “I just want to know why you’re pissed at me, ‘cos even though I act the way I do, I’m really not that clever — I can’t even figure out why my best mate is mad in the first place!”

Dietrich was quiet. Then he said, a bit hopefully, “I am your best friend?”

I rolled my eyes. “Yes, Bastion, that’s what best mate means.”

“But… Lovegood-”

“Is my friend, and always will be. You were the one I chose to be my Second, stupid.”

There was a commotion somewhere far-off... seems someone was being brought in, probably being trailed by well-wishers and friends, by the noise-level. Dietrich came to the same conclusion, and looked me in the eye.

“We will speak later, this I promise. No more avoidance. I am sorry for that.” he said quickly.

I nodded in agreement. “After I get out of this bloody bed, then.”

“After.”

I had to focus on the friends I had now, stop thinking about everything else. If I worked hard enough for them, I’d forget why, right? Then again, this was advice from a friend that I really shouldn’t be thinking about, either.

...

“Well, Harry, what’re you up for?” I whispered.

The dead of night. Madam Pomfrey was keeping me overnight, *I don’t know why*, and Harry was re-growing his arm because the idiotic ponce Lockhart had Vanished it. I’d laughed when the Seeker told me, and he laughed when I grumbled at the fact that I was being kept prisoner, and the rest was history. Two kids prone to the Hospital Wing, bored out of their minds and friendly, therefore it stood to reason we’d mutter at each other so the dragon-lady wouldn’t hear us.

“Same as you, I reckon,” replied Harry, smiling crookedly even though he winced at the pain of *regrowing his arm*, “Bored out of my mind.”

I snickered. “I suppose the excruciating pain hasn’t anything to do with it?”

“Oh, that? I’m only developing a new forearm. No skin off my back.”

“See, that’s an actual thing you need to be in the Hospital Wing for,” I complained, “I’m here because the dragon-lady is worried about my iron. Honestly.”

Harry rolled his eyes. Same complaint, over and over. Because I was bored. I mean, I told him a fair bit about Slytherin politics and lectured a bit more on Magical Core Theory at his behest, but I was really annoyed at being kept overnight. I had things to do! Slytherins to manipulate! Apologies to beat into someone’s head! All that.

“Never knew you were anaemic. Ron said you had asthma, though.”
I nodded. “Born with both. Sucky genetics, you know? Plus, I’m a midget. Ginny’s going to be a half-head taller than me when we’re grown, I can just feel it.”

He laughed quietly at that. “Aren’t there magical cures to those things?”

I shrugged. “Most magical medicine is put into curing magical afflictions, actually. Curing hexes and curses. Anything else is mostly sports medicine, fixing injuries — like regrowing bones.” All of this, I learned from Mum, years ago.

“Really? But… I mean, I would’ve thought…”

I nodded knowingly. “Yeah, you’d think magic would cure cancer or something, huh?”

Harry looked up thoughtfully. “Yeah. I mean, at least asthma…”

“Know someone with it?”

“Eh… this kid I know did. Piers Polkiss, one of my cousin’s friends. Had an inhaler and everything.”

Huh. I think I remembered that name. But knowing that person was one of Harry’s cousin’s friends already pissed me off. I knew what kind of bastard his cousin was. Wasn’t there some fucked up thing about ‘Harry Hunting’ in the books?

“Hm. Yeah, magical society, inhalers are plastic, which doesn’t react well with magic, so we have a potion instead. I don’t keep it on me, since my attacks have toned down.” Since, you know, I’ve gotten such a hold on my magic — so it won’t attack me — and I keep quite away from strenuous physical activity.

Harry frowned. “Plastic? Is that the same with electricity, then?”

I laughed. “Yeah, it just blows up. Me and my dad took apart a bunch of electric things once, just to see how they worked, but we had to be in town. For the plugs, and so the Burrow’s magic wouldn’t fry everything.”

And really, we just chatted back and forth like that until Madam Pomfrey stomped out of her office (which was probably connected to her bedroom???) when I started laughing too hard at some ridiculous story about Harry’s aunt and uncle. She scolded us for at least a half-hour before she drew privacy curtains between us, sternly commanding us to sleep; Harry and I only got a glance at each other in before she did, one that said, Better get to sleep before she really gets pissed.

It was nice. Easy. Slytherin politics was fun, yes, and being with my firsties was fun, but sometimes, it was nice to just kick back with Harry Potter. He didn’t look at me like a leader, expecting crazy things; he just wanted to listen and chat and… Well, it was nice not to have to think about insane magical practices and etiquette and how to break this rule and that.

I drifted away, and thought I heard Harry whispering furiously and the squeaky voice of a House Elf replying.
Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

AAAAAAHHHHH I’m sorry this is very late. Why on earth did I make my update days Tuesday? I never remember to do shit on Tuesdays.

Huge, huge thanks to all commentors and kudos-ers and bookmarkers! I passed 100 kudos, it's so exciting! Thanks guys! What makes this even cooler is that I've officially been writing this fic for a year, just about now... So yay!

Enjoy the chapter!

...

I hate Lockhart.

Ever since he found out that I didn’t buy his fucking books, the bastard’s been on my case. When I told him bluntly that I didn’t want to waste money on the vomit-inducing shit he’d smeared over perfectly good paper, his efforts doubled. When I asked him why I should apologize to him when he hadn’t apologized to the trees killed in the making of his overpriced, vainglorious, sorry excuses for written word, his efforts tripled.

So today, as he called me up to perform one of his fake heroic acts in front of the class, I finally gave in and stood. I stood, packed my things away, and proceeded to walk towards the exit-

And he grabbed me.

Just my upper arm, nothing fancy. But I gave him a glare that I usually only used on half-dead insects crawling along my shoes.

“Let go.” I snarled.

“Come now, Miss Weasley, I’m sure you’re a decent actress — not as skilled as I am, I could’ve been Londontown’s star a few years back, but I declined in order to pursue my duty in fighting against Dark Forces—”

“There are few things in this world I care less for than your blindingly disgusting narcissism, Professor, and one of them is when flamboyant perverts put their grubby hands on my person. So, if you would, let go.”

“Now, Miss Weasley, I know you’re a bit starstruck and your first instinct is to react with biting retorts — a habit I’ve noticed in many Slytherin-gear girls — but I cannot allow you to leave my class… You’d miss Year with the Yeti, which I know would break your heart as you’re financially unable to possess my books—”
I saw red.

But before I could snap out a few choice curses, the sound of a bench upturning had me blinking back to reality; my boys had all stood in righteous fury, snarling and shouting insults and threats to Lockhart. They couldn’t see him ‘cos he was turned to face me, but a flash of something flitted across his face, his bubblegum colors flickering with red at the edges for just a moment before he turned to shut them up. I bit down my yelp as his hand tightened on my arm, but sullenly sat down as he recruited someone else to play the part of the Yeti in his shit books.

Wanting to avoid the Hospital Wing for as long as possible with how damn often I was there already, I muttered to the boys about needing to speak to Professor Snape about something; Dietrich gave me a significant look, but I shook my head and nodded for him to lead them to the common room.

“Professor Snape?” I called, entering his dungeon office — adjoint to the Potions classroom, though it was significantly less dangerous-looking and significantly more frightening.

He looked up from where he’d been splattering red marks on some essays, his eyes promising murder. “Weasley,” he barely managed to bite out, “What is it?”

_Lordy, and I wanted to be a teacher in my last life..._

“D’you have some bruise paste in stock, sir?”

Snape narrowed his eyes. “If Vaisey managed to crash his broom again-” threatened the stressed professor quietly.

I shook my head (fucking Lu was always doing that shit, the Quidditch nut, and he always asked us to fly with him…) quickly, then muttered, “No, this is something much worse.”

He glanced at the hand I was using to rub my upper arm tenderly. His night-colored magic rippled with suspicion. “I give free reign to the Slytherin House, of course, but I _will not_ tolerate inter-House bullying. Report their names, Miss Weasley, and I will exact fair punishment.”

Snape thought I was being picked on by non-Slytherins? Ridiculous. Gryffindors wouldn’t dare — too many protective brothers for their taste — and the Ravenclaws had stopped after I set a nasty Hex on the stupid ringleader (fucking Michael Corner, the little-), and I’d even set a few wards on Luna’s things; tracking spells would latch onto the person who dared to steal from her, and I had lots of fun with Fred and George pranking the ever-loving shit out of them.

Anyways, I suppose I couldn’t fault Snape his suspicions... the Slytherins were easy targets if one discounted my Gryffindor connections, and even _those_ were tenuous because everyone hailed Harry as the Heir of Slytherin — I was suspicious, often being found with the Golden Trio, especially after they let me in on their Polyjuice Potion plan for Christmas (they were going to Polyjuice Crabbe, Goyle, and Bulstrode; I’d lead them to the Common Room and train them in how to act like them beforehand).

Shaking my head, I said, “Better not say. You might kill him.”

Snape motioned for me to come forward; he cast a weak _Diffindo_ at the seam of my shirt’s shoulder after I’d shed the black robes, and his eyes narrowed in fury at the sight of hand-shaped bruises on my arm. Say what you will about Snape, but he was as protective of his snakes as McGonagall was of her lions.

“This is an adult’s hand,” he said quietly, applying the bruise paste with experienced ease.
I smirked. “Guess I got carried away, insulting his poney books.”

“Is this the only injury?”

I balked as I realized he might’ve been thinking that Lockhart touched me elsewh- UGH GROSS. The fucking guy was an idiot, and a sneaky, achievement-stealing bastard, but a pedophile? Fuck, I hope not for HIS sake, ‘cos if I caught him anywhere with my brothers or firsties alone, the motherfucker was going to die. Avada Kedavra, right then and there.

Spluttering, I protested vehemently, “YES, this is all! Only injury! Nothing else! Merlin, I’m going to be sick... I should report you to Alby for putting those images in my head, Professor!”

Snape’s magic shook with amusement. His face, however, was as bland as ever. “I assure you, Miss Weasley, this is no laughing matter. As it is, I should report the esteemed Professor for child assault.”

I waved it away, nodding appreciably as Snape Reparo’d my shirt. “That’s alright, Professor, I’d rather let the year play out.” Let him Obliviate himself and get locked in a St. Mungo’s ward. Fucker.

Snape scowled.

I smirked. “A tip, though. Densaugeo Maxima. A few hair-related curses would be nice, too, but I don’t know any that aren’t painful.”

He didn’t ask for clarification and I didn’t give it, I just thanked him and left to be with my firsties. They were practicing their Spongify with glee, Harper was just using it so he could un-painfully slam into the walls and floor where Lu and Jay were amused by just chucking things at annoyed Slytherin passers-byes, laughing when the things bounced off of them. Dietrich had joined their game, throwing softened textbooks at Marcus Flint’s head; until, of course, Harper being the idiot he was threw a not Spongify-ed book and nearly knocked Flint unconscious (Flint, who was the older brother of little Sebastian Flint, sent Stinging Hexes at a cackling Harper for that). My boys were just playing around, their wandwork was much better than it was initially, and I was scribbling in a new black diary — this one would be filled with actual notes, and not Tom Riddle.

(I studiously ignored the slight longing for his snarky commentary. I could imagine how it’d go and everything:

Tom, I think Harper just tried to concuss Marcus Flint.

Please tell me the boy was caught. Finally.

He’s taken after me too much, I’m afraid. Very good at not getting caught.

At least he’s good for something, then.

Or something of that nature. Tom would likely do that. He liked to make sure I remembered the faults of everyone around me, since he thought I went on about them too long. Hadn’t used ‘proud mum’ yet, to insult me, but maybe…

Ugh. What was I thinking? He was a villain. I was going to kill the little fuck, for possessing some nameless innocent. Boy, Tom had almost gotten me, hadn’t he?)

But the boys’ game looked too fun to miss out on, and I got up to join the Spongify party with just one note to myself scribbled underneath a new ward blueprint I wanted to test:
It was, I believe, that particular conversation that prompted the best beat-down of an flamboyant pervert I’d ever seen.

“Gather round, gather round! Can everyone see me? Can you all hear me? Excellent! Now, Professor Dumbledore has granted me permission to start this little dueling club, to train you all in case you ever need to defend yourselves as I myself have done on countless occasions — for full details, see my published works.”

The fucking fool went on, and I snickered as Ron leaned over to Harry and muttered, “ Wouldn’t it be good if they finished each other off?”

Lu, beside me, whispered, “As if Professor Snape’ll get any spellfire from that dumb wanker.”

“True” Dietrich said, his grey eyes dancing (they were the only feature he’d led emotion slip from). “Lockhart was defeated the moment he asked Professor Snape to... assist.”

We five sniggered into our hands, and Dietrich and I shared a look. There had been no time for our talk; after I’d gotten out of the Hospital Wing, we’d had to beat Slytherins away with sticks (literally!) to get them away from my position of power. Someone heard the Trio talking, or someone just did a bit of research, because it got out that I had both anaemia and asthma, and wouldn’t that make me a weak leader? Then classes sped up, threatening homework over the Winter Hols. And now, we had to watch Snape kick some ass.

Which he did.

Rather than blasting him back quickly, Snape allowed Lockhart to cast his weak spells and grin at the crowd winningly, despite Snape’s very lazy evasion. As soon as Lockhart opened his mouth for a third or fourth spell, Snape flicked his wand rapidly, his spells silent and his eyes glinting with a streak of that famous sadism.

Lockhart’s hair shriveled up and seemed to die on his scalp, his skin broke out into unattractive welts, his front teeth shot out nearly to the floor, and his hands swelled like balloons; fat fingers straightened with air pressure, he dropped his wand. There were gasps of horror from the girls, and laughter from almost everyone else. Lockhart’s embarrassment was evident and he could barely speak, opting instead to motion for Snape to take over while he retreated with all the dignity he could muster — which was very little, as my Head of House had been merciless.

Coolly, Snape instructed us to pair up and practice dueling. When our eyes met, despite the differing colors, they were identical in that nearly crazed gleam of someone who had just gotten wonderful, petty revenge.

It was hard not to like the guy when he was so obviously on your side.

After a few minutes of disastrous attempts to duel (Snape sneered, disinterested in anyone but his Slytherins; he nodded approvingly when he saw me and Dietich exchange simple spells, enacting our usual warm-ups), Lockhart returned... his hair was a bit dead and unnatural-looking, his teeth were a bit long, and the welts were only just fading, but he could soak up attention.
I cursed to myself; I’d wanted him gone so that he wouldn’t force Harry and Malfoy to duel and indirectly out my friend as a Parselmouth… I don’t know why, but people were already suspicious of Harry being the Heir of Slytherin. It’s not like me, Hermione, and Ron weren’t also there, at Mrs. Norris’ petrification. And Colin Creevey — who’d been brought to the Hospital Wing already — annoyed lots of people.

Seems Fate had other ideas.

“Let’s have a volunteer pair — Longbottom and Finch-Fletchy, how about you—”

I took back the thing about liking Snape when he suggested Harry and Malfoy go up instead, insulting Neville Longbottom in the passing (I didn’t have much chance to talk to him this year, the poor kid). Lockhart tried to teach Harry how to do something stupid and dropped his wand, Snape whispered to Malfoy with a smirk and I knew it was Serpensortia.

“-do what I did, Harry!” Lockhart said cheerfully.

“What, drop my wand?” he asked, a little panicked-looking.

“Three — two — one — go!” Lockhart announced gleefully, ignoring Harry.

Malfoy went ahead with his, “Serpensortia!”

I wanted to face-palm as a long, black snake erupted from the end of his wand. The serpent seemed irritated and it reared up aggressively; I watched it in fascinated horror and knew Snape and Lockhart were speaking, and narrowed my eyes as Lockhart threw it up into the air with his pure incompetence.

Finch-Fletchy… there he was. I slipped away from my friends and “accidentally” jostled him out of the way — wasn’t hard, when he was scared shitless of the Slytherin who hung out with Harry Potter and stuff, never mind my bloodtraitor status — and when the stupid snake landed, I faced it without fear. It was about to attack, and I made a show of looking coldly at it while I raised my wand.

“Petrificus To-”

Too late. I didn’t get to finish the spell before a strange hissing sound rose above the noises of the crowd, and the snake sunk into submission; Harry had spoken too quickly for me to resolve this, and his secret was out. I turned to him, a brow raised in exasperation while he grinned at me. Perhaps I could salvage this a little?

“Thanks, Harry.” I called, rolling my eyes, “I’m just a regular damsel in distress, hm? Not like I was going to see what a snake looked like in a Body-Bind Curse or anything-”

“What do you think you’re playing at?” came a shout from beside me.

What the fuck? That’s canon! Justin Finch-Fletchy said that, even though he wasn’t even the one being attacked? He even stormed out like in the books, and the whole hall went crazy with whispers as my brother pulled Harry away.

I snarled in frustration, finding Dietrich and jerking my head at the exit before heading there myself. I didn’t manage to catch the Trio as they shuffled off with Harry, but I met up with my five and we stalked back down to the dungeons, claiming our usual abandoned classroom where we practiced the dueling and whatnot.
Sitting on a desk, I sighed. “This is going to blow up in his face.” I said.

“Potter’s?” Harper asked, sitting beside me after throwing his stuff down.

I nodded; all of them took a seat somewhere, Dietrich in a chair neatly, Lu on the floor, Jay on another desk, Harper against the wall.

“I know you don’t care for him, but he’s my friend. I might have to stick by him these next few weeks...”

Dietrich frowned. “Will that not make it worse? You’re a Slytherin.”

Harper blinked. “Yeah, if you’re seen with Potter too much, they’ll think you’re aiming to be his Dark Lady or something!”

I groaned. “Shut up, Harper.”

Jay, however, nodded his approval. “We can look after ourselves a while, Guinevere.”

Lu looked at Jay with a raised brow. “I don’t understand how you’re related to ex- Unspeakable Augustus Rookwood when you’re so... fluffy.”

Everyone in the room quieted, knowing that Lu wasn’t talking about Augustus Rookwood being an ex-Unspeakable. Ex-Death Eaters. I thought. However, before I could change the subject, Jay did with for me.

“Fl... fluffy?”

“What’s with that reaction? You should punch Lu in the nose for that!” Harper demanded.

“Shut up, Harper.” Lu muttered.

I slapped my forehead with my hand, but looked kindly at Jay. “Thanks, Jay. I’m glad someone understands that I’ve got friends outside of you all. We might take a hit for this, though. Maybe not as bad since it’s expected for me to hang about the Gryffies, but still. Is that okay?”

Lu sneered. “As if we’d let anyone grab our hard-earned power. I actually can’t believe the prefects ignored us before.”

“Well, they didn’t want to help us, so they just pretended there was nothing wrong.” Harper said cheerfully, “Lots of people do that. Also, has anyone noticed that Malfoy’s been really mad? And Parkinson’s been sad.”

Lu threw a quill at his head. “We were talking about Slytherin politics, and now you want to talk about feelings? Why don’t you and Jay go braid each other’s hair or something, you idiot, Harper.”

I narrowed my eyes. “There’s nothing wrong with hair-braiding.”

“Of course not, Guinevere.” he said quickly, hazel-blue eyes widening a little.

Jay laughed. “If you grew out your hair, Lu, you might understand.”

“That’d get in the way of Quidditch, Jay! I honestly don’t know how Bell manages to fly around without tying her hair up, is she blind??”

Dietrich nudged me out of the ensuing argument, muttering quietly, “Malfoy has been quiet lately.
A bit too quiet."

"Do you think I went too far?" I asked, feeling a little bad.

He snorted. "Not that quiet. Still prances around his circle like he is still a little prince. He irritates them all, now. No, he is not isolated, but he has not made a bid for power. Biding his time?"

"Hm. We'll see. I don't want to fight Malfoy again. He made it hard for us; Parkinson’s little blunder was a blessing."

"I know. She has been outcasted for it."

"Well, bloody hell. Now I feel bad. Thanks, Dietrich. Erm..." I looked at Dietrich, but he shook his head slowly.

"You don’t talk about grown-up things when the children are present."

I laughed. With the promise of a heart-to-heart, Dietrich was a lot less frigid and was reintegrating himself into the group. He could even joke around a little now, though we had tense staring contests sometimes.

"Fair enough. By the way, have you kept a tally on how many times we’ve told Harper to shut it?"

Dietrich rolled his eyes. "Eighty-seven."

"Nice. But you only started counting last week."

"I fear that the novelty has worn off."

"Oh, it wore off the third time, believe me!" Harper laughed.

Me and Dietrich looked at each other. I grinned.

"Shut up, Harper." we said together.

...
you’ve seen someone with it, I’d like to know.”) and I had my brothers’ word that Ginny was acting fine, so it wasn’t her. I couldn’t keep track of everyone in the fucking school, but anyone who called me Lys or Guinevere — anyone who mattered, basically — seemed to be Horcrux-free. It was frustrating and I knew better than to ask for help after the way Dietrich blew up in my face, and though he was a bit better now, he was still a bit colder than we’d been before.

Fucking hell, I was this close to just blurting it all out to Dumbledore… If I didn’t know that would hurt — Clairvoyance gave me a bit of a Seer intuition that told me whether I’d die if I did things now, which was nice — I might. I had to work around Fate, not strong-arm her. Telling was bad. Direct action like that was bad. In fact, I’m honestly not sure why I hadn’t been killed for taking Tom in the first place. Probably because it was fated that I’d lose the diary, too.

“So. How was your talk with Alby?”

I’d heard that Dumbledore called him up after the double-petrification of Finch-Fletchy and Nick.

Harry chuckled at my nickname for the Headmaster. “Uneventful. Oh, but I saw his phoenix... erm, die.”

“Oh, Fawkes finally had his burning day? Bloody chicken has been gross looking lately. Did it scare you? Stupid Alby likes to trick people into thinking they just killed his turkey by leaving them alone with him when he’s close to burning day.”

Harry mouthed ‘Stupid Alby’ to himself before shaking his head and replying, “Yeah, I thought I’d just witnessed Professor Dumbledore’s familiar spontaneously combust.”

I laughed, then nudged Harry excitedly. “Polyjuice done yet?”

He brightened. “Yeah, it’s pretty much ready. Meet us near Myrtle’s bathroom tomorrow?”

“I’ll call you all names and if you don’t grunt and walk away, I’ll assume it’s not the real Crabbe and Goyle.”

“And whoever Hermione is.”

“Yeah, and her.” I said, knowing that poor Hermione was going to have a difficult time of it, putting cat hair into her Polyjuice. But then again… it’s not like it would change much, if Hermione were to succeed… Yeah, look at that, no visions of doom! No death for me, then.

“Harry, make sure that the hair she got from Bulstrode is actually hers. Bulstrode’s got a cat, and you don’t want to see what’ll happen if you mix Polyjuice and animal fur.”

Harry blinked at me curiously, but nodded. “I’ll let Hermione know. Thanks.”

I shrugged. “Should be fun. Getting one up on Malfoy always is.”

He grinned, asking curiously, “Are you really the Slytherin leader now?”

“Not the leader. Not yet. But did I really kick Malfoy’s arse? Yes. Yes, I did.”

He laughed. “I wish I’d seen that!”

“It took a while, lots of really boring Slytherin politics, and a duel with an idiot; not all that interesting. Only the duel was somewhat entertaining, and that was because I told myself that if I took spellfire from Parkinson, I’d forfeit.”
Harry laughed at the sheer cockiness of it, and I laughed because I was happy the kid was okay — this Heir of Slytherin shit would take it’s toll on anyone. I had hugged Fred and George hard when I saw how they joked around when Harry showed up (“Make way for the Heir of Slytherin, seriously evil wizard coming through!”) and had hit Percy on the arm when he told them to stop (“Percy! They’re trying to lighten Harry up, lay off them!”)

Ginny seemed to still be starstruck, though, so she took the more Percy-route and avoided Harry usually. Oh, that girl. At least she’d found her niche of friends. If only Luna weren’t so adept at sneaking off, I might be tempted to shove her in there, just so I know she was protected properly.

I looked up to see Ron and Hermione approaching while arguing, and nodded to Harry with a wink. “That’s my cue. Don’t know how you stand it, so I think I’ll be off.” I said, rising from the bench. When they’re older, there’ll be soooo much great sexual tension — I’ll be able to poke fun at Ron for it, I thought with a snicker, waving at Harry as I walked away.

The firstie boys were all doing their own thing and the Golden Trio seemed to be doing well, so I slipped outside (it was cold, but Warming Charms were fantastic) and sat near the icy Black Lake, under a willow-ish tree.

I made it a point to go meditate every day and let the visions swarm me for a bit so it wouldn’t build up. That just sounded dangerous, and headache-inducing. My Occlumency was going well, though I still hadn’t gotten to the point of building a proper mindscape. (After all these years, too…) Shields were strong, though. Fucking Voldemort would have nothing on the tenacity of my Clairvoyance. Maybe I’d be able to give Harry a few pointers when he got to his fifth year.

Heh. I’d be better than Snape, that’s for sure.

Music. I knew this music… Tchaikovsky — It played softly but vivaciously, and the Great Hall was filled with golden light. Christmas trees adorned with ridiculous amounts of baubles. Snow on the windows. Wizards and witches waltzing around in dress robes and dresses — the Yule Ball.

Cedric Diggory passed by — Cho Chang on his arm — dancing — and Hermione and her partner passed in the background. Hermione looked very pretty, and she was laughing — blurred crowd, white noise — Ron and Harry were up and about, but they didn’t look very irritated or miserable… rather, both looked happy. Dancing with girls — not the Patil twins.. — faces kept blurring, though I couldn’t tell apart things, colors were blending together, but there was an overall happy air about the whole place...

Stop.

My eyes opened.


I didn’t always have nice future visions; they were usually a lot less clear, and a lot more bloody. The present were usually very interesting… and the past was a mix of information that I needed and information that I’d wanted. Focusing on a subject was easy enough, but with how confusing and flighty my visions worked, I never really understood why I was seeing what I was seeing. It was probably random, but for some reason, I kept thinking that Fate was showing me things on purpose. Trying to tell me something.

Then again, I was an arrogant motherfucker and I was probably overstating my importance to Fate… oh wait, no I wasn’t, I was the character that wasn’t supposed to be here.
In any case, the fucking visions never showed me who was opening the Chamber.

Never.

I once saw the petrification of Finch-Fletchy and Nick, though. It was uneventful and the basilisk’s form was blurred to me (likely to protect me), but the fucking thing was huge — how it got around the fucking pipes, I don’t know, that was pretty bullshit — and Finch-Fletchy was frozen in fear before he was frozen by the stare. Nick had been very confused, facing him at the time, and then he turned and let out a small sound of surprise before he, too, was petrified.

It was a bit disturbing, actually.

Speaking of ghosts, I managed to speak to the Bloody Baron again. It was currently Christmas Eve, which was apparently not as celebrated here in Britain than it was back in America. I was the only one going around, when I spotted the pale form of the Baron skulking around the dungeons.

He spotted me, too, and floated on over.

“Young Slytherin.” he said in greeting, his voice rusted and raspy.

I smiled; he wasn’t that scary if you prepared yourself for him. Otherwise, if he ever felt like popping out of a wall, I wouldn’t even judge you if you shit yourself. It was fucking PT all over again.

“Hello, Baron. I don’t suppose you’re alright?”

He merely tilted his head to one side. “We ghosts of Hogwarts feel the absence of Sir Nicholas more keenly than you students do.”

“Except for Peeves?”

“Nay, Peeves is more frightened than most.” came the whispered reply.

I hmmm’ed thoughtfully, thinking about the dungbomb party the poltergeist had thrown yesterday evening; Percy apparently had come across Peeves harassing some third-year ‘Claws and it just got worse from there. His weekly letter had come smelling slightly of dung and his writing had been as sloppy as it got (which was still prettier than my nicest penmanship) with his irritation.

“You wouldn’t happen to know who’s opening the Chamber, would you?” I asked.

The Baron gave a bloody sneer that almost made me shiver. “You would like to know, would you? For what purpose, young one? You are pureblood, Slytherin, friend to Harry Potter... you are the safest you can be.”

My eyes narrowed. “So the Slytherins are gossiping? I guess it was too much to hope for, that my firsties and Zabini would keep them off my back while I threw my support to Harry.” The Baron didn’t reply, but I could guess. I rolled my eyes. “Malfoy, hm? Spreading slander, I suppose, to debase me.”

“So politically-minded, for one so young,” he said quietly, his eyes looking a bit more alive than before; almost proud, I thought.

I gave him a grim smile. “I don’t feel young, sometimes.”

“Nay, the Sovereign never do.”
Stiffening in shock, I looked at the ghost sharply; I didn’t know how to exorcise a ghost, but if this motherfucker tried to spread my shit around out of boredom or something, I’d learn.

The Bloody Baron shook his head. “Impulsive,” he rasped, almost tutting at me, “I am a Slytherin, girl. There is no boon I can be offered in exchange for such precious information.”

I tilted my head to one side, looking pointedly at his chains.

His face was sad and solemn, and for a moment I thought I saw a shadow of a smile so rare because he was always striving to be better — for her. He used to smile for her — she never saw. She never saw anything around her — trapped in the shadow of her mother. It used to make him burn with passion — he burned too bright and it was his hands, his knife that ended her breathing forever.

He wailed — he’d killed the woman he loved the most — her ghostly form, her eyes blazing with everything but forgiveness — never forgiven — he wore chains — her eyes followed him accusingly — he thought he had wanted her to look at him, but not like this, not like this — and so he took that same knife, rusted with her blood, and threw it into his chest over and over and over and over and over and over and over and over and over and over and over and over —

Stop.

The Baron hovered there, staring at me with a knowing look in his eyes.

“There is only one thing I want.” he whispered quietly, taking his leave.

I stared after him sadly, wondering why anyone glorified immortality if it left everyone heartbroken in the end. When I slept that night, I dreamed of a man who wanted a woman to look his way, and when she finally did, he couldn’t even kill himself to escape her hateful eyes.

(The Bloody Baron became my ally, I think.)

The next day, I was greeted with numerous gifts from friends and family, and laughed when I saw such a pile; being a middle daughter of a middle-income household before, it was so gratifying to see a great big pile like this. A present from every brother, my parents, my firsties, Prefect Zabini, Alby, the Golden Trio, Luna, and even a little thing from Ginny. I had, of course, sent those same people presents, along with a gift for my Head of House and hand-drawn and written cards to my professors, for good measure.

I tugged Mum’s dark purple Weasley sweater over my head (there was an ‘L’ instead of a ‘G’ because, really, Lys was the name I cared about and the people I called mine called me, except for Luna, who was odd about that sort of thing) and I relaxed into comfortable jeans and sneakers; the bloody school uniform was a pain to wear — fucking skirts and fancy shoes, ugh — and I relished dressing in my usual things over the Winter Hols. With that, I made a note to owl my boys, as they’d all gone home, and headed to the Owlery after writing some quick, but warm, letters to each of them.

It was probably time for me to meet the Golden Trio near the Chamber — I mean, oops, Myrtle’s bathroom, that’s still a secret — so I waited around there, chatting with the portraits nearby and asking them questions about magical painting and drawing.

When I spotted Crabbe, Goyle, and Bulstrode, I knew instinctively that it was the Golden Trio, but I went with the safe option anyways.

“And what are you three doing so far from your minders?” I asked, my voice frigid and
condescending as it always was to them, “You ought to hurry back down to the Common Room, Thing 1 and 2, Malfoy’s sure to be missing his arse warmers.”

A Goyle wearing Harry’s glasses blinked. It was Goyle’s voice that answered, too, which was weird. “Merlin, Lys, you’re scary when you’re not on our side.” Harry-Goyle said, looking nervous.

Ron-Crabbe nodded furiously. “Don’t ever let Mum hear you talking like that, she’ll pull you out of school. You were practically Malfoy.”

I grinned. “A short, redhead, pretty female Malfoy, at least?”

Hermione-Bulstrode snorted. “By the way, thanks for the tip, Lys. I think I really did have cat hair the first time.”

I patted her arm (and managed not to shudder in revulsion, mentally telling myself it was just Hermione). “Any time, Hermione... Bulstrode? Ergh, this is confusing. C’mon, follow me back to the common room — and don’t react to anything I say, okay? I might have to throw a few insults here and there if anyone sees us, to keep up appearances.”

With their agreeable nods, I led the three of them down to the Slytherin Common room with few incidents; there was a ‘Claw and then Percy showed up at one point, but he’d gone away after I shooed him off and assured him that I was playing nice with the stupid lugs following me back, annoyingly enough. He’d been reluctant, but trusted me to handle myself. Eventually, though, we hit a nice empty corridor and I slowed to walk with them.

“It’s actually quite uncomfortable to be walking with Crabbe, Goyle, and Bulstrode.” I noted airily, “I feel like I’m going to turn stupid any moment, and have to remind myself that it’s just you three.”

Ron-Crabbe snorted. “You even insult like a Slytherin. I can’t believe we’re related.”

I grinned at Crabbe (whoa, weird thought). “You can’t say that it’s not nice, though, having a Slytherin on your side. I’m taking Malfoy down, you know — and I know that he hasn’t been as bloody annoying as he’s usually been because of it.”

Hermione-Bulstrode rolled her eyes. “I don’t understand... it sounds like you’re constantly battling each other, you Slytherins. This is a school, not a warzone.”

Harry-Goyle nodded. “It’s like you’re all enemies, the way you talk about it sometimes, Lys. But I’ve never seen a Slytherin argue with another Slytherin, I don’t think...”

“Rules set by Professor Snape,” I explained, “Present a united front. And yes, Herm- er, I mean, Bulstrode, it’s a battle. Political battle, though I had to show off my magical strength to really be a contender. And half of that win is because Prefect Zabini is backing me, ‘cos she wants the full set of the better control.”

“The better control?” Not-Bulstrode asked.

I nodded. “Well, there’s seven groups; one for each year, yeah? The better control, magnus potesta, is the fourths through sevenths, the lesser control is third and down. Malfoy took the lesser control, the parvus potesta, but he wanted more power, so he used Daddy-dearest to get the 4ths, too. It pissed Zabini off, so when I stepped in and threatened the lesser control from Malfoy, Zabini helped me out.”
Not-Crabbe and Not-Goyle looked stupefied. I laughed.

“There, you look like the real deal now!” I said.

Not-Bulstrode just shook her head. “I will never understand you Slytherins.”

I shrugged. “It’s fun, actually. And it’s practice, for the real world; Hogwarts is the training ground and the matchmaking stage. Lotta the pureblood girls are searching for matches right now, getting ready to step into the world of high society for females.”

“Because girls can only be powerful figures under their husbands?” Not-Bulstrode asked, her eyes narrowing with anger.

Another shrug. “So they say. And- I’d advise you to step away from me, Bulstrode.” The smile and casual manner slid from me, replaced by ice. Not-Bulstrode looked a bit shocked, and I sneered. “Are you deaf as well as ugly, Bulstrode? Get out of my face before it becomes contagious.”

Shocked and hurt-looking, Hermione-strode stepped away. Ron-Crabbe looked angry, but a familiar, drawling voice called out:

“Having fun without me?”

I was impressed with how quickly Harry-Goyle stepped into character, nudging Ron-Crabbe and taking their customary places on either flank of Malfoy. Hermione-strode stepped back into that protective circle, her eyes clearing of hurt and replaced by understanding, right before she wiped it away with the dull look that Millicent Bulstrode usually wore. I stuck my hands in my pockets and gave a bored look to Malfoy, who was looking very superior with familiar faces surrounding him and outnumbering me.

He nodded to Bulstrode, looking irritated. “You said you were going home.”

A flash of panic; I saved the day and snorted, answering before Hermione-strode could say anything, “I suppose you pulled a Bole and forgot something, Bulstrode. Funny, you second-years are so very forgetful.”

Malfoy sneered. “At least I haven’t forgotten my place, bloodtraitor.”

I smirked. “Have you forgotten that my position, bloodtraitor or not, is still equal to yours, Malfoy? Or, maybe, you’ve forgotten the thrashing I gave your girlfriend when she thought she’d challenge me? Sometimes, really, I think you’ve forgotten Parkinson all together — or is it because you’ve realized that she would cost you your throne?”

“That’s right, Weaslette, my throne. Have fun trying to pry it away from me. Haven’t done it yet, even with Zabini helping out, have you? Mummy Zabini won’t hover over you forever, you know. Does she tuck you in at night like your fat mother does?”

I saw Ron-Crabbe clench his fists. This might be dangerous; this was honestly a tame fight, when it came to me and Malfoy. If it got anywhere near the level we were usually at, Ron might snap (temper, temper, brother-dear...)

“Even throws in a goodnight kiss, actually.” I said nonchalantly, “I suppose I’m a bit better of, compared to you, Malfoy — now that Parkinson’s out of the picture for yourself, do Crabbe and Goyle alternate? No, don’t answer that, I really don’t want to think about what you boys do behind closed doors. Anyways, I’d stay to chat, really, but I’ve got letters to send. Bye-bye, Malfoy, henchmen.”
I did my customary turn-on-the-heel (which wasn’t nearly as impressive as it usually was, as I wasn’t wearing my robes) and wondered what I should do... Oh! I’d visit Fawkes. It was Winter Hols so Alby wouldn’t mind.

With that, I skipped my way there, humming under my breath.

... 

Valentine’s day. Everything was going alright until then.

Why, why would Lockhart do this. Why... why why why would the bastard pay fucking gnomes to dress up like cupid and torment students like this? Did I mention that I hated Lockhart? I hate Lockhart.

I felt so bloody embarrassed.

It was times like these that I missed my old brown skin, and the lack of blushing that came with it. Another gnome marched up to me, and I squeaked and bodily threw Harper in front of it. Harper cheerfully took another valentine for me (“I’m Guinevere Weasley’s inbox, I’ll be taking any and all valentines from any and all cupid-dwarfs!”), and Jay patted my arm sympathetically as I moaned into Lu’s back, whom I’d been hiding behind the entire day.


In my last life, I’d never gotten a valentine... that’s a bit of a lie, I had a boyfriend one year, but it was a bit of a fading relationship anyways- NOT the point right now! I’d never suffered through this, having people watch me as fucking dwarves kept chucking things and sweets at me. Why me? I literally was a child. Yes, I suppose I was kinda nice-looking and I did treat people politely, but really?

When Lockhart made his announcement, Zabini had pulled me over.

“Guinevere, you better be ready.” she said, looking annoyed, “You’re sure to get lots, with how friendly you are to everybody you talk to and how pretty you are. Careful, though, because I wouldn’t be surprised if half of your stuff was hexed; you’ve got enemies all over the place.”

Harper trotted over to me, in his hands a few valentines, held out to me.

“Here, Guinevere! You got more.” he chirped.

I glared at them suspiciously. “Put them with the others.” I muttered.

He shoved them unceremoniously in his bag, and we five walked to the DADA classroom for Lockhart hell. I’m pretty sure that we set the record for smallest Slytherin class, with only the eight of us (and it was unheard of, usually, for there to be only one of a gender), but there were plenty of our year-mates in the other Houses. I dearly hoped these valentines were just from them, platonic valentines from girls and whatnot, but by the time lunch came around, there were too many for that to be the case because even I had not spoken to every single yearmate in all the Houses.

Lu confirmed when he peeked in Harper’s bag, nodding.
“I see one from Pucey, a third-year. Another from... ugh, Bole... wait, it might be a threat or a hex or something-”

“Please don’t check.” I mumbled, laying my face against the table.

“That’s got to be bad for your posture, Guinevere.” Harper noted.

I groaned. “The table understands me.”

Dietrich sighed, nudging my head over so he could give me a plate of sandwiches. Another dwarf passed by, dropping some valentines off (two for me, one for Jay and Lu each, both of whom looked surprised and blushed, Jay more so than Lu). I nibbled at a sandwich, muttering plans for the assassination of Gilderoy Lockhart with a rather bemused Dietrich.

Harper sniggered suddenly, though. “Here it comes, guys!”

Something slammed into the table, and I looked up to see a rather irate Ron.

“Who’s sent you valentines?” he hissed, eyes wild, “You’re only bloody eleven! I’ll KILL ‘em! Tell me their names! No one tries to seduce my baby sister without my permission — I’ll hex them into next Tuesday!”

I glowered at Harper, who was laughing with Lu, and received sympathetic frowns from Dietrich and Julius. Then I sighed, “Ron, it’s not a big deal... Not really, I don’t think.”

He narrowed his eyes. “Did you send anyone anything?”

I gave him a flat look. Then I plastered on a smile. “Of course, Ronnie! I sent Professor Lockhart seven already!”

Ron looked horrified, and even Jay snickered. I rolled my eyes.

“No, Ron, I didn’t send any; well, not really. Not using the dwarves at any rate- I have one for Luna and another for Hermione and Prefect Zabini... D’you think Alby will like his? It’s purely platonic, I assure you. As a joke, really.”

Ron relaxed, then nodded firmly. “Good. Good, good. Only girls and... WHAT? You sent one to the-”

“Shut it, Ron!” I interrupted, smacking his arm. Then quieter, “Don’t announce it; anyways, it’s an inside joke. I’ve sent Alby a valentine every bloody year since I met him, you know! It’s just for fun! Piss off!”

My brother groaned and buried his head in his hands. “That’s how it starts, Lyssie. It’s just for fun, it’s just a joke, and then BAM! Suddenly I’m fending off boys with sticks, shielding you-”

My eye twitched. “What are you smoking, Ron?” He raised a brow, and I waved him off. “Never mind, Muggle joke. Whatever. I’m not even going to use the stupid delivery system — none of mine are secret, and I’ll hand them out to people’s faces, thank you very much. Did- Oh. Ginny sent one to Harry, didn’t she?”

Ron sighed and nodded, ignoring the scandalized looks as he finally sat down and proceeded to eat everything within his reach. Good old Ron, he never changed. “It was a singing valentine and everything, in front of everyone.”
I moaned into my hands. Ron went on, “He was dying on the inside, I could see it. And then Harry dropped his book and Parkinson picked it up, Percy took points off when Harry disarmed the git to take it back.”

Book.

I snapped to attention, grabbing Ron’s wrist. “Book?” I asked, voice a little higher than normal.

He nodded, raising a brow. “Found it nearly flushed down a toilet. Empty, y’know, so Harry decided to keep it. I guess he liked it, ’cos he near ripped it out of Parkinson’s grubby little hands… Malfoy got all hissy, then, though why he’d defend a cow is beyond me…”

Ron went on talking, but my thoughts were a million miles away… or rather, the expanse of the Great Hall away, in the bag of Harry Potter. Whoever had the diary had tried to get rid of it, and it was picked up by the hands of my friend… just like canon.

Only, who had tried to get rid of it?

It wasn’t Ginny, not this time. But someone… someone had done all these petrifications, someone had gotten scared and decided to chuck the diary before it got worse. And that someone, if Fate went on like this, was going to steal it back.

*Wards that put tracking charms on thieves*, I remembered faintly; I’d made those wards up so I could catch Luna’s bullies and put an end to it, as much as possible, but now they could prove very, very useful.

When lunch finished, my eyes were trained on the most famous of the Golden Trio. The one who had a certain diary in their pocket.

*Tom Marvolo Riddle, I’d written once, Odd name, don’t you think?*

*A mixture of pureblood and not, unfortunately.*

*Hm.*

I could already imagine the deep, deep red of his black, faded, glassy colors. Curling and uncurling, winding around my indigo. Searching for weakness.

I could see flickers of black ink, words written on top of each other and blotted enough that I knew he was thinking too fast for me to read. *You didn’t read any of that?*

*It’s like you’re writing too fast too keep up. Good Merlin Tom, are you alright? There’s ink all over the place!*

Yeah, he was definitely there. Probably hiding in Harry’s peacock colors. Maybe there was some sort of Horcrux recognition thingy, unconscious or something, which was how even with concentrated Mage Sight — oh god, the headache — I couldn’t distinguish his influence on such a Light wizard. Ah, whatever. I found him, that motherfucker.

Fuck, I hated Valentine’s Day.
Chapter 14

Chapter Summary

HA! Look who remembered to update! That's right. Me. I remembered.

Also, this is perfect. I’m edit before posting, right, since I backlog for a looooong time, but this chapter used to be bloody 10,000 words, so I cut it down into two chapters. And now I have space for more chill shit, as was pointed out in a comment by Lucy (guest)! Yay!

And, as always, thanks to all who comment/kudos/bookmark/subscribe! A shoutout to SwiftyTheWriter deserves to be said here, I think, because you have commented every single chapter and I don’t really know how I haven't disappointed you yet. XD Thanks to all once again, please enjoy!

…

“The incantation, Avifors, is taken from Latin, which makes up the majority of the lower-level spells you have all been learning here at Hogwarts…” McGonagall lectured, which I was — rather unfortunately, because I did like the woman — tuning out.

Luna was humming under her breath, sitting next to me. I was partnered with Dietrich, actually, and she was with some ‘Claw named Cole, or something, who was very politely ignoring her oddities. Better than sneering at her or laughing behind his hands, I suppose, so the kid registered alright in my book.

Dietrich nudged me. “Pay attention, fille stupide.”

“Shut up. Fake French.” I mumbled.

I swear, I actually saw the vein in his temple bulge a little. “I. Am. French. Why is this so difficult for you to grasp? All of you!” hissed Dietrich.

Harper, on his other side, snickered into his textbook — quietly. Impressive, really, because Harper usually was so distracted by interesting things that he gave us away to the professors more often than not. I guess that schedule of ours was really working.

“Your name’s Dietrich. That’s German.” I replied.

“Bastion. Dietrich Bastion. It’s French! Par tous les dieux!”

“Weasley! Bastion! Pay attention, if you please!” came McGonagall’s sharp command.

If we weren’t self-respecting Slytherins, we’d have sat up straighter or something. McGonagall was one intimidating witch, after all. As it was, we nodded respectful and murmured apologies for
the disruption. The ‘Claws knew better than to laugh at me, knowing what I’d done to some of their upperclassman for insults against Luna.

Luna giggled airily beside me. “You like to play with your lieutenants, don’t you, Guinevere?” she whispered.

“If by ‘play’ you mean ‘annoy’, yes.”

Dietrich muttered in French on the other side. Probably unflattering things. It brought a smile to my face, because I had, truly, missed him being all relaxed like this. It got me to relax, too. If the stiff, snarling Dietrich Bastion wasn’t wound up, there was no reason for anyone else to be, either, really. The kid was more uptight than canon!Percy, honestly, if a bit less invested in institutions and their rules.

“Break into pairs and practice on the cushions in front of you,” instructed McGonagall, knocking me out of my thoughts.

The classroom was filled with incantations and the odd sound of fluttering wings or squawking birds. McGonagall — and most professors, really — normally didn’t bother me and mine during the practical part of class, since we were all quite competent, having learned all this ahead of time. (Unless Harper and I were partnered; the kid was adorable, I loved him really, but he had a tendency to make things explode, and I had a tendency to try to replicate it out of pure curiosity.)

The pillows were already stuffed with feathers, so it’d be easier for us to Transfigure them.

I was starting to cast Avifors on Dietrich’s school supplies. He’d already gotten my tie — imperfect Transfiguration, since the birds were all silvery and green, fluttering above us — in revenge, and was attempting to get my parchment and spare quills.

We got bored in class, sometimes. Which was normal.

This was normal.

“-no, no, Mr. Harper, you’re not meant to jab at the pillow that violently!”

“Avifors!”

“Dammit, Harper, it’s all over the place!”

“Mr. Mason, language!”

Dietrich got roped into trying to help Harper at some point or another. (“Mr. Bastion! Since you and Weasley are so obviously ahead of your classmates, do assist your House mate.” “Of course, Professor.”) At that point, I glanced over to see Luna Transfiguring easily — she was, at heart, a lover of Care of Magical Creatures, of course, but Luna was the only one in my year that matched my natural aptitude for Transfiguration and Charms — and looking rather more lost than usual.

So I pointed my wand at the birds she had circling around. “Camalio Flaxis! Macalosia Osturus! Camalio Luteus!” I started casting randomly, having her grey birds pop into neon yellows and oranges with garish, purple spots.

Luna laughed lightly as I shot a bit of color and interest into her own magic. She turned wide, silvery eyes towards me. “You smell of campfire.” said Luna suddenly.

Ah. Well, that made sense.
I burned most of the valentines I’d gotten yesterday. Bunches of them were trick ones, of course. Some were those obligatory ones, weren’t even personalized, usually from the girls in Hufflepuff just because those badgers used Lockhart’s horrible system to make sure everyone was equally embarrassed. (Fairness, see?) Some were creepy as hell and I found it irritating that someone who’d write shitty poetry like this wouldn’t come up to tell me they thought I was pretty themselves, if they really did ‘feel their heart race like a Nimbus in their chest’ every time I passed by. (Pffft.)

Harper got a bit creative with the fire spells, though. Jay still had some blisters.

“Got a bit carried away yesterday.” I replied to Luna carelessly.

Luna nodded dreamily. “You get carried away a lot.”

I smiled sheepishly, still flicking Color Changing Charms at her birds and mine, feeling my magic sing as I did. (It wasn’t used much for simple pleasures like this.) “I do, don’t I?”

“That’s alright. That’s what your lieutenants are for. They’ve got to ground you when you’re too distracted to notice you’re floating away. There are lofty things in your head, you know. Might be the nargles’ doing.”

“You’ve told me lots that I’m more susceptible to nargles than most.” I said, nodding.

“It’s rather tragic.” Luna sighed. “Have you found your lonely book?”

_Do you ever get lonely? What on earth do you do when I’m not writing?

_Sift through memories, mostly. I have some limited awareness of the outside world, however, and it’s mostly thanks to you. The more we speak, the more awake I am.

Stop.

_Feeding on the magic of the — indigo and blue and silver, pulsing with health, a quasi-sentient cloud of color. Curling up to it was black, black, blackened red and — siphoning, eating, growing stronger and redder — pale skin, the veins blue and stark against the translucent — Drops of water, slowly falling, green glow and worn stone curving to make a face — black ink, yellow pages, white fangs, red red red-

Stop.

_So you DO sleep?

_I’d been sleeping for a long time before you, Guinevere.

_You never answered my question.

_Which was?

_Do you ever get lonely?

_Blurring words — ink all over the page, splattered on, too quick — she frowned at it. Sometimes it happened, when she was distracted or — black book and smooth, lovely pages that were leathery and soft with age. It fit right into her hidden pockets.

Stop.
“I have, actually.” I said quietly.

Luna looked at me sadly. “Really?”

I smiled a little. “I know where he is, but not quite how to get to him. It’s… an odd situation.”

She frowned, looking a bit concerned. “Don’t let its nargles get to you, Guinevere. You attract nargles like honey and bees.”

“I don’t mean to.” I said, rather guiltily.

(This was Luna’s way of saying she was worried about me getting into trouble, you see.)

She shook her head. “I know you don’t, Guinevere. But even flowers shed away their brightness and hibernate for the winter, you see. Oughtn’t you to do that?”

“Hibernate?”

“Just like a Seven-horned Humbibbily.” Luna said matter-of-factly.

I laughed a little. “I’ll try to keep my head down, if that’s what you’re getting at.”

Luna patted the top of my head. “You try very hard.” she praised.

Well. I think it was praise. One never knew with Luna, after all. Even after all these years, the girl still caught me off-guard sometimes. Pleasantly, as I really did enjoy trying to piece together her thoughts through her words, but still.

…

Okay.

What the fuck did I do wrong this time?

I looked between Harper and Jay in blatant confusion, watching Dietrich coldly walk off with Lu following after him uncertainly, glancing back at me a few times before the two exited the Slytherin common room. I blinked.

It was the day after Valentine’s Day, right after classes; Dietrich had slowly been warming up after the big fight — holy shit, his grudge-holding capabilities neared Ginny levels — and I thought we’d be back to normal by Easter Hols at least, with how we didn’t have time to speak properly, not reall. Then fucking- *Something* happened, ’cos the little shit was back to ignoring me and keeping at least a three foot distance and *holy Merlin it was pissing me off*.

“He has more mood swings than a girl!” I hissed, folding my arms childishly.

Harper gave me a ‘You’re an idiot’ look. I narrowed my eyes at him.

Jay sighed, “You said it started after Valentine’s?”

“Yeah.”
Harper gave me a ‘You’re a REALLY BIG idiot’ look. I snarled.

Jay, again, sighed, “For someone who’s really smart, sometimes you don’t think.”

I threw my hands up in the air. “For Merlin’s sake, Harper just explain it to me in non-cryptic words already! Jay seems to have a problem with telling things to me straight today!”

Harper huffed, rolling his doe-eyes at me. He didn’t say anything, though.

Jay continued, “Remember what we said, Guinevere? Last time you two were fighting? Remember what we told you not to tell Dietrich that you knew?”

I scrunched my eyebrows together.

That was the end of Harper’s patience.

“You idiot, Guinevere! Dietrich FANCIES you! It was just Valentine’s! You probably got a valentine from him or something, and because you didn’t read any of them, he’s pissed off at you!”

I blinked. Then I stared accusingly at Jay. “You said it was just a crush! You said he’d get over it!”

I hissed.

Jay face-palmed. Actually did. Which was how I knew this was bad, Jay was normally too elegant for that shite. “No, Guinevere, I said that Dietrich thought he’d get over it.”

“You’re a terrible Slytherin, actually forgetting when we told you to forget it.” Harper piped in, looking disappointed in me.

I looked at Jay incredulously. “You tell me to forget, you expect me to remember, make up your mind, man!”

Harper threw his head back and groaned to the ceiling.

I crossed my arms and looked away, feeling like an idiot and a child. Which I was technically both, but it still was embarrassing. And irritating. Why the hell- I didn’t remember that Dietrich fancied me with everything else going on, and it’s not like he was making it known, acting so cautious around me... and we’d never had our fucking talk. Fuck! I forgot about that, too!

“Why would he bloody fancy me if I’m like this?” I muttered to myself.

Harper turned his wide eyes to me, looking shocked. “You get a tonne of valentines, and you ask something like that? Are you stupid, Guinevere?”

I glared. “Shut up, Harper.”

Jay shook his head. “I have to agree with Harper on this one, Guinevere.”

“Wha- traitor!”

Harper grinned. “Does this mean I’m the king, now? I beat Guinevere!”

Jay nodded, humoring him. “Of course. May I be your Second?”

“Of course, Jay! Does this mean you fancy me like Dietrich fancies Guinevere? Good thing I’m already an idiot, I won’t need to work to ignore you and make you pine after me quietly-”
“Shut up, Harper!” I interrupted, feeling bad all of a sudden.

Harper sniggered, but Jay frowned and put a hand on my arm. “Sorry, Guinevere. It’s surprising that you’d ask that, though; all of us saw it coming the moment we allied at the beginning of the school year.”

I buried my head in my hands. “Really? I’m the only one who didn’t know?”

“Yup!”

“Shut up, Harper.”

Jay patted my back comfortingly. “I can’t believe this is a surprise to you. What’s not to like about you, Guinevere? Why wouldn’t Dietrich fancy you?”

“Maybe the fact that we’re both eleven?” I muttered.

“As if that matters, Guinevere. I had a crush on Astoria Greengrass — she’s coming to Hogwarts next year — for a few years.” Jay reasoned, “It only faded when her big sister punched me in the nose when I was nine...”

Harper laughed. “You got beat up by a girl, Jay? Was it Daphne, in Malfoy’s year? D’you wanna prank her?”


“I’m cocky, I’m a bloodtraitor, I’m constantly dividing my attention among all the bloody things I do, I’m cruel when I feel threatened, I’m an idiot when it matters, and I’m a liar. Why would someone fancy that?” came my feeble mumble. I was trying to deny this bullshit, because I was fucking eleven and drama like this didn’t happen when you were eleven.

Fuck.

This could not be happening.

“You’re confident when you need to be, Guinevere.” Jay said gently and patiently, “Like when you’re sniping at Malfoy. But the fact that you were embarrassed at the valentines and you seem to be putting yourself down now... well, that’s not very arrogant of you.”

“Who cares if you’re a bloodtraitor? Didn’t I say it didn’t matter?” Harper asked.

“You are busy, but that’s because you try to give time to everyone. Potter and his gang, your brothers, Lovegood, Zabini, us... it’s a lot, and we understand that.” Jay went on, smiling.

“You’re scary to Malfoy and his gang and anyone who crosses you, but that’s alright. You’re kinda like a mother that way, y’know? Do you mother a lot, Guinevere? You terrorized all of Lovegood’s bullies, which was fun.” Harper chimed in cheerfully.

“And yes, you’re a bit scatterbrained sometimes...” laughed Jay, but it was a warm kind of laugh. “But it’s proof that you’re a normal kid, like us. Sometimes you’re so mature, Guinevere, it frightens us... but then you do something idiotic, like forget your gloves in Herbology, and we’re reminded that you’re only human.”

I was honestly going to cry. These little buggers... Dammit! I shouldn’t be asking for emotional reassurance from eleven-year-old boys! But that’s what this was, really; them reassuring me that I
wasn’t a fucking monster that was changing the plot line too much, that I was necessary to them. That my faults didn’t outweigh the good (?) I’d done, at least, in their eyes.

“Lastly! Well, you’ve never lied about who you are with us.” Harper piped in, patting my head gently, “I think you’ve only ever lied about what you do; and it usually had something to do with that book of yours. The one Parkinson stole.”

I froze.

“What?”

It was true, I guess, that I lied when I had the diary — I couldn’t rightly tell people that I was talking to a little version of the Dark Lord!

“Sometimes when you said you’re studying, you were just writing in it.” explained Jay quietly, “You don’t lie when you sneak off from us — you always explain what you’re doing, and it’s usually to help your brothers or something.”

Harper nodded in agreement. “That book, though... well, it’s a diary so we can’t really tell you to hand it over, right? You said it’s got notes and stuff, but you can be truthful with us, Guinevere: it’s really just a diary. Don’t be embarrassed about that — you’re a girl, you do girl things sometimes.”

Oh shit. Okay, this was really starting to make sense to me now. No, I usually didn’t lie to them — they were my friends, even before I realized it, I didn’t want to lie to them! Anything that I lied about to the rest of Slytherin — sneaking off to see my brothers, the Hospital Wing incident, the Halloween Feast incident, after the Dueling Club thing — I always explained to them. I was actually strangely truthful, for being a Slytherin... at least, when it came to them.

I never said a thing about Mage Sight or Clairvoyance or Reincarnation — didn’t even hint at it. I never had to lie about that, because the subject never even came close to that, there was nothing to cover up. But the diary?

Oh, Tom had always been with me. I had been constantly having him tutor me, trying to get him to believe I was falling for his nice-boy trap. I often told the boys that it was just my private notebook, I told them that it was filled with notes and wards and stuff about them; which was technically true because that’s what I talked about with Tom. They picked up that technicality and shrugged off my half-truths, believing that it was a diary and I was just embarrassed — so, to them, yes it was filled with those things, but I lied about it because it was also intensely private and I didn’t want them to think I was girly for having a diary.

Oh Merlin.

Dietrich’s anger was a bit justifiable now. My ‘diary’ was a dangerous, Dark artifact; now that he knew, suddenly my dishonesty wasn’t something trivial and easy to dismiss... Suddenly, I was lying to protect a Dark object, which might even explain why I was being uncharacteristically dishonest...

He actually really thought I might be possessed.

Fuck. Really?

“GUINEVERE! HARPER! JAY!”

I jumped out of my seat, on my feet and with my wand out; Lu ran up to us, panting for breath — there was a cut on his forehead and a bruise on his jaw. My eyes narrowed with protective anger; I
cheated a bit and canceled my *Dī-konden An-drixtā and* looked at his magic (Lu was a warm burnt coral with a bit of deep red, some soft silver on his edges). Lu's magic showed that he was on edge, nervous, *maybe scared?* That wasn’t fucking normal.


“The abandoned classroom — Guinevere, please-”

I pushed my boys out of the way and ran through my list of combative spells, my list of Healing for Dietrich, and another list of cusses for letting myself grow complacent. Just because I’d managed to get on with most everyone didn’t mean my enemies had de-clawed themselves; the fuckers were probably waiting for me to forget about them before they jumped us.

Goddammit.

My wand was spitting out sparks by the time I reached the classroom and I threw the door open, shouting out, “Dietrich! Are you alright?”

...

What?

Dietrich sat on a desk, looking a bit surprised at my sudden ferocious entrance.

We blinked at each other for a moment.

(A moment too long.)

“SORRY GUINEVERE DIETRICH IT HAD TO BE DONE BYE!”

In my shock, Harper ripped my wand out of my hand and the door was slammed closed and obviously locked before I could wandlessly summon it back. Both Dietrich and I gaped silently at the door, before my temper snapped and I stomped to the door and pounded on it, snarling.

“HARPER! YOU LITTLE GIT! OPEN THE DOOR!”

“No! Not happening!” came a muffled laugh.

“VAISEY! ROOKWOOD! OPEN THE BLOODY DOOR!”

“Sorry, Guinevere! It had to be done!”

I stepped back from the door and resisted the urge to kick it. Sighing, I turned to look at Dietrich. His eyes were narrowed in a rare moment of expression, and we exchanged places as he threatened through the door:

“I will make your lives very painful for the next few days. Let us out.”

Jay’s cool, soft voice answered (Harper was laughing in the background), “You’ve both made our lives painful for the last few weeks. You keep saying you’ll talk, but you never do; now’s your chance, both of you.”

I groaned and we both realized that we weren’t going to be let out for *at least* an hour. Dietrich sighed and sat down on another desk across from me. I pulled up my legs to sit cross-legged, and we eyed each other awkwardly.
You’re an adult! You shouldn’t be so awkward with a little kid! I told myself.

But you’ve got the instincts of a child, remember? another voice said quietly.

Ugh. Talking to myself again.

“Hi, Dietrich.” I finally said, giving him a crooked grin.

He raised a brow, but sighed and shook his head. “Hello, Guinevere.”

Okay. Good start.

“So... our friends are idiots.” I said, glancing at the door.

“Very. Though... they are right, you know. This is our chance.”

I nodded. “We never quite got around to our talk, did we?”

Dietrich snorted; it was a bit more bitter than I’d heard before. “No, we never did. I suppose it’s both our faults. We have been avoiding it. Now, sitting in a room those idiots trapped us in, I wonder why.”

A thought occurred to me. I groaned into my hands. “Dietrich, we were tricked by Harper.”

He blinked, then slumped. “He will not forget this.”

…

Alright. This was fine. He was fine, I was fine. Okay, just a few seconds of courage... I could do it…

“What’d I do this time, Dietrich?” I blurted out.

He looked at me in surprise.

I went on, feeling silly for all this. “I thought it was getting better — we hadn’t talked yet, no, but it was like before. We were best mates again and everything. What was it about Valentine’s day? I know that’s when this started up again.”

Dietrich shuffled, and I knew that as his sign of embarrassment. “Guinevere, the last time we had a... similar talk, you told me that you were going to do the... not Slytherin thing, and ask me frankly.”

I nodded, remembering that day in the Hospital Wing clearly.

“Can I be frank, then? Un-Slytherin?”

I rolled my eyes. “Didn’t I say, and I quote, ‘Pants to Slytherin’ during that conversation? As if I care right now, Dietrich — I’m tired of this dramatic bollocks, so pants to subtlety, too. I feel like this is too much drama for one year.”

He nodded. “Guinevere, this was never about my... er, feelings.”
Oh shit, son.

“Harper.” I growled.

Dietrich’s face pinked slightly. “Yes. Harper. Let it slip that you knew before breakfast one day. I was particularly... difficult with you that day. I think it’s what encouraged Bole to make his bid the next day.”

My eyes widened. “What the- I remember that day! You prat!”

Dietrich rolled his eyes. “This is not about that, Guinevere.”

I swallowed my indignation and nodded, listening intently.

“I am over that, Guinevere — no need to worry. Rookwood and Harper made such a big deal of it, those squabbling little children.” he muttered. Then he cleared his throat, looking me in the eye quite seriously. “This is, and always has been, about the diary.”

Fuck. I knew it. I honestly would've taken the crush over this talk. Shit.

“You knew I was lying about it.” I said quietly, “All this time.”

He nodded. “I heard you... When you were speaking to Lovegood in Transfiguration. About... Welll...” Dietrich cleared his throat. “At first, we all thought it was nothing... You are the only girl of the group, we thought you lied out of embarrassment. We could let such lies pass, because it did not concern us; and you were always honest to us in everything else — I did not think you could lie to us to save your life, it is why I... fancied you for a bit...”

He cleared his throat again, looking very awkward.

“When Parkinson stole it, I didn’t think anything of it when you fought to get it back. It is a diary, personal — that is important to girls more so than boys, I’ve been told. It is when you went behind the others’ backs to search their rooms that I became worried. It was unbelievable, to me, that you would value your diary over the trust of your friends — unbelievable, because that is not you. That is not who you are.”

Lastly! Well, you’ve never lied about who you are with us, Harper echoed in my mind.

Dietrich still spoke, the most he’d ever said in one go; I think he spoke more in these long minutes than the entire past year put together.

“I can go on about your virtues as a leader, but that’s not what this is about, either. The point is, it was worrying when I saw that. And then you told me that your diary was not just a silly book, but a Dark artifact? How else did you expect me to react, Guinevere? When I found out that all the time you’d lied and said you were studying, you were actually risking your life — and for what?”

He paused, and I realized he was waiting for an answer.

I sighed. “I can’t tell you, Dietrich — I can’t.”

He breathed deeply, grey eyes like melting iron — fiercely angry. “It’s dangerous enough to kill someone? It’s dangerous enough to kill someone like Harper in two seconds? That’s what you told me, Guinevere. That’s all I knew about that book... that thing.” He spat the last word like it was a curse word, disgusting.
“You’re not angry.” I said, sick with the realization. “You’re worried.”

That was so much worse than anger. It dropped a stone right into my stomach.

Dietrich glared at me.

“You said it yourself, Guinevere; you are my best friend. While you had been, I thought, forgetting about that cursed little thing, busying yourself with school and Slytherin politics, I had been looking for what it was. Researching, all the time; going off the little you told me and what I observed. And you know what I found, Guinevere?”

I closed my eyes. I think I rather did. No wonder I kept Seeing Dietrich in the library; I thought it was just stupid stuff, he was just studying, but this is what he’d been doing... he’d been finding-

“Possession. Soul stealing. That, Guinevere, is what I found while I snuck into the Restricted Section. And it fit! I thought you’d been using invisible ink, you know? I thought you’d cast Aparecium once, and words appeared on the page, but no! It was writing back, wasn’t it? It was talking to you!” He was shouting, the first time he had during the duration of our acquaintance. “And you wrote back! Everyday! You spoke to the thing every day since you’d had it!”

“Dietrich, it’s not-”

“Why, Guinevere, would you put yourself in danger like that?” he interrupted again, uncoiled cool-toned magic touching at my own tense indigo-silver unknowingly. “Why would you risk yourself- What does it offer you, that you’d do this?”

I flinched at the pure worry in his voice.

How come Dietrich could scold me like my mother? Dammit. It wasn’t fair!

“Okay — you’re right. But not really. It’s not just a soul-stealer! It’s got someone inside.” I admitted, voice near-whisper, “A memory of someone — a genius. I’ve looked him up — he used to be a Slytherin prefect and Head Boy. He set records in classes, became the king of Slytherin even though he was a Half-blood. I wanted to learn from him.”

Dietrich looked betrayed.

I waved my hands, “No, no, no! I refused to let him help me in conquering Slytherin, in befriending you guys. I’ll swear on my magic, we’re friends of my own volition! No, Dietrich, he tutored me in class. Taught me how to ward and some of the easier curses and hexes-”

“And this is worth it?” he asked, his voice almost devastated, “You could have died before we became friends? You could have died, and we first-years would’ve been pawns for the Malfoy boy; Harper would be failing all his classes; Rookwood would never speak; and I would have gone back to Germany the first month, because of this book?”

Putting it that way, I felt like shit.

But... if Guinevere Lysandra Weasley never existed, that’s exactly what would have happened.

I played with my hands, feeling very scolded now.

And very guilty.

“We would not have even known why you would’ve died.” he whispered on, looking both parts
enraged and grieving, “Why alone, Guinevere? Why did you not share the burden? Warn us? So we could have helped ground you, keep your soul away from it? And how could you continue your obsession with it??”

“It’s not that I’m obsessed with the diary, Dietrich!” I protested, feeling angry at the imagery of Tom managing to trick me, to make me- I dunno, bow to him. “I told you- It’s dangerous! Now you know how, and now you can understand why I don’t want anyone else to be at risk of it!”

“You guard it with wards-”

“Because it’s dangerous! Dammit, Dietrich, the moment I picked it up, it became my responsibility — and anyone it kills, whoever it’s killing right now, that’s on my head! It’s not obsession, it’s not jealousy!”

Dietrich pinched his nose, looking very frustrated. He glanced up at me, sneered a little, then down again, sighing. A deep breath for both of us, and then he looked at me with that familiar bored expression, his voice calm:

“Why do you do this to yourself, alone? Tell me the truth, Guinevere. Help me understand, so I can help. Just... why do you put it above us? What power does it hold over you, what do you fear, that you can’t at least tell me? Your best friend?”

FUCK. That’s a low blow, Dietrich, you sneaky little bastard.

My heart actually pinched in pain, and I felt like the worst person in the world right about now. I’d dangled information in front of Dietrich and expected him not to ask questions, not to look into things... I’d expected blind obedience, really, and when all I got were questions, I got pissed off. I painted myself the victim all this time, when I was really being the irritating problem.

But Dietrich’s eleven, Lys! You can’t involve him in this! something shouted furiously at me in my head.

Harry bloody Potter raced a Dark Lord to the Philosopher’s Stone when he was eleven. Dietrich can damn well do whatever the fuck he wants. I muttered back.

You’re the adult here! You can’t endanger children! it protested.

But I’m not, am I? I’m an eleven-year-old witch with memories of nineteen years of a Muggle life in the future. I don’t know what the fuck I’m doing with this magic shit, and I need my friend’s help, and he needs my trust. Fuck off!

Sighing, I nodded.

“Okay. You win. You’re not going to drop this, are you?”

“Not a chance in hell.”

“I never thought I’d be annoyed at your loyalty. I’ll tell you what I can.”

I won’t tell him about the Clairvoyance, that’s not even really a factor. Reincarnation memories are something I’m taking to the grave, obviously. But I’ll tell him everything I’ve got about Tom, about my suspicions that he’s possessing someone to open the Chamber of Secrets, that every time I’ve tried to interfere with his plans, something gets in the way.

And I did.
I told Dietrich about finding the diary in Ginny’s things during the summer, and writing in it. Discovering another soul inside, the memory of a sixteen-year-old genius named Tom. Researching what he was, coming to a similar conclusion as Dietrich (that was a bit of a fib, but if you counted foreknowledge and visions, it worked), that Tom was some sort of soul-stealer, or wished to possess me. Deciding that I’d rather pick his mind, make his knowledge and skill my own, than turn him in just yet... after all, I’m a Slytherin, and I wanted power — and was confident I could out-Slytherin Tom, take his knowledge and get away with my soul intact.

I spoke of some of the conversations we had, Tom and I, and of how I was very careful not to give much away. How I dealt with him like an ally — an ally that would turn on me in a heartbeat if I slipped once. I described some of the knowledge Tom had, trying to explain his depth of knowledge and why I deemed it more valuable than my safety for the moment.

(“Are you sure?”

“What do you mean?” I asked.

“That you were simply trying to use it. You wrote the soul-stealer… every day, Guinevere. Every day. It is not… You call it ‘he’, you call it by name, not by the magical abomination it is. That is…”

I hesitated, feeling vaguely guilty and ashamed. “Maybe…” I conceded, “Maybe I thought he was my friend. I just… forgot, sometimes. It’s…”

Dietrich only nodded, a soft sort of understanding in his eyes. “No need for excuses, Guinevere. You were not… You were better off than I, in the beginning of the year. But I know what loneliness is. This ‘Tom’ is very dangerous.”

I shuddered, imaging what would’ve happened if Dietrich had the diary at the beginning of the year. Shit, it would’ve been horrible.)

Then I talked about how I’d had to keep Tom from them — the four boys — because at first, I didn’t trust them. We were allies, not friends. But by the time we’d become friends, I didn’t want to burden them with Tom’s existence; I was arrogant, I thought I was the only one who’d understand how dangerous Tom was. I admitted that. I even touched a little on how maybe Dietrich might be right, that I kinda sorta thought Tom might’ve been my friend at one point.

Dietrich listened patiently, commented only a few times for clarification, nodded along with me. I felt like a burden was coming off my shoulders, piece by piece, as I spoke. Eventually, I finished, and we were left in peaceful silence.

“We’ll get it back.” he said finally.

I looked at him. “Yeah?”

He nodded. “We’ll get it back. But then we’re going to destroy it. Or bury it deep somewhere, where it will never see the light of day again.” He gave me a firm look. “It has been useful, Guinevere, I admit that — but it is too dangerous. I will not risk anymore souls to it. Not yours, not mine.”

I sighed, but understood and nodded. “I understand.”

Tom’s fate was sealed, then. Either he’d be dead by Dietrich’s hands, buried until the seventh book and then killed by Harry, or just plain killed by Harry at the end of the current school year.
Whatever the pathway, the end of it was the diary being stabbed or burned or something.

(I didn’t want to acknowledge the part of me that felt sad at the prospect. It meant admitting that Tom had been succeeding, and if Parkinson hadn’t stolen it when she did, I might be talking around petrifying people right now.)

“Good. Now... I suppose we should be trying to get out now.” he said.

“We missed dinner... They may have forgotten us.”

“Revenge tomorrow?”

Dietrich huffed an amused snort, and I sighed, looking at the ceiling. So. Dietrich knew that Tom was probably possessing someone to open the Chamber. He knew I was at the root of these petrifications, and he didn’t seem to give two shits about it. Seemed only relieved that it wasn’t me being possessed.

I grinned at him, first time in a while. “Are we friends again?”

He scoffed. “I was never not your friend.”

“Could’ve fooled me, you prat. Oh, and… Call me Lys, yeah?”

Dietrich smiled, eyes crinkling and mouth curving and dimples showing. He looked so much younger like that.

“Lys.” was all he said.

(First time I’d S/seen that before.)

Had a nice ring to it, with the light French accent and all. Lys. That, plus his small smile, which probably mirrored my own; we both knew that this was a clean slate now, that this was the conclusion to our rigidness. And maybe the others would be- I dunno, disappointed that it wasn’t any sort of drama shit that got us to this point (Harper and Jay were hopeless romantics, though Harper was generally just sort of hopeless), but this was enough for me. It almost felt like... I had another brother. Or something.

Me and mine now, Dietrich. I suppose it’s about time.
Chapter 15

Chapter Summary

Quick 'lil update for y'all before I go to lab. Basically the part two of the last chapter. Enjoy!

Oh, and as always, thank you to commentors/kudos-ers/subscribers/bookmarkers! I do enjoy the questions, and always squeal when I see comments in my inbox. Much love to all of you. XD

... 

Huh. I’d forgotten how nice it was to have a go-to partner-in-crime. When I was younger, it had been Ginny. Then she got all weird about pranking after the George-grudge incident... so I’d go to Ron, or the twins. Usually Ron, to get revenge on the twins. Percy wasn’t a partner-in-crime type, though I adored him. And with Ginny off, still mad at me, Ron with Harry and Hermione, and the twins used to just each other and/or Lee Jordan, I’d lost that.

Now I had Dietrich.

Fake French fucker. He has a German name, for Merlin’s sake! Why does he have a French accent?

Anyways.

It was nice, having someone who knew mostly everything, because I had someone to panic to when Ron told me that the diary had been stolen out of Harry’s dorm.

“WE were going to do that!” I hissed to Dietrich in Potions, “Now we have no bloody clue where it is again — it’s probably the possessed person again, they probably saw Harry with it some time…” Fucking Clairvoyance isn’t giving me a hint! Fuck!

Dietrich hissed back, “Concentrate on the potion, we’ll worry later!”

I clenched by jaw, but obeyed. If my potion-mixing was a little stiff, who could blame me?

“I don’t want to kill anyone.” I muttered, barely a whisper.

Dietrich, of course, heard me. He nearly paused in the preparation of the rat tails, but continued after a surprised little jolt, slicing one of the tails a bit too widely for Snape’s meticulous tastes. “You will not be at fault.”

“I should’ve fetched Tom as soon as I could.”

He gave me a sharp look. “Have you forgotten? We agreed that the horrible putain de livre had
almost ensnared you. You would be the dead one, in this case.”

“Better than murdering some—”

“Absolument pas.” hissed Dietrich.

“But—”

“Pour l’amour de Dieu, woman, do not martyr yourself.” He glared at me. “You are Slytherin, non? I will drag you back from the dead if you die for some fool like Stimpson or Bennett, and I will kill you.”

I felt myself smile a little. “Is this your way of saying I’m more important than Stimpson and Bennett?”

He snorted. “Of course you are.” He shuffled me over, sliding the rat tails into the potion and raising an unimpressed brow when it let out a puff of purple-grey smoke and started turning colors. “We will do what we must to get the book, Lys, but do not wish you were in the place of its victim. Tu es une fille tellement ridicule. Tu as si peu d’estime de soi. C’est complètement absurde, puisqu’au final tu es vraiment une personne incroyable.”

“Why do you keep doing that?” I whined.

Dietrich raised a brow at me.

“I never understand what you’re saying. You’re insulting me, aren’t you?”

Dietrich sighed heavily, letting me step back in and start timing the potion, stirring it clockwise then counter-clockwise. I had the impression that if he weren’t so proper, he’d be rolling his eyes and groaning by now.

“We will finish the potion. Then we will plot.”

“I’m rather good at multitasking.”

“So you think. Lovegood is right — you are often carried away, Lys.”

I grinned at him. “But you still value me more than Stimpson or Bennett.”

Dietrich swatted at me irritably, making me turn back to the potion, which was turning a sort of magenta color, softly glowing.

“No worry so much for the book. We will take care of it.”

Together. It wasn’t said, but it was heavily implied. Because Dietrich was my partner-in-crime again. It was a lovely feeling, having back up when you were flailing in a panic and likely compromised by a fucking diary, too.

...
“Dietrich, who would have access to Harry’s dorm besides another Gryffindor?” I asked at, shoveling a thick slice of bread into my mouth as quickly and politely as possible, “Does this mean he’s possessing a Gryff?”

He glanced at the Gryffindor table, his eyes hesitating over the Golden Trio for a moment or two. “It is likely. But there are many inter-House alliances; a ‘Claw or a ‘Puff is possible.”

I sighed a little, shaking my head. “Luna says she doesn’t think any of her yearmates have the diary. She’s on the lookout, though.”

“Hm. So Lovegood knew before I did.”

“...Are you sulking? You’re sulking, Dietrich!”

“I am not.”

Laughing at the hunched shoulders of my friend, I patted his arm. “No, Luna doesn’t need to be told things to know all she does. Come now, you’ve spoken to her in Herbology, Dietrich — Luna just knows things.”

“This is true.” Dietrich admitted. Though, he looked much less pouty after that.

The firsties grouped together after lunch while I went searching for the Golden Trio. (They were so happy that their leader and lieutenant made up, the sappy fucks.)

I think it actually quite helped Harry that there was just one more person that believed him to not be a crazy Dark Lord in training. So, I made it my mission to say hello every now and then, try to get him to laugh at some joke at the usual expense of Malfoy. Sometimes my firsties. Often Malfoy. I found the Trio quickly, though apparently Hermione had just run off. I suppose she didn’t want to go to the match... Harry had a habit of getting injured at his matches.

Odd. Didn’t deter him from the game at all. Crazy boys and their obsession with brooms.

“-why’s she got to go to the library?” Harry asked.

Ron shrugged. “Because that’s what Hermione does. When in doubt, go to the library.”

“Harry!” I called.

Both boys turned, and I walked up to them with a smile.

“Ready for your match?” I asked the Seeker.

“As I’ll ever be.” he replied, his voice friendly. Friendly... but strained. His eyes darted around.

I arched a brow at him. “Nervous, Potter?”

Ron rolled his eyes, “What’s Harry got to be nervous for? He’s the best Seeker in the school.”

I shook my head. “I don’t know why you wouldn’t be nervous — flying around with just a stick underneath you to keep you from falling, the threat of falling to your death hanging over you. I told you a broom almost killed me, right?”

Harry laughed a little. (He’d heard the story.) “I like flying, though.”
“As if Harry would fall off his broom.” Ron snorted. “Just ‘cos you’re terrified of flying doesn’t mean it’s dangerous.”

“Hm. Yes, very sound logic, Ron.”

He wanted to stick his tongue out at me, I could tell. But he refrained, then seemed to realize something as he turned to Harry quickly. “You’d better get moving. It’s nearly eleven — the match...”

As they left, I shuffled over to the side to let the crowd of Hogwarts students pass by me without any trampling of my appendages, and I took out a notebook and opened to a random page, focusing the indigo-silver around me — my own magic, though it was faint, now, I was learning to ignore the colors because they really weren’t all that useful when I was faced with a horde of magic cores stomping around me — and letting my mind clear, for one thing.

The Basilisk.

I wanted to See it, hopefully find out what it was doing, because for some odd reason I felt like I was forgetting something and it slithered through the pipes, poisonous green and black, scales sleek like glass — whispered to itself, though the language didn’t make any sense — damp path. It looked almost iguana-like in its face, though it was undoubtedly a snake...

It’s tongue tasted two scents — female and young and somewhere near — closer, closer, closer, it could see a flash of something — reflection? — and the scents changed, dulling... It spat angrily, seeing its prey of two female-young having been petrified by the glass in their hands, the reflected stares of its eyes-

Stop.

I gasped.

Hermione and Penelope Clearwater.

FUCK! I knew I’d forgotten something, but really? How the shit did I forget that Hermione got petrified? As I ran through the hallways, hoping to reach the library, I cursed to myself and wondered why I hadn’t read the second book more often. The basilisk had likely slunk off to wallow in another failure, and I cranked up my Mage Sight to look for inhuman colors if it hadn’t — Mage Sight didn’t work very well in visions, but it gave off an ancient, poisonous kind of aura (wow, I wonder why?) so I was vigilant as I made my way to the stiff forms of my friend and my brother’s girlfriend.

“Dammit.” I muttered.

But I sighed, knowing that they would be fine and this was probably something that Fate willed... though, I might’ve been able to save Penelope Clearwater and Percy’s nerves, but if I hadn’t even remembered Hermione, there was no way...

“Harry and Ron aren’t gonna be happy about this.” I sighed, mustering up a grief-stricken and panicked face before I ran off to the nearest teacher to report this. Mustn’t let anyone think I’d known about this, after all.

As it was, the Heads of House and Madam Pomfrey were probably wondering why a Seer of my calibre wasn’t doing something; it was probably only by the grace of Alby that I wasn’t being interrogated about all the strange happenings. And anyways, they would still expect me to be distressed about my friend’s petrification... which I was, but not in the way they wanted.
I was distressed because Tom fucking Riddle was out there again and I didn’t know who it was, I just knew who it wasn’t. Not that helpful, with the entire student body being suspects due to that.

It was good that I wasn’t the type to freeze in the face of danger, because otherwise I’d be a sobbing mess. Having Dietrich’s support and Alby’s blessing and my brothers/Harry as sanctuary did wonders for my frayed conscious; I was still trying to do good for me and mine, and giving everyone else what was fair. The diary was my mistake, though, which was probably why I wasn’t just sitting back and letting it pass by...

“Lys!”

Ron had cornered me near the Hospital Wing; he’d probably just seen Hermione, maybe leaving Harry with her, and had been waiting to speak to me alone. Three guesses as to what he wanted!

“Haven’t you, you know, Seen something? Something about who... who’s doing this?” he asked, his eyes pleading.

I shook my head truthfully. “I don’t know, Ron. I’ve been trying to find out, but I just keep Seeing things from the past or things that’re happening now, that I can’t help with.”

Hope filled his face. “You Saw what petrified Hermione?”

Yes. But I can’t tell you, you’re going to talk to Aragog, the giant fucking spider...

“I Saw her freeze up after looking in the mirror. Clearwater, too. So the mirror’s a key. Anything else... well, unless you need to know what wheat fields in America look like in the sunset — which is ‘very pretty’ by the way — I’ve got nothing.”

Sorry, brother.

Ron sighed, shoulders slumping.

A twinge of guilt, overridden by knowing that I had to let things play out at this point. I had two projects going on: making sure canon was preserved, all events surrounding Harry Potter staying mostly the same on pain of death, and trying to make sure that the interference I’d already done (which had assumed I’d be flipping canon off this year, at least) wouldn’t kill someone. Trying to balance these things made me stressed, goddammit.

For all I knew, because Tom hadn’t possessed Ginny, someone would die.

(A darker part of me didn’t care, because Ginny was my sister, and whoever it was didn’t seem to be important to me. I tried to squash that part down in favor of taking responsibility for my mistake...)

“I’m sorry, Ron.” I said quietly, taking his hand and giving it a squeeze.

He shook his head. “S’not your fault, Lyssie. Dad always said your abilities were better for information gathering than prediction — leave that to the Prophesiers, I guess. But... if you see anything-“

“If I can tell you, I will.” I said.

My brother gave me a funny look. “There’s something you can’t tell me, then?”

I frowned at my mistake, but I nodded honestly. “Sorry. You’re going to hate it. But you learn
something important, so it’s worth it. You know how Fate works.”

*Spiders.*

Ron groaned a little. “Thanks for that, Lys.”

A weak smile. “You’re welcome, Ronnie.”

…

“Parkinson.”

Dietrich looked at me. “Hm?”

We were sitting in the common room, in a corner near the windows-into-the-lake. I had been waving at some passing merpeople when the thought hit me with the force of a freight train.

I grinned at Dietrich triumphantly. “She lied! When she said she got rid of it, the diary — it’s her, Parkinson! Listen, Tom’s a soul-stealer, right? Normally you’d notice when the victim is being eaten magically, but how would anyone notice if you’re isolated? Why would anyone care, if they’re an outcast?”

It made so much fucking sense! I couldn’t believe it took me this long... Somehow, Parkinson lied — I bet if I reviewed my memories or Saw the night after the duel, I’d find something inconsistent in her salmon-colored magic, something that indicated mistruth — and hadn’t thrown the book after all. After Malfoy cast her from the group (she still hung around them, just not on his arm anymore), she must’ve been lonely and sad and completely lacking self-confidence... the perfect victim for Tom.

I explained as much to Dietrich, whose eyes brightened with understanding.

“Allright. So it is her. She is the conduit for the Heir of Slytherin.” he mused.

I nodded frantically. “She *must* be! She’s definitely stupid enough to write into a book that writes back.” Dietrich gave me a look. I rolled my eyes. “And actually *trust* it.” He continued to stare at me. I looked away. “And not research what it is, thus trusting a sentient object with an unknown nature completely.” I mumbled.

Dietrich snorted. Snarky git.

“Whatever! Point is, we know *who* she is...”

“I have doubts.” Dietrich said slowly, however, “She does not act like someone who is being possessed.”

“Well, she wouldn’t exactly care that the victims are all non-purebloods, would she?” I retorted, giddy with the new discover, “And she’s looked like shite since our duel, though that can also be blamed with Crabbe, Goyle, Bulstrode, and even *Zabini* giving her a hard time.”

“Which Zabini?”

“Blaise. He was part of Malfoy’s group, you know, but avoided the fallout because his cousin
looked after him. Even though he’s not looked down on, he did still drop a few pegs in the social ladder because of Parkinson.”

Dietrich hmmm’ed, still looking a bit unconvinced. “What of Malfoy?”

I raised a brow. “What of him?”

“You said that Lucius Malfoy was the one who slipped Ginevra the book. Would his son not see the signs and save his friend, no matter if they are fighting?”

Ooh.

I saw what he was doing here. Like how Dietrich had been trying to save me when we were fighting — researching in the library, watching if I was acting differently, confronting me about Tom in the first place — wouldn’t baby-Malfoy try to prevent Parkinson from being killed? He made a good point, though... so maybe Parkinson didn’t have it? ‘Cos obviously Malfoy would...

“We’re assuming that Malfoy knows about the book at all. I’m not sure he does.”

“Why not?” Dietrich asked, looking slightly flabbergasted. I suppose it would be strange, to him, that a parent wouldn’t warn their child of a danger they instigated. Dietrich wrote to his parents weekly, even more often than I did.

“Well, Lucius Malfoy wouldn’t want to incriminate his son, right?”

“Hm. True. But I wish to look into this. We do not want to confront Parkinson and discover that not only were we wrong, but we have now given her information that she can use against us.”

I frowned at the thought. “You’re right. I got overexcited. Sorry.”

Dietrich’s eyes warmed, and his lips twitched — like he wanted to smile but was restraining himself. “We are a team, Lys. Though... after this is over, we will tell the others, right?”

I saluted, grinning. “After this is over. Hopefully in person.”

Dietrich gave a graceful incline of his head. “Good. I do not like to keep secrets from them. They are friends. But I understand why we are not telling Harper about this; he is a creative strategist, but the boy’s head is empty.”

“Impulsive.” I said, remembering a conversation with the Baron, “More than I am.”

A thought occurred to me.

I blinked at Dietrich.

“How are we going to wheedle information from Malfoy and Parkinson?”

My friend hunched over, his eyes betraying his guilt. He had thought of this already. His reply did little to inspire me. “Using every bit of cunning we possess, mon amie.”

“You’re not even French! Shut up!”

“I told you a million times, my household speaks French! Stop complaining!”

He threw a cushion at my head, which I deflected with a near-silent Protego; I sent a color-changing charm at his hair, which immediately brightened into a garish pink that had Dietrich’s
eyebrows scrunch together (one of his few usual expressions). He snapped out some quick French that was probably all insults, and I decided to chuck *Spongify*’d books at him, thinking of Harper and Lu.

When Lu and Jay came down to fetch Dietrich, they decided to join the fun. (We got a lecture on propriety and decorum from a disapproving Prefect Rosier, though behind him, Prefect Zabini looked amused and managed to get us out of the passionate scolding quickly.)

Dietrich and I gave each other firm nods as we separated into our dormitories.

*Parkinson for me, Malfoy for you — any trouble, and we’ll switch off at the end of the week.*

The end of the week couldn’t come any sooner, however.

At one point, I would’ve been gratified to know how much fear I struck into Parkinson; every time I stepped in her direction, she’d stiffen, and every time I looked her way, she’d flee. It was smooth, of course, the way she managed to evade me with minimal amounts of looking like a frightened mouse scurrying from a predator — but once I was finally searching for it, *it was bloody obvious.*

And annoying.

And to think, all I had to do was threaten to set her owl on fire as she watched then proceed to slaughter her in a duel, which ended only because I threatened to break her legs.

Shit, I sounded like such a bad guy.

*Whatever... as long as she isn’t dead, she has the chance to try to claw her way back to her old standing.*

I even resorted to concentrating on her pug-face when I meditated, hoping to gain some insight to her fleeing patterns, or even confirm that she was the one opening the Chamber of Secrets. All I ever saw were flashes of her cooing over Malfoy in the future (ugh) or her following Davis around, who was obviously pining after Goyle (UGH), or of Malfoy telling her to piss off, which was a present vision. It seemed all she did was trail quietly behind Davis, her only friend; often, though, Davis had to step up to be leader ‘cos Malfoy was throwing tantrums again and scaring the shit out of the rest of them.

It came to a point, one evening, when I was cornered by Zabini.

That by itself wasn’t odd, but it wasn’t the Zabini I was friends with. It was the prefect’s younger cousin.

Blaise Zabini.

“I was under the impression you didn’t much like me, Zabini.” I said, surprised as he pulled me aside. He had the sharpness to his eyes and the strong features that I’d learned to recognize in Josephine Zabini’s face, but his nose was longer and his face was rounded with childhood.

“A silly notion,” he dismissed, “We were made opponents by bad circumstance. It’s not your fault that Malfoy insults everything that breathes. It was only a matter of time before someone who wouldn’t bow to him came along.”

Huh. That’s not what I was expecting.

“And here I was, expecting revenge. What do you want then? You’re pretty well protected, with
your cousin watching over you.”

“I owe Josie for convincing me to go neutral, yes. And since she likes you, and she’ll be around for another year, you’re going to be important next year, too. So remember me then, when I warn you now: don’t provoke Malfoy anymore.”

I blinked. Then I cheated. The faint outlines of color deepened and brightened, my Mage Sight going full-force. Blaise Zabini was a royal violet, tinged with wine-red and an intelligent grey-blue. He had a lot of pride, and there was no quiver in his curling colors that spoke of anything but truth.

But Pansy Parkinson had managed to lie to me, so I kept my guard and Mage Sight up.

“Is he planning to put me down? This late in the year?” I questioned suspiciously.

Blaise Zabini shook his head. “No, for some reason, he’s decided to wait it out. He wants to wait until Josie’s gone, or something — not very clever of him, but Malfoy was never the sharpest of us. No, I’m talking about how you and Bastion are poking around.”

Shit. Were we too obvious?

“We’re not threatening anyone. We’re just watching; we’d’ve thought your camp—Malfoy’s camp would make a move by now. The longer you wait, the more difficult it’s going to be to reaffirm your position. I’m a bit unsure of where you — specifically — stand now, to be honest.”

Zabini gave a catlike smile that was much too similar to his cousin’s. “I like to think that I’m standing back, actually.” For now, went unsaid.

I clicked my tongue. Malfoy may have his family’s influence, but Zabini had the bearing of a true Slytherin. He would side with the winner, it seemed; something he undoubtedly learned from Josephine Zabini when she saved him from falling with Malfoy’s camp. If he made a bid for power, it might be a close call...

I shook my head. For now, Blaise Zabini was testing the waters.

“Why shouldn’t I provoke them, then? You’re warning me not to, but even if I were trying to poke the bloody hornet’s nest, all of the hornets are dead. Parkinson can’t even look me in the eyes without squeaking.”

Where I’d expected a smirk, Zabini’s face only darkened.

“I’m expecting a favor for this, Weasley.” he muttered; then he leaned forward ever so slightly, continuing in a quieter voice, “Malfoy’s been getting grief from his father over the decrease in power, and it’s making him angry. Parkinson’s the same, though it’s more that she couldn’t even hit you once during the duel. Their camp is tense, and I would not annoy them right now.”

My eyes narrowed as his rich colors shivered with worry. “Do you think they’re unbalanced? Will they react violently?”

Blaise quirked a brow. “They’re Slytherins, Weasley. You have the mindset of a Gryffindor — Merlin help you — so I suppose you wouldn’t know: we don’t snap at the first sign of pressure. But if you provoke them, they’ll provoke back. All I’m saying is you should let them lick their wounds in peace.”

I smirked. “I don’t think I owe you any favors, Zabini. I think I’d actually be doing you one if I listened to you...”
He shrugged noncommittally. “Listening would benefit both of us, Weasley. Your choice.”

With that last word in, he left. Blaise Zabini’s warning only deepened my suspicion towards Parkinson, though... A twelve-year-old girl, recently outcasted for a stupid mistake, pressure from her family for her incompetence, her confidence shattered — I should’ve spelled a shiny, red bow on her, so that it was obvious I was giving Tom the perfect gift. While the rest of her friends were busy planning out how they’d grab power back from me, she was busy being possessed — and she looked no different from usual because she was already having a hard time of it (why would anyone think her stress was from being possessed, rather than all the crazy shit that was going on in her life already?) and she didn’t give two shits about Muggle-borns being petrified. Probably cheered her up, actually.

But I didn’t want to ignore Blaise’s advice completely.

So Dietrich and I toned it down a bit.

Which was nice, because now I could shift more attention to furthering my studies of warding and healing spells and meditation again. My wards were, sadly, elementary and easy to break into, if not painful — Dietrich attested to this with stinging welts on his hands when he grabbed a notebook from my bag — but my healing was coming along nicely!

Lu and Harper, the main Quidditch nuts, often practiced throwing a Quaffle back and forth and managed to gain a few bruises from stupid incidents; Harper, by the way, was a clumsy idiot that didn’t think things through (“Why Harper, did you think that sliding down the banisters of the moving staircases was a good idea?”). They were my practice dummies, and I was getting good at the basics after a year of intense study and constant training — and it was only the basics I needed, as it would be useful to be able to bind up your broken leg so you could stand and keep fighting in a war.

My Occlumency barriers were getting to a good point, too, with my more careful management of my visions. Bloody fucking things wouldn’t stop — even Alby said it was highly unusual I will only truly have left this school when none here are loyal to me... Help will always be given at Hogwarts to those who ask for it.” Dumbledore said before being taken away...

Harry and Ron listened — invisibility cloak — Malfoy laughed that his father had gotten rid of Dumbledore, finally, though he had been spoken to in quiet, irritated tones when Lucius Malfoy had left. The young heir, however, only let Harry and Ron see the smugness in his eyes before he turned to leave. Harry and Ron decided to follow the spiders…

“Follow the spiders! I’ll never forgive Hagrid. We’re lucky to be alive.” — “I bet he though Aragog wouldn’t hurt friends of his.” — “That’s exactly Hagrid’s problem! He always thinks monsters aren’t as bad as they’re mad out, and look where it’s got him! A cell in Azkaban! What was the point of sending us in there? What have we found out, I’d like to know! Stupid Lyssie!” Ron asked, shivering at the memory of spiders, spiders everywhere...

Harry frowned. “What’s your sister got to do with this?” — “Er, Lys used to say that, er, if I hung around spiders more, I, erm, wouldn’t be so scared of them. And that’s a right fat lie, if I ever heard one!” — “Sounds like something she’d say. But we did find out that Hagrid never opened the Chamber of Secrets. He was innocent.”

Stop.

Golden grass, overgrown, and brush with deep purple leave swayed — the sun was setting over the mountains, making the water glint like aluminum — “-never been here before, you know.” “Well,
that means you have to go!” — laughing, snow in her hands, ice and the pavement, cracking and flying all over the place. Their breath was visible in the air.

Stop.

Have you ever seen the ocean?

A few times.

Are you afraid of it?

I… I don’t have a great love for water, actually. I told you how my brother almost drowned? He’s afraid of it, too. It was only recently that he’s able to step into it, and even then, he’ll never let himself get further than knee-deep.

Ah. Well, fear does so often rule us.

So philosophical, for a teenager. Are you afraid?

Haven’t I said already, Guinevere? Distract yourself, so you aren’t afraid.

Fear is important.

Fear is crippling.

Stop.

The two walked back to the castle, thoughtful about different things. Images flickered by: Harry — Tom Riddle — catching Hagrid — the spider, Aragog, fleeing — Harry again — Tom Riddle’s trophy — Ron — the spiders — running for their lives — the Ford Anglia — Ron speaking to me — was it really worth it? — right outside the Hospital Wing — Hermione petrified on the bed — Ron and Harry...

They’d settled into their beds — Harry sat up, quick as light. “Ron! Ron… Ron — that girl who died. Aragog said that she was found in a bathroom. What if she never left the bathroom? What if she’s still there?”

“You don’t think — not Moaning Myrtle?”

Stop.

I snapped out of it, seeing Dietrich crouched in front of me with a quizzical fluttering in his blue colors, which had been looking a bit more persian-blue than ocean-blue lately. He seemed to have just finished calling my name, but for how long, I didn’t know...

“Er- Sorry. I space out a lot, y’know?”

Not the best excuse ever, but it should work, right? Not like I could tell Dietrich I was reading the past/present (I was a little unsure, but I think it was likely the past… Ron hadn’t spoken to me lately, though…) 

He rolled his eyes. “You are ridiculous, Lys.”

“But you love me anyways. What did you need me for, then?”

“You did not hear it?”
I was spacing out, Dietrich!

"...You are worse than Harper sometimes. I am going to speak to Malfoy today; he is likely throwing curses at an empty room again but perhaps I can speak to him without a duel breaking out."

I shuddered at the memory. I’d Seen it happen, actually, a few days ago. Dietrich was dutifully watching over Malfoy, and then the bratty little shit started taking out angry spells on innocent, abandoned furniture. Dietrich had tried to stop him, almost panicked at the crazed behavior of the sore loser, but as they almost got into a wandfight, I’d snapped out of the vision and sprinted across the school to help. (We didn’t get caught, as I stopped the fight before anyone got hit, and Malfoy and I traded weak insults before he sneered and stalked away).

Amazing, really, what the Slytherins were getting away with, now that Alby’d been taken out of the picture.

“In that case, I think I’m going to confront Parkinson.” and hopefully stop her from being dragged down into the Chamber, ‘cos honestly, it’s getting a little close to the end of the year and I don’t want Harry to get stabbed with a basilisk fang.

Hopefully, hopefully, Fate would let me get away with it. Because really, why the bloody hell would Harry go into the Chamber of Secrets for Parkinson anyway? She would die, and that’s bad. So I could stop her from going down there, and that’s good! Fate got to petrify people, the Golden Trio know of the existence of the basilisk and can thus fight it in their seventh year to get Horcrux-killing things, no one would die, the diary would be put away until the Horcrux hunt, and I’d fill in for the roles that Dobby would play in the coming years if I had to.

I should honestly be having a breakdown or something, with how much shit I have to juggle around.

Fate better reward me nicely for playing along without (much) protest.

Dietrich sighed. “I suppose the year grows late.”

“We’re out of time. I want to get Tom put down right now. He’s had too much time with her.”

She’d been so desperate when she first got the diary, she became his damn puppet in an instant. That desperation, continuing throughout the year — probably only held back by whatever luck and Slytherin intelligence she had — could make a corpse out of Parkinson. Something I very much didn’t want to happen.

“All right. But I will attempt to speak to the little bratling anyways, since I already agreed to speak with him.”

My brows shot up. “You arranged a meeting with him? Civilly?”

Dietrich rolled his eyes. “I want to gauge his aggression. It might prove dangerous to us next year, if I do not see for myself. Perhaps he wishes to make excuses for his tantrums, to save face. Whatever the case, I would like to get a read on him properly.”

I nodded. “An armistice, then?”

“Yes. I just wanted to let you know. You may go back to... spacing out.”

“Ugh, you’ve knocked me out of it already, I may as well be productive. I’m going to find my
brother and Harry, first.” So I know what point of the books I’m at. I don’t know dates, it’s all by guestimation…

Dietrich helped me up from the ground.

“We’ll speak later, my friend.”

I smiled at the title. Dietrich treated those words very carefully, and said them only when he was feeling exceptionally affectionate. I suppose the next time we’d see each other, I’d have the diary in my hands and we’d bury the fucking thing. It would be the end — the true end — of our arguments this year.

“Don’t let the poncy brat get the last word in.” I called.

He raised a pale brow. “Do I ever, Lys?”

... 

“Ron! Harry!” I called.

I’d found them in the staffroom, of all places — why they were here, I didn’t know, but I was curious. I gave my usual grin, and they turned, but before any of us could say anything more-

“All students to return to their House dormitories at once. All teachers return to the staff room. Immediately, please.”

Not a vision. McGonagall’s magically amplified voice, ringing through the hallways.

“Not another attack? Not now?” Harry said, his voice strained.

“What’ll- Lyssie, go back to your dormitory! Lyssie, you- Lyssie? Oy!”

I suppose Ron’s protective words were cut off by his worry when he saw my face. I had no doubt that I my face had whitened dramatically, blue eyes wide with fear and legs a little wobbly… well, everything felt a little wobbly, now that I thought of it, and the castle seemed to jump? No, that was me collapsing.

In shock.

Because I knew what that announcement meant.

I’m too late. Parkinson’s been taken down to the Chamber…

“Lys? Bollocks, let’s hide in here. Let’s hear what it’s all about. Then we can tell them what we’ve found out; Lys, sorry, you’ve got to hide with us — I want to know what’s going on.”

Harry opened a wardrobe full of cloaks, and I swallowed and nodded.

Ron seemed torn between his curiosity and his worry for his little sister. “But- Lyssie, are you okay? Maybe-“

I shook my head, stepping into the wardrobe quickly. “Not now, Ron; it was just a dizzy spell, and
now you’ve got me curious too.” I said, flashing a weak smile and knowing my voice sounded too shaky to be convincing.

We piled into the wardrobe, Ron squishing me uncomfortably. We listened as McGonagall’s announcement was obeyed. The teachers gathered, McGonagall herself the last to arrive.

“It has happened,” she said gravely, “Students have been taken by the monster. Right into the Chamber itself.”

I closed my eyes; Parkinson had-

Students? As in... more than one? The fuck?

“How can you be sure?” asked my Head of House.

“The Heir of Slytherin left another message,” said the Transfiguration professor, “Right underneath the first one. ‘Their skeletons will lie in the Chamber forever.’”

“Who are they? Which students?”

McGonagall’s answer made me want to crawl into a hole and die. “Dietrich Bastion and Draco Malfoy.”

No! No NO NO, WHY, godDAMMIT, NO!!

Ron actually clamped a hand on my mouth, and I made a strangled sound. For the first time since my family had learned of my Seer abilities, I was actually crying. I barely saw the flash of pure, fucking anger in Professor Snape’s magic; the colors exploded outwards, though the most that happened was a wave of icy air displacing a few papers and lighter items, quills and things like that. Shifted in waves of magic.

“We shall have to send the students home tomorrow,” McGonagall went on, “This is the end of Hogwarts. Dumbledore always said...”

I think Lockhart showed up, but I was concentrating on trying to breathe with Ron’s hand over my mouth. I was concentrating on trying to think with my best friend down in the Chamber with fucking Tom Riddle.

Draco Malfoy had the diary the entire time.

Desperate and lonely and scared; he needed to regain the ground he lost to me, he needed someone to trust after his most loyal nearly cost him his position, he needed comfort when it was obvious that I was closing in.

Draco Malfoy.

Suspicious and intelligent and Dark; he was a pureblood, he would have keyed onto the price of such a wonderful little book, he’s been raised to be a Paterfamilias therefore he’s smart enough to make the connection from new book to new blank spots in his memory, he’s Dark so he’d know that there were things in this world that could do this to him...

The entire time.

Desperate again; if Harry saw the diary, spoke to it, learned of the things he said, the person he was underneath the sneers and witty insults, he...
Oh god, what the fuck have I done?

Why didn’t you see this coming YOU’RE A SEER you were right there WHY DID HE TAKE DIETRICH why why WHY WHY are you USELESS you put him in DANGER it’s your fault you caused this your BEST MATE’S going to be fed to a FUCKING BASILISK and if you hadn’t been so STUPID Dietrich wouldn’t die HE’S GOING TO DIE him and Malfoy are going to die and it’s your fault damn you damn you DAMN YOU-

When we’d finally gotten out, Harry rushed Ron, holding me, to some secluded alcove of a corridor and Ron released me quickly.

“Lys? Lys, I know it’s bad, I know Bastion’s your best mate-”

I didn’t let Harry finish his attempts at comforting me, though, because I whirled around and slammed into Ron’s chest, gripping at his robes and using him to muffle my scream. Ron was shaking, but his arms tightened around me as I sobbed into his chest and muted profanities and cries were all I could utter.

So this was the price Fate demanded for my interference.

My sister and my triumph for the life of my best friend.
Chapter 16

Chapter Summary

I made my Tuesday deadline, if barely! Sorry folks, I took a five-hour nap and then had -- and still have -- a shit ton of homework to do, so. That's my excuse.

As always, thank you to those who comment/kudos/bookmark/etc.! You are much appreciated. :)

Now, this chapter is LONG. I could've split it into two but I didn't wanna do that to you guys. Heads up on that. I really hope this lives up to the hype I created last chapter. Enjoy!

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Professor Snape was not an emotional person, but he’d let out accidental magic in his rage as McGonagall spoke the name of one of his few first-year students — bright child who showed much promise in his future — his godson — bitterly set Lockhart on his way, angered that it was his House who suffered two casualties, and then stormed down to the dungeons — grief and fury and shock, — colors rolling like an angry storm.

Stop.

“You’re a good friend, Lys.” — white walls and sheets and ceilings, high and airy, clean and sterile. She shrugged. — “It’s a selfish thing.” “Well, then, thank you for being selfish, Lys.” — ?? — dark skin and a sharp smile. A regal tilt of the head. “You’re lucky, you know.”

Stop.

Slytherin Commons — black and green and silver and — greeted by the worried faces of first years — Harper and Rookwood looked almost in tears — hunched figures of Parkinson, Crabbe, Goyle, and Blaise Zabini.

“Dietrich’s missing, Professor. Was there another attack? Did the Heir get him?” asked Harper — voice pitched high with confusion and worry — “Draco’s gone, too, Professor.” Zabini said — could not even muster up the energy to be gentle. Closed his eyes — wanted to sigh.

“The Heir of Slytherin has taken both Dietrich Bastion and Draco Malfoy into the Chamber of Secrets.” — The first year boys flinched — Parkinson let out a wail. Crabbe and Goyle looked confused, looking around wildly as if Malfoy would pop up somewhere, and Zabini’s expression tightened. Rookwood began to cry quietly, Lucas Vaisey looking around nervously...

“Where’s Lys? We’ve got to tell Lys!” Jay said, shaking. — “She probably already knows!” cried Harper, a desperate hope in his eyes, “Th-that’s why she’s locked up in her dorm! She’s probably planning on getting Dietrich out now, so we should go help her—"
Stop.

It didn’t hurt did it?

Hm?

I dropped the diary when one of the Slytherin upper-years nearly shoved me down the stairs. Dietrich and Harper caught me, but my things were all over the place.

Who did that? Their name.

Erm? I’m not sure. Lots of Slytherins treat me like that. Ripped things, Tripping Jinxes, prank hexes, the works.

Pathetic. They’re all pathetic. Let me help you conquer Slytherin, Guinevere. I punished those who opposed me when I won as well, you know. They’ll never irritate you again.

Kind of you, Tom. Oddly kind, but okay.

Guinevere. You are in a dangerous position now, more than ever. I can help you.

I know you can.

Don’t friends help each other?

Oh, don’t guilt trip me into that! We are friends, Tom.

Stop.

Professor Snape snapped his eyes to Prefect Zabini — never had a hair out of place in her entire career at Hogwarts — wildly stumbled into view from the girls’ dormitories — welt crossing her face with painful clarity — “Professor! We can’t find Guinevere! I forced open her dorm and it was empty!”

The Head of Slytherin spun on his heel — wayward snake... The brightest boy of his year-group, his godson, and now the Slytherin power-holder, one of his favorite students? He would have a bone to pick with this Heir of Slytherin, who dared target his snakes-

Stop.

I was probably the only Slytherin who’d been let into the Gryffindor Common room without any fuss from the lions. After Professor Snape found me clutched onto Ron, a mess, he’d snapped for Harry and Ron to follow him and silently led us to the Gryffindor Commons; he said he’d explain to his Slytherins, knowing that I needed the comfort of my family in the face of my best friend’s — my Second’s — death.

It was universal knowledge that Dietrich was my best mate, so the Gryffs mostly left it alone when Ron managed to pass me to George and the Weasley’s, and Harry, sans Percy (who was sending a letter to our parents in regards to my emotional state) sat in the common room.

I was curled up on George’s lap, holding his robes so tightly I was surprised that I hadn’t torn through them. Fred was on his right, holding my hand as I shook. Ginny was on the other side, stroking my hair quietly. Percy was sitting near us, looking pained at the emotional breakdown of his most level-headed sibling, Harry sitting with a rather damp Ron and looking sick.

I felt sick, too.
YOU LET THIS HAPPEN TO HIM he’s going to die both of them are BECAUSE OF YOU you coward you FUCKING COWARD you can’t protect anything! Tricked by the DAMN BOOK because you’re weak weak you fucking useless, weak CHILD!

Ron and Harry were so quiet that I shouldn’t have been able to hear them, but I caught one thing from my brother...

“She hasn’t cried since she was five.” Ron whispered, sounding shocked and broken.

Well, I had never killed someone before. I’d never killed my best friend. Maybe you only cry when you do it the first time.

disgusting USELESS murderer!

Murderer. That made me flinch. It wouldn’t be so bad if the victim weren’t an innocent kid who just wanted to help me... A boy who had a crush on me for a bit, a boy who’d spent nights researching possession to save me, a boy that had become as important to me as my family. My best mate, one of me and mine.

WHAT’S BEST FOR YOUR FAMILY? YOU’RE NOTHING! YOU’VE DONE NOTHING!

I would’ve burned Europe for him. But what would that accomplish now?

Hours and hours passed like that. My head a mess of screaming and sobbing, my face covered in tears, my hands filled with tearing fabric — like my nails were desperate to get to my palms, desperate to punish for this disgusting thing I’d done.

Percy had taken a turn holding my mess of a body, and he’d fallen asleep with his head tilted back on the couch. The twins had slipped off, probably to find something to try to cheer me up with or something, and Ginny had curled up next to me, her hand resting on mine.

What a bitter taste in my mouth. Evidently, me and my twin were fine now — I knew it instinctively that Ginny and I could be able to speak now — but it had cost the life of my best friend. I didn’t give a fuck about Draco Malfoy or what he represented in canon because Dietrich was trapped down there with Tom motherfucking Riddle, and here I was just... just crying.

Being the only one awake in a mostly empty common room (many Gryffindors had dispersed, the misery of one of the only decent Slytherin and her usually happy family prompting them into subdued, sympathizing grief), I was the only one, really who saw Harry and Ron slip out Knocking on the door, Lockhart peeked out of a small crack in answer, finding the short figures of Ron and Harry looking up at him solemnly.

“Oh — Mr. Potter, Mr. Weasley — I’m rather busy at the moment — if you would be quick-” — “Professor, we’ve got some information for you. We think it’ll help you.” — “Er-“ — Stumbling across his words, Lockhart eventually let them in. The room was bare — boxes and trunks — Harry and Ron frowned at the sight of the boxes on his desk. “Are you doing somewhere?” — “Er, well, yes. Urgent call — unavoidable — got to go-”

Stop.

“Dietrich! Where are you off to, on your lonesome?” — kind eyes, familiar, he felt his face go gentle when she bounded up to him. “The Owler.” — “Letter for Schwarzwogelschluss, right? Want to meet in the Kitchens later, for dinner?” — Dietrich nodded — never had someone to make such plans with before — “Alright.”
Why such interest in wards and rituals, Guinevere?

I’ve got a Dark core and secrets to protect.

Doesn’t everyone? Both wards and rituals take much more time to cast and perform, however. Would spellwork not be more beneficial for you?

Next year, Tom, I’ll have you tutor me in that.

Next year?

Oh fine, I’ll give you tidbits of information if that’s what you want as payment.

Ah, yes. I trust you to remember this. For next year.

Stop.

“What about Bastion?” Ron hissed, “My sister’s a bleedin’ mess ‘cos her best mate’s been taken down to the Chamber!” — “Well, as to that — most unfortunate- No one regrets more than I-“ — “You mean you’re running away? After all that stuff you did in your books-“

“Books can be misleading.”

“YOU WROTE THEM!”

Stop.

My eyes cleared as I realized what was going on. All wasn’t lost... Harry and Ron were going to go down to the Chamber. I didn’t think they would, as it wasn’t Ginny down there, but... for me...

Goddammit, I was going to start crying again.

It’s not like Dietrich was awfully close to either of the two, but since he was my best friend, my Second, they were going to save him. Ron just wanted to stop his sister’s crying and Harry just wanted to help his friends... even if it meant they’d have to help their rival, their enemy, Draco Malfoy.

Fuck. Fuck fuck fuck.

My responsibility, I thought, wiping the tears from my eyes as I delicately removed myself from Percy’s arms, My friend. My fault. My mistake. My responsibility.

As soon as I’d cleared the Fat Lady, I snarled at my own weakness, my own stupidity, and angrily whipped out my wand from it’s place in my sleeve.

“Scourgify. Recipriflari.” I muttered, glad I’d learned the last one. My eyes cleared of their red-rimmedness, no longer puffy — I’d be able to see more easily like this, more able to fight.

“Conjunctivitis Curse, Occaecous Curse, Diffindo to the eyes — maybe a Bombarda if I must...” my voice growled as I navigated the empty hallways, intent on the Chamber of Secrets.

I was going to kill the fucking basilisk, or at least help Harry kill it — Fawkes would blind it, but I think I had dibs on the fucking worm. The bloody pigeon could have one eye, and my wand the other. Not quite burning Europe to the ground, but killing a big damn snake would have to do.
It wasn’t quite the five stages of grief, I don’t think; was there a specific order of emotions? The denial stage lasted about three words, then I’d jumped straight to depression. I was angry now, but also bargaining... but I was also a Slytherin, so my bargains were a bit more vicious than asking Fate to do something for me. No, my ‘bargain’ was a promise:

If Dietrich was hurt, if *one hair on his head* was hurt, I was going to fucking kill the basilisk, and I would laugh as Tom Riddle died.

*How dare you, you fucker! How dare you take one of mine from my protection!*

Something was going to die, because I was done fucking crying.

…

They left the Chamber entrance open, and I don’t think they were down there long; might even still be sliding, with how quickly I’d moved after I saw them confront Lockhart. I wasted no time in jumping down, ignoring the grime, and I quietly used my feet and hands against the smooth stone to brake before I landed in a heap at the bottom.

Voices echoed.

“-under the school.” Harry’s voice said faintly.

“Under the lake probably.” replied my brother.

I ran after them, and Ron shrieked as I barreled into his back — it was dark and I could barely see a thing, in my defense.

“LYSSIE?” he shouted in horror, having recovered from his shock and turning to face me, “No-what- why- What are you doing here? Did you see us? No, bollocks, why did you follow us??”

Harry chimed in, his own voice laced with horrified misgivings, “Lys, you shouldn’t be here! This is the Chamber of Secrets-”

I glowered. “I’ve got every right to be here!”

Ron hissed, turning me around, “Go wait by the entrance, Lyssie, it’s too danger-“

“Dangerous?” I said, shoving Ron off me, “For who? ME? No, it’s dangerous for Dietrich! He’s my friend — I’m going to save him, too! You and Harry are only a year older than me, the only adult here is an incompetent ninny!”

Ron glared. “You are *not* going with us to the Chamber, Lys!”

“You’re NOT leaving me behind! I probably know more spells than you do anyways, Ron!”

“LYS-”

I huffed, knowing that this was going nowhere. “If I promise to stick behind you and stuff, will you just let me come with you? We’re wasting time!”

Ron was about to argue, but Harry called out, “C’mon, mate, Bastion is Lys’ friend anyways. And
we are wasting time. Lys, just please stay behind us, alright? We’ll just grab Bastion and go, if we can.”

“And Malfoy.” I said, following close to Harry as he lit a Lumos and led the way.

Ron made some sort of strangled groan. “I forgot about him. Do we have to save his arse, too? He’s just- Oh. Oh Merlin. Harry — there’s something up there...”

We all stiffened, but this was going to take too much time. I rolled my eyes.

“It’s not alive. Don’t worry.”

“How-”

“Mage Sight, Ron. I’ll explain later, Harry.”

We marched towards the giant snake skin in good pace, and we all stunned by the size of it. It was twenty-ish feet long, I think, but just a skin. Falling apart, too; it was very old, meaning the basilisk was much bigger. I forget the exact details, but it would probably just around twenty-ish yards long? According to my Clairvoyance. Or previous knowledge. Whatever the case.

“Blimey...” Ron breathed.

Lockhart collapsed; I tensed, moving back from him and towards the entrance of the real Chamber. (I knew what was coming up and wanted to be on the right side of it all — and if Ron wasn’t going to face a damn basilisk and a megalomaniac, then all the better. He’d be pissed at me though…) Ron muttered something at the “fainting” buffoon, but yelped as Lockhart scrambled to his feet and dove at my brother, reaching for his wand — Harry was too late to stop him, even as he moved forward — Lockhart straightened with my brother’s fucked up wand, smiling viciously.

“The adventure ends here, boys! I shall take a bit of this skin back up to the school, tell them I was too late to save the boys, and that you two tragically lost your minds at the sight of the mangled bodies. Say good-bye to your memories! Obliviate!”

Ron’s wand burst with magic, it’s core having been wonky and unattached to Ron’s fiery colors for a while now, aside from it being broken all year because of the Whomping Willow. Harry stumbled towards me, arms over his head, as the cavern ceiling cracked and caved in with a roar of stone. The noise was like thunder, crashing down in front of me, stirring clouds of dust and dirt and making me wince. In just a moment, Harry and I were standing and staring at the suddenly-formed wall.

“RON!” Harry shouted, “Are you okay? Ron!”

“I’m here! Is- Is Lyssie okay?” he called.

“We’re both fine.” I announced, coughing a little. Ergh, don’t let my asthma act up, please...

“I’m okay,” Ron said, “This git’s not, though — he got blasted by the wand...”

A muffled, “Ow!”

“I hope that hurt.” I hissed, happy the idiot was kicked.

“What now?” Ron asked, voice a bit higher-pitched than normal, “We can’t get through — it’ll take ages!”
I glanced towards the entrance of the Chamber worriedly, as we listened to Ron try to dig himself out and apparently throw chunks of stone at Lockhart (which would normally have me smiling, but Dietrich...) Harry did the same, glancing between the cave-in and the way forward.

“Wait there!” he called to Ron, “Wait with Lockhart. I’ll go on... If I’m not back in an hour...” He trailed off, swallowing. Seems he thought I’d stay with Ron; not an inaccurate assessment, but the kid probably didn’t factor in the fact that he was one of mine, too, and I wouldn’t be leaving him alone for anything.

“I’ll try and shift some of this rock, Lyssie from your side,” Ron called, “So you can- can get back through. And, Harry-”

Not for anything. Especially when, really...

“You don’t have to do this.” I said suddenly. “There’s no one in there that you care about.”

He was a child. Yes, he was the Boy-Who-Lived, but he was a child. My friend. One of mine. Why the hell was I even allowing this? Because of Fate, maybe, but was I trading more lives, this way? He didn’t deserve this.

Harry gave me a tight smile. “S’not about that. This is just... the right thing to do. ‘Sides, Bastion isn’t so bad. He’s your friend, after all.”

A hero at eleven, I thought, partly sad and partly exasperated, A child.

“See you in a bit.” he said to both of us Weasleys, before he went on. He wasn’t shaking, but he should’ve been.

I waited until I couldn’t see him anymore, the shadows swallowing him, before I approached the wall very carefully and called for my brother to come closer so we could speak in normal volumes. Harry would open the door to the Chamber with Parseltongue, and I didn’t know if it would close again so I’d have to be a little quick — I had to follow Harry, but he needed to speak to Riddle first, without me there... he needed to understand what he was fighting, get the clues he needed to kill the Horcrux. I had no doubt that Harry was going to play to Fate’s tune, and fight the basilisk despite my efforts to prevent it... only, he’d be fighting for two, rather than just one. Dietrich and Malfoy, not just Ginny anymore.

Good thing I’d be on his side, too. Two versus two for the sake of two, wasn’t that a laugh?

“Ron.” I said quietly.

He must’ve heard something in my voice. “Don’t you dare, Lyssie.” came his snarl.

“Dietrich’s my friend. Don’t tell me you wouldn’t do the same if it were Harry.” My voice was soft.

Ron’s was not. “NO! It’s not the same!”

I couldn’t muster the will to be irritated at his stubbornness, like usual. He was just concerned, and why wouldn’t he be? “Ron. I have to go. It’s... you don’t understand, it’s my responsibility. He’s my best friend. I have to go.”

“Not where I can’t protect you! You’re my sister! I’m supposed to be the one- I should be protecting you!” His voice was slightly hysterical, and I could hear that he’d redoubled his efforts to break through the crumbling wall.
I chuckled. Protective big brother... I'd always wanted one, back in my first life. Now I had six and a twin sister, and I still loved it.

"Someone’s got to have Harry’s back when he does stupid Gryffindor things,” I said, still laughing a bit, “Since you’re a bit stuck, I’ll fill in for you. Besides... I’ve always wanted to see the Chamber of Secrets! I’m a Slytherin, you know.”

“Lys, DON’T!”

I was swallowed by the dark, too, my brother’s voice shouting after me.

...

Verbal spars were fun; I liked to get as creative as possible, as quick as possible. Magical duels were the same — just a bit more exhilarating, needing a bit more energy. But fighting a fucking basilisk and Tom Riddle was different, and I was shaking as I walked through quietly.

The Chamber was oddly reminiscent of the Slytherin common room, which shouldn’t have surprised me. A faint green glow seemed to shine on the dark stone and dance in the black water. Columns fashioned like snakes stood, casting pitch black shadows in odd and frightening shapes. The end of the chamber held a huge stone face carved into the expanse of the wall, and it was there two figures were sprawled in odd angles and two more facing each other, their voices echoing around me.

Harry was speaking.

"Look! I don’t think you get it. We’re in the Chamber of Secrets. You grab Bastion while I get Malfoy, we can talk later-“

"We’re going to talk now.”

The voice of nightmares.

There was a pause. Then, “…How did Malfoy get like this?” Harry asked slowly.

“Well, that’s an interesting question.” Tom replied, “And quite a long story. I suppose the real reason Draco Malfoy’s like this is because he opened his heart and spilled all his secrets to an invisible stranger.”

“What are you talking about?”

“The diary. My diary. We should go to the beginning, though. It started with Guinevere Lysandra Weasley — who, actually, I had been hoping to see. It was the only reason Dietrich Bastion was brought here, you know.”

This was de-railed from canon. I was curious, though. Draco Malfoy was, in fact, the possessed student, and I’d just gone along with the fact that Dietrich apparently was kidnapped. But, listening to Tom and Harry, I wondered: why? Why would Tom take Dietrich, too? For me?

“What’s this got to do with Lys?” Harry asked.

“Hm. Lys, is she called? She never let me call her that. And I suppose that’s why I wanted to see
her, in the flesh. You see, Harry Potter, it was Guinevere — Lys — who had my diary first. She wrote to me of her life, of her troubles and triumphs... and it was not until I fell into the hands of young Draco there that I truly realized how very Slytherin she was. I have never lost to anyone before her!”

“You’re not making any sense!”

“I suppose not.” Riddle said sympathetically. “Shall I spin you a tale, then? Draco Malfoy was desperate to defeat the girl who could out-Slytherin the entire world, the girl who was a threat. He ordered a girl in his year to sneak into Guinevere’s dorm to steal the little diary she’d always been seen writing in, the diary — my diary. He happened to write in it, looking for a way to defeat the girl who wouldn’t be defeated, and he found me.

“I fed him nonsense, of course, but kind nonsense. Sympathy, confidence, pride — little Draco, feeling pathetic due to his near-defeat, ate it up. He’s been writing in the diary for months and months, telling me all his pitiful schemes and schisms — how Guinevere has humiliated him, how Parkinson disgraced him, how he needed help in getting his father to be proud of him again, how... he detested the fame and admiration given to the great Harry Potter, who didn’t even want it in the first place...

“It’s very boring, having to listen to the jealous, mediocre troubles of an twelve-year-old spoiled brat. I had a much more entertaining time, bantering with Guinevere... But I was patient. I wrote back. I gave him advise, compliments. Draco simply loved me. You’re the only one I really like around here, Tom... I’m glad I’ve got you to confide in... I think it was the best mistake I’ve made, stealing you away from Weasley...”

A cold chuckle that I recognized all too well. I hugged my knees to my chest, leaning against a snake-decorated pillar, hoping it would stop soon before a vision of the Dark Tosser decided to come… I felt something heavy in my chest, something like guilt or hurt, an ache to have Tom Riddle back in the diary and harmless and resting in my pocket. He wasn’t…

It was... hard to listen. He wasn’t supposed to be like this, he was supposed to be quiet and snarky and teaching me wards and things. Not threatening me and mine. If only I’d been better, if only I’d managed to keep him away…

“If I say myself, Harry, I’ve always been able to charm the people I needed — aside from Guinevere, of course. So little Draco poured out his soul to me, and his soul happened to be exactly what I wanted... I grew stronger and stronger on a diet of his deepest fears, his darkest secrets. I grew powerful. Far more quickly than Draco. Powerful enough to start feeding him a few of my secrets, to start pouring a little of my soul back into him...”

“What d’you mean?” Harry asked weakly, sounding horrified.

“Haven’t you guessed yet, Harry Potter? Draco Malfoy opened the Chamber of Secrets. He strangled the school roosters and daubed threatening messages on the walls. He set the Serpent of Slytherin on four Mudbloods, and the Squib’s cat.”

“I... but he said he didn’t do it. He said he didn’t know! I asked him, Malfoy-”

*Christmas. Polyjuice.*

“Funny you should mention that, Harry. The convenient thing of it all was that he didn’t know what he was doing at first. He began to suspect in his later diary entries, of course. He is a child of the Dark, after all, even if he is a desperate, pathetic one. It was rather amusing...”
Then Tom’s voice took on a quieter note.

“It took a very long time for Draco to stop trusting his diary. But he finally had enough and tried to dispose of it, of me. And that’s where you came in, Harry. You found it, and I couldn’t have been more delighted than if Guinevere came across it again. Of all the people who picked it up, it was you, who I’d been most anxious to meet…”

Harry’s voice trembled, and I didn’t know if it was anger or fear. “And why did you want to meet me?” he asked.

“Well, you see, Draco told me all about you, Harry. Your whole fascinating history, in between childish insults and jealous outbursts... I knew I must find out more about you, if I could. So I decided to show you my famous capture of that great oaf, Hagrid, to gain your trust-”

“Hagrid’s my friend!” Harry nearly shouted, “And you framed him, didn’t you? I thought you made a mistake, but-”

Cold laughter. But it was softer this time.

I gripped my knees, wondering when I should pop out... Probably to blind the basilisk fucker. As soon as the basilisk came out, I’d blind it and then do my best to help Harry. Even though it made me supremely uncomfortable that Riddle spoke to Harry about me, and I knew I’d have to explain a few things to Harry after this was all over, I had to help.


(Which friend was I talking about? Dietrich or Tom? …The fact I had to think about that made me hurt, because obviously it was Dietrich. Tom wasn’t my friend. I was the only one who thought that.)

They spoke more on Tom’s terms. I listened with half a mind, running through my list of curses and hexes that might help. Then through my medical list, just in case Dietrich or Malfoy were hurt at all...

Lucius Malfoy looked like he wanted to kill himself — messy, blond strands loosened from his normal — bags under his eyes, worry, pain, guilt, nonono not my son, not Draco — Professor Snape told him that the Heir of Slytherin had taken Draco. He stared blankly ahead — Narcissa cried into his shoulder. He knew that it was his doing — bloody book, black, “Keep this in your house, Abraxas. Protect it as you would be, or you shall know the consequences…” — somehow it made it to Draco and now his son would die...

Etienne and Elisabet Bastion — sobbing — clutching happy letters from their son. They had been worried — Dietrich’s letters had been curt in the first month, then overjoyed that he’d found a group to settle in — best friend to watch over — “Mutter, Vater. Sie ist sehr seltsam, ja. Ich bin der Erste, zugegeben, aber ich bin hier glücklich.” — worried when he wrote that his friend was acting strange — sitting in the Headmaster’s office...

Stop.

I shook the images out of my head. Future? Present? Lots of images, flashing by, lots of information soaked up, but it was unclear whether this was going on now or would be happening-

“Imagine how frustrated I was when the next time my diary was opened, it was Draco who was writing to me, not you. He saw you with the diary, you see, and panicked — some third-year Gryff was willing to steal from the great Harry Potter for a price, of course... one that Draco paid. Of
course he did. What if you found out how to work it, and I repeated all his secrets to you, his enemy? Foolish boy. But I knew what I should do. It was clear to me that you were on the trail of Slytherin’s heir. From reading in between the lines of what Draco wrote about you, I knew you would go to any lengths to solve the mystery. And Draco harped on and on about how it wasn’t fair that you, Gryffindor golden boy, could speak Parseltongue...

“Eventually I made Draco write his farewell on the wall and took the Bastion boy down here to wait. He struggled and shouted and became very boring — Draco, that is. Bastion was a bit fun to speak to, quite a good Slytherin, no doubt the effects of being… close to Guinevere. Draco seems less Slytherin than you are, honestly. But there isn’t much life left in him... he put too much into the diary, into me. Enough to let me leave its pages at last... and I have been waiting for you and Guinevere since we arrived here.”

Harry shouted, “Why Lys? She had you for a while and you failed to charm her!”

A pause. “Ah, but that’s exactly it. I failed. I do not fail. I wanted to speak to her, but you came alone. Disappointing, but... no matter — I have many questions for you, Harry Potter.”

“Like what?” my friend hissed.

“Well... how is it that you — a boy with no extraordinary magical talent — managed to defeat the greatest wizard of the age? How did you escape with nothing but a scar, while Lord Voldemort’s powers were destroyed?”

Harry was cautious — slow — when he spoke. “Why do you care how I escaped? Voldemort was after your time...”

“Voldemort,” Riddle said, a trace of amusement in his voice, “is my past, present, and future, Harry Potter...”

Anagrams. Tom Marvolo Riddle into I am Lord Voldemort.

Oh god, I was about to fight a basilisk. Oh god, how the shit was I going to do this?

Scopoccuo, my mind whispered reassuringly.

‘Follow the eyes’. A very specific homing spell. I’d been practicing it a bit, but I never thought I’d actually need it. It was just a fucking complicated wand movement, and it only worked once the entire time I’d practiced! You could probably fail nine times out of ten and that would be deemed a good job. Shit, I was so dead. I don’t even think I had protagonist armor like Harry did...

This isn’t a fucking book anymore, you dumb shit! The moment you were born into the Weasley family, it never really was! There’s no such thing as protagonist armor! Look at Draco fucking Malfoy!

God, I was afraid. I was going to fight a damn huge snake and a book that almost had me enchanted, and I was afraid. My hands were trembling, and I almost felt like I couldn’t move. Like I’d just sit here, crouched and listening to Tom Riddle and Harry Potter, and Dietrich was in between them, him and Malfoy, and oh god…

I closed my eyes. What would others do if they were sitting here, in my place? Dad would go. Dad would burn the fucking world to the ground and go. Ron would go. He’d dig a fucking hole with his bare, bleeding hands — kick Lockhart to the side and everything — and go. Dietrich would go, too. If he were here and I was there, between a boy-hero and a monster, he wouldn’t hesitate. That was who he was. But how?
How do I stop myself from shaking?

*Distract yourself, so you aren’t afraid.*

*Fear is important.*

*Fear is crippling.*

*Stop.*

Music.

Music as warm as summer and smooth as silk, loud and ethereal. It reverberated in my chest, as if it dove into my heart to drive the growing hoarfrost away, and I felt like I’d live.

Fawkes.

“About time, you bloody pigeon.” I murmured, smiling.

“That’s a phoenix...” Riddle said, surprised and a bit disgruntled.

“Fawkes—”

“And that — that’s the old school Sorting Hat.” Then Riddle laughed, the sound bouncing off the shadows and filling the Chamber as completely as Fawkes had just a moment before. “This is what Dumbledore sends his defender! A songbird and an old hat! Do you feel brave, Harry Potter? Do you feel safe now?”

Just a moment longer. Harry only had to feel alone a moment longer. I was right here, waiting. I couldn’t charge — I was no Gryffindor — but I could sneak and hide and lie in wait for the right time to strike, the first opening. I was a Slytherin, and that’s the only way I could help, pathetic as it was...

There!

A hissing, following more monologuing, and the grinding of stone on stone. The basilisk was waking.

Another hiss that surely meant ‘Kill him’ as I’d remembered from the books. Then the scuffing of stone, Harry running, and the slithering of scales on the damp rock of the Chamber-

“Scopoccuo Bombarda!” I snarled, eyes shut as I stepped from the pillar and pointed my wand at the source of the sliding-sound. “Scopoccuo Diffindo Maxima! Scopoccuo Conjuntiva!”

An inhuman scream.

Then a trill of the phoenix, and another hissing roar. I opened my eyes and saw as Harry was about to be bitten, Fawkes swooping in and blinding the far-side eye; because, heh, I had managed to destroy the one facing me. Somehow.

*Don’t be afraid.*

*Stop.*

I felt a lot better about myself, and as Riddle screamed in Parseltongue and watched Harry shove the Sorting Hat on his head, I darted forward to the two pale, prone figures that were being
ignored. Them, before anything.

“Dietrich, Malfoy...” I muttered, feeling for their pulses; one was strong and steady, the other barely a flutter beneath his chalky skin. That had to be good enough, I had to help Harry now-

I looked to Harry, after hearing a resounding CRASH! that was a pillar being smashed into by a blind 60-foot snake. He was fighting the basilisk with the sword, alongside Fawkes. I pushed myself to my feet (They’re fine now, Lyssie, go help the kid battling the fucking Serpent of Slytherin!) and ran to his side as he dodged a blind lunge from the basilisk.

“LYS?!!!”

“No time to talk, Harry- PROTEGO MAXIMA!”

The bloody worm almost bit Harry but my shield gave us enough time to leap out of the way. Harry swung at it’s thick hide and the sword of Godric Gryffindor managed to make a shallow cut — not enough to damage, but enough to surprise the hell out of the basilisk whose scales had been imprenetrtable for a thousand years.

But a hissing, strangled snarl had the basilisk still suddenly.

I blinked, and both Harry and my gaze went to Tom Riddle, who was looking at me in shock. He had stopped the basilisk.

I blurted out the first thing on my mind. You know. Like an idiot. “Could you be anymore anticlimactic, Tom?”

“Guinevere Weasley. You came.” he said, the cold amusement he’d been using with Harry melting away into... genuine surprise?

“What of it? You said you were waiting for me, well, here I am.” I bit out, wondering what he was doing. Why stop the basilisk when I showed up? To freak me out, maybe? Because my heart was pounding with adrenaline, wand gripped tightly enough that it almost hurt.

Not that it wasn’t a good thing, the stopping. In the corner of my eye, I saw Harry inch his way to the basilisk’s mouth; the only soft spot, I suppose. It was slow going’s — I’d need to buy more time, speak to Tom, to get him all the way to the fucker’s open jaws (the obviously poisoned fangs made me wince)

All right. I could do that.

Tom tilted his head to one side. A pause, the silence booming.

“I knew Harry Potter would come, his curiosity and hero-complex spurring him to save whoever the victim was — even his schoolboy enemy. Perhaps especially so. But you... you, Lys, needed an incentive. You are a Slytherin, after all. I wanted to speak to you.” he said.

Harry was only a quarter of the way around the basilisk, which was twitching in pain of its lost eyes and coiled in around itself, looking rather harmless. Bullshit, of course, a little creepy hissing from Tom and it would be on us again, but Tom was effectively distracted for some reason.

“Well, congratulations, Tom. I’m here. And I’m rather pissed off at you.” I said flatly, willing myself not to look at Harry and give him away, “And incentive? That’s a load of hippogriff dung! Couldn’t you bloody tell that I would go after whoever had the diary, because I would feel it was my responsibility?”
“I couldn’t tell much about you,” Tom admitted, his voice still that quiet, almost soft tone that I hadn’t thought Voldemort capable of, “All I knew was that when I felt the Parkinson girl enter your rooms, no doubt looking for me, I reached out for her.”

Diary — black book — underneath — papers everywhere, parchments, essays — diary hidden in the folds — Parkinson entered, crying, hurt — “I got it, Draco.” “Good, Pansy. Thank you.” — Hello, Draco Malfoy. My name is Tom Riddle. How did you come by my diary? — painful effects of breaking wards — looking for him — looking for the diary-

I opened my eyes, surprised that I’d closed them in the first place.

“And you say that you hate Muggles.” I said, smirking at the incredulity of it. “An object that abandoned its owner and searched for another?”

“Yes...” He sounded almost questioning.

I wanted to snicker at him. It was ridiculous, this whole situation was ridiculous, and my heart was still poundingly aware of the basilisk threatening painful death. “Hmph. You’ve definitely read Tolkien. I’m getting some very one ring vibes from you and your diary, Tom. Ash nazg duburtleku and all that.”

A twitch of his lips again. A smile? Weird. “Perhaps I have read that particular series.”

“HA!” I barked out, trying to imagine a snake-faced Voldemort with reading glasses, using his evil yew wand to turn the pages of Fellowship of the Ring. “I win! Dad always said Muggles were interesting — even the Dark Lord will read some Muggle fiction.”

My humor died away as something felt very familiar about this conversation.

Then I glanced at the diary.

Buy time, Lyssie, just buy time…

“So... why?” I asked, feeling rather confused about it all. (A twitch of hurt, because it wasn’t supposed to be this way, it wasn’t, if only I’d kept him in the Horcrux, away from everyone else-)

“Why did it happen, then?”

“Why what?” he asked softly. I didn’t even notice that he had walked closer, and we were at respectable conversation distance. Harry was halfway to the basilisk’s open mouth, the rubies of the sword of Gryffindor glinting like winking eyes. So close.

“Why was the first owner abandoned?” I asked, “Why call out to Parkinson? My soul wasn’t good enough, then? Not that I’m complaining, but... you would’ve had me, you know. I thought of you as a friend for a moment, before Dietrich set me right.”

Tom’s face twisted into an irritated scowl, and I almost stepped back in fear. But my pride wouldn’t allow it, and I was rooted into the stone. He glanced back at my unconscious friend, face darkening.

“Clever child, Dietrich Bastion.” he murmured, “He knew right away when he saw Draco that it was really me underneath. Tried to run, to warn you... He’s only Stunned, you know. I did not want to turn you against me.”

“You didn’t answer the question.”
“I doubt you’re unfamiliar with the pattern. Slytherins always are.”

I laughed softly. So evasive. So Slytherin. “It’s almost like Tolkien, isn’t it? The first owner was abandoned. Why? Why was the first owner abandoned, Tom? Because they were weak?”

Perhaps I hadn’t been good enough for him. It should’ve made me feel relieved, maybe even offended, but…

He snorted. “You would think of Tolkien here, wouldn’t you? Silly girl. Because they… you… were weak… No. Not at all...” he answered, looking the most human I’d ever seen or expected of him, refusing to meet my eyes. “Because I was.”

_Tolkien — conversation — high pitched voice and deeper male — red blood black robes — grey stone _white fang — because they were weak? — visions — Hospital Wing, high white ceilings and — no not at all because I was._

Stop.

_I’ve seen this, _I realized.

My eyes widened. “What?”

Harry was almost there, but he was slowing. He was listening to us.

Tom gave a crooked, somewhat wry smile. “I could not possess you, Lys — not for lack of trying, no — you were clever but you so easily believe in the good in people. A habit you will have to kill. No, I could not… muster the will to drain your soul away. It was most curious.”

In my peripheral vision, Harry Potter paused completely, looking stupefied. I wanted to glare at him to keep going, but I was a bit focused on the fact that the _fucking Dark Lord_ just admitted that he hadn’t wanted to steal my soul. The actual _fuck_ was going on?

“…You... what? Wait, what?” I asked, extremely articulately.

“I did not understand,” he admitted, looking at his solidifying hand with fascination, “I did not want you to die so I could live. But as this… reluctance... grew, so did my desire to be free of the diary. So I decided that perhaps my container, my diary, was corrupted somehow. I wanted to speak to you, face to face, properly—”

“In the flesh.” I repeated faintly.

He gave a single, graceful nod. “You said,” he muttered softly, “that you’d have me tutor you in spells next year. I... wanted there to be a next year. For some reason I can’t fathom.”

I wanted to moan into my hands. This was not supposed to happen.

This was not fucking canon at all. What the actual- _Tom Riddle_ actually liked me. I didn’t even know he _could_ like someone. Fucking hell! So when I felt friendship for him... when I myself grew attached, it was a _mutual thing_? WHAT? Why the bloody _fucking flying fuck_ does this keep happening to me?

_Fate, you bitch, you are laughing at me._ I cursed to myself.

“Speaking to you now, it seems the sentiment has not faded.” Tom went on, looking a bit puzzled at himself, “So I will offer to you a choice, Lys: join me willingly, or join me under the Imperius.”
My fists clenched.

Fred’s empty eyes — George’s face covered in blood, hands frantically trying to stem the — Bill’s wand spitting spells, falling, loosened hands and screaming — Ron curling in on himself, shivering, red light and the witch cackling as he — BROTHER-KILLER, MURDERER, MONSTER!

Stop.

“Never.” I spat.

Tom didn’t look perturbed in the slightest. “Ah. So the latter option, then.”

Fuck this stupid little git. He was treating me like some sort of favorite toy or something. His glaring at Dietrich made sense, now — the little shit was jealous. If you got over the fact that Tom Riddle seemed to like me, it was easy to see that Tom was pissed that Dietrich was my best mate and had also tried to turn me against Tom when I’d actually been a little attached to him.

And honestly... very, very honestly... I still was.

This wasn’t Voldemort yet, after all. It was a kid who would become him. But really, all this Horcrux was, was a sixteen-year-old who had never had a friend before. He did a horrible thing, murdering Myrtle, of course. But... But still.. I’d been a friend to him, and I was fifty years too late. Redeemable, that was it. I felt like he was redeemable, at this point, and the stupid-ass bleeding heart I was, I wanted to redeem him.

If Fate reincarnated me back then, would I have saved you from all this?

No. There was no time for that.

(Murderer. Brother-killer. Monster.)

(Don’t forget what you’re fighting against, Lys. Don’t forget what you’re fighting for. Fight hard enough and you’ll never be afraid.)

“Impedimenta!” I hissed, though the spell went right through him. It did its job, though, and Tom was startled by my sudden aggression; I threw a hasty shield up and screamed to Harry, “Kill it now!”

“NO!” Tom roared, then he screamed in Parseltongue.

A blast of magic knocked me back, from Harry’s wand in Tom’s hand, and I was thrown against a pillar painfully. My back slammed against stone scales, no doubt bruised by the force, and I crumpled onto the ground. I breathed hard, seeing stars — had I hit my head? — and by the time I’d recovered enough to look up, Harry had somehow managed to get his arm stabbed with a fucking basilisk fang and his sword stuck up the basilisk’s fucking brain. Dammit. I’d failed again — when was I ever not going to fail the things that really mattered?

“You’re dead, Harry Potter.” Riddle snarled, standing over a severely poisoned Harry and a weeping Fawkes. “Dead. I will drain the life from Draco Malfoy, Imperio Lys, and have her cast the curse to kill her little friend. You won’t be alone in death, at least, Potter. Lord Voldemort knows mercy.”

I grit my teeth and staggered up, leaning against the stone. I had to get to the diary — it was so far from Harry, because of the brief ceasefire I’d caused. That wouldn’t do. How the hell had he gotten it the first time? Luck? He had to stab it with the basilisk fang, he had to kill the Horcrux. He
had to kill Tom, who even now I couldn’t help but think was my friend.

My friend that snarked to me while I tutored my firsties, my friend that-

Fuck! He’s got me good, the bastard. I could’ve been the poor sod openin the Chamber if Tom hadn’t suddenly opened eyes to the power of fucking friendship. Vision swimmin- No, no, ju get to the diary. Go on, you can do it Lys, and then we c’n laugh with Dietrich about it after he scolds you...

“I’m going to sit here and watch you die, Harry Potter. Take your time. I’m in no hurry.” Tom sneered, no doubt angry that Harry’d killed his fucking snake and I’d helped by distracting him.

(I wonder. Did he see it as betrayal?)

I lurched towards the diary, near the stone head of Salazar Slytherin, and dropped it a few times before I managed to pick it up. There was blood on my fingers, my grip with slippery. I lurched towards the diary, near the stone head of Salazar Slytherin, and dropped it few- Wait, shit, fuck, I ready did that. What was I doing again? Reading Harry Potter?

“Phoenix tears... Of course... healing powers. I forgot.” came Tom’s voce.

Fawkes.

In the book, Fawkes had gotten the book for Harry.

I looked up unsteadily, and promptly chucked the diary at the blurry red-gold thing in the air. A trill — of thanks? — and then there was the most monstrous scream, piercing and shrill as a banshee, echoing round the cavern. Looking over at Harry, black stuff was bursting out of the diary — ink? — and Riddle stepped back in horror. His image began to crack and glow eerily, and unlike canon, it was slow-fading.

Yes, unlike canon, Harry shouted in pain and passed out (perhaps the Hocux in his fucking face was reacting to the death of a brother, or basilisk venom hurt like a motherfucker) as Riddle watched his hands with fascinated horror, crumbling away like he was eroding. I don’t remember how, but I was standing before him in a moment, blocking his view of Harry — if he tried to touch the poor kid, I’d deck him, concussion or no.

If he tried to touch the poor kid, I’d deck him, concussion or- GODDAMMIT, I fucking hated concussions. Things kept repeating. I couldn’t tell what I was doing... And time was moving strangely. Was I standing between them?

Tom looked at me, and there was fear in his eyes.

Fear is crippling, he’d said. It made you shake and feel like you couldn’t move. It made you close your eyes. He was very afraid.

It should’ve made me smirk or sneer or something, but I only felt sad. I guess he still had a bit of my soul or something, because as pieces of himself began to shrivel into dust, I could only smile sadly. It was stupid, I guess, but I was impulsive and affectionate and impulsively affectionate and I couldn’t help but want to say something silly and snarky and maybe see Tom Riddle at least go with a bit of a smile on his face.

“I never gave you permission t’call me Lys. Prat.” I said faintly, “But I guess you c’n. Whatever. It’s probably whatever you did. To me. With th’diary? I think I’m crying. Might be the conc... cudgeon, though.”
Tom seemed shocked, angry, in pain, fearful, angry, and everything in between... but it all seemed to evaporate into a tired sort of acceptance. All else was simmering underneath that. Heat underneath cool.

“You are infuriating.” he muttered, but his voice was all whispering and echoing now, and maybe that’s why I couldn’t hear the anger. “And I am pathetic. Destroyed by a twelve-year-old because I was distracted by an eleven-year-old.”

“Friends don’t put other friends under th’imperius Curse. That’s very bird- no, er, bad. Very bad.”

He looked at me strangely, his face literally cracking a little. I think most of his legs were already gone. How was he floating? Weird... Magic was weird...

“Are we friends, Lys?” he asked, looking more human than I’d ever seen him even as he dissolved into smoke before my eyes.

I am your best friend? — broken sort of hope, like he doesn’t believe it’s really happening. It’s sad, the way — “Are we friends, Lys?” — A pleasure, Guinevere. My name is Tom Riddle. How did you come by my diary? — reddish purple, once upon a time, but then large, calloused hands always held her — precious smiles — bluing out, settling into a more regal color. Reserved, afraid, protective, defensive, no no no me and mine no-

Stop.

I grinned, but it was difficult. I couldn’t think. It was hard. “Why wouldn’t I wanna be friends with a Horcrux? Soul-stealer. Haha. Really, it’s not like I meant to. Friends... happen that way. Accident. An’ we’re friends. Don’t think I don’t see m’colors in you, Tom. Sneaky thief.”

Stupid blurry concussion vision. Or were those tears? Fuck. I couldn’t see properly, even though the colors were obvious. Even as they writhed in pain and began to crumble along with their master, they were clear: black, with a core of weak crimson; and in the center, small as a needle’s eye, was a pinprick of deep, very familiar indigo.

Color thief. I thought, almost fondly.

He snorted out a semblance of a laugh. “You’re teasing me.”

I looked back to those conversations we’d had. He said the same thing, once.

“That’s what friends do, Tom. They tease.” I echoed, swaying where I stood. Why was it difficult to speak in my usual way? I was all choppy and stupid-sounding, goddammit.

My knees suddenly buckled, though, and it was only when Tom grabbed me that I managed to steady myself. He looked surprised at himself, at his ability to retain tangibility even as he was filtering life force back into Draco Malfoy; but he looked more surprised at the fact that he’d tried to catch me in the first place. My blood was on his hands, and it, too, eroded as he did.

I laughed a little, feeling sick. I was watching my friend — who wasn’t really my friend — or was he? — die slowly. He was my friend... Or was he my friend? He tried to catch me as I fell. I laughed a little, feeling sick. Or had I done that already? Things were still very blurry. I could barely concentrate on the colors, they were going away... No, wait, Tom was going away. Right. I laughed a little. I felt sick.

“Pathetic.” he said again, quietly.
I blinked away black spots in my eyes that I didn’t think were colors. “No need to be rude, Tom. You shov’me into a pillar. A snake pillar. Rember? No, erm, re-mem-ber? It’s hard to think, I can’t even recall m’Healing spells. Bollocks.”

“No you.” he said, sounding a bit exasperated. “Me.”

“Narcissist.”

He huffed that little laugh again. He was mostly gone. There was only a bit of his torso left, arms gone, face half floating away into nothingness. A crumbling bust. His remaining eye, blue and narrowed, looked a bit sad.

“I wish you had been born in 1926.” he whispered. Then he shook his head, what remained of it. “You must think me foolish.”

“I think everyone’s foolish. Teenagers especially.” I was one, once. It was horrible.

I blamed the concussion for the flippant, random answers.

He chuckled, the sound slipping away so quickly that I might’ve imagined it. “A child,” he muttered. “More than fifty years old, and I was taken apart by a child. Because I wanted a child to-” He swallowed. That expression on his face was so lost, my heart ached. “-to be my friend.”

The last few words were whispers. His voice was fading, too.

All that remained of his colors was a struggling crimson, curled around that pinprick of indigo. As if it was protecting that piece of itself, that piece of me that he’d stolen, with everything he had. (Color thief, I thought. Again?) That was probably why he hadn’t faded so quickly; there was something he was trying to live for, a tiny color in his magic he had wanted so badly that he’d threatened to Imperio me for it.

“Haven’t fig’r it out, ‘en? Silly Tom. I think li’ a 19-year-old, at the ver’ least. Reincarnations an’ all that.” I said, watching the red wither and the bleeding ink slow to a trickle. Like there just wasn’t enough, like he was bleeding out.

He paused, then searched my face for something that he must’ve found, ‘cos in another moment, he was smiling.

“Ah. That’s not so bad, then.” he said, laughing as he went.

Color thief.

I think. Laughing? I laughed a lot, too, so it might’ve been me. Hey, I didn’t have my Occlumency barriers up! And the visions weren’t coming! Did this mean I wasn’t a Seer anymore? I should’ve smashed my face against a snake pillar before!

I turned to look at Tom and give some sort of stumbling reply reflecting my strange thoughts, but- Gone.


With that, I really fell over and somehow had crawled to Dietrich and Malfoy, who was looking more colorful and evenly breathing and everything. My hands were covered in blood and ink as I approached their forms, and I really fell over and somehow had crawled to Dietrich and Malfoy,
who was- Um. I really fell over... No, I crawled... Shit, I was there already.

Somehow.

Dietrich. What spell’s’it? Um, dammit... Ennervate! Yes, that’s right.” I babbled, trying three times before I realized I was holding my wand wrong.

“Ennervate. Ennervate. Ennervate.” I repeated for all the boys.

Dietrich first, since he was right there. Actually, he was the only one who got up because I missed the first and last time. I watched in a daze as his dark grey eyes fluttered open, and he looked a bit confused before his entire body stiffened and he flew up, smashing his forehead into mine.

I saw stars. Wow.

“BLOODY- Lys? What’s wrong with you? Are you alright? It’s Malfoy, like I thought, he is the one Tom is possessing- Lys? Merde, you’re bleeding!”

“Ya hit m’ head wi’ your head.” I said, blinking rapidly, “That hurt.”

“I do not think that is why you are bleeding. Where is my wand? Ah, the fils de pute didn’t take it. Here, Lys, face me... Scourgify, Scourfigy, Episkey. You are bleeding a lot, I do not think Episkey will help.”

I laughed a little, relieved that Dietrich seemed wholly unaffected. Or maybe I couldn’t tell because things were really weird right now.

“So mum-like. Guess you’re all nice and better. So. Revive... erm... ‘em. Those two. Harry got bit by th’basilisk! Then he stabbed it.” It was so much harder to think now, and the adrenaline was going off, and my chest kinda hurt ‘cos Tom had died and I felt bad even though he was not a nice person. My chest hurt. “Then Fawkes blubbered all over him, so... I tried to Ennervate but I think I missed. Dietrich, I’ve got a cushion. Con-cushion? Cusscushion. I can’t think...”


Here we go. I could talk properly, I swear. “Thanks, mate. I’ll stay here.”

Nailed it.

I watched as Dietrich rose a bit stiffly (the Chamber can’t have been a lovely place to nap) and he Ennervate’d Harry. There was some sort of scuffle, Harry probably thought he was being attacked or something, but eventually after some loud shouting that made my ears ring, they both came near me. Harry was holding Tom’s corpse; I mean, the diary. The diary with a hole in it. My chest hurt and I laughed a little and I felt sick.

I greeted Dietrich. “Thanks, mate. I’ll stay here.”

Wait. That’s not what I wanted to say. Shit.

Dietrich glanced at Harry. “Concussion,” he explained bluntly, “It was not so bad before; she managed to Ennervate me, but then I... accidentally hit her head and I believe it got worse.”

Harry glared at Dietrich disapprovingly. “What’d you go and do that for, then?”

“Similar to you, Potter, I thought I was being attacked when I woke up and someone was leaning
over me with a wand in their hand. We should wake Malfoy — the stupid child looks alive, at least.”

“Prat.” I said quietly, remembering Tom. Color thief. Then I started crying and Dietrich looked very, very lost. He turned to Ennervate Malfoy, since Harry didn’t know how to cast that quite yet. I think. When was that spell taught, anyways? I didn’t know, I couldn’t think, and then I started crying- No, I was crying already. I think.

Harry patted my shoulder, looking worried. “Lys? Does it hurt somewhere?”

I nodded, sniffling. “He took my colors! My colors. Him. He used t’be black an’ red. But not an’ more, Tom’s dead. He was. But he took... colors and... um... I’m indigo. Use’a be red, ‘en Dad was blue, so I’m indigo. Purple-ish. He took some, the Dark Lord Prat.”

“Colors... as in Mage Sight? The thing you were telling me about, over the summer? In the Hospital Wing...?”

I smiled. “You remember. Yup, good. Smart Potty. Merlin, tired... I’m tired, do you levitate? Wingdardum Levista, see? You remember. I’m gonna sleep.” ‘Cos sleep sounded so nice right now, it sounded amazing.

Harry gave me an indulgent smile that was a bit too nervous, and then called over his shoulder to Dietrich, who seemed to be speaking quietly to a waking Malfoy, “Er, Bastion, Lys says she’s going to sleep-”

“What? Do not let her! Lys, do not sleep! You might fall into a coma!”

“Er, right. Lys, you can’t sleep.” Harry repeated, shaking my shoulder.

I groaned and squinted at Harry. His eyes were very green. Why wasn’t he in Slytherin? “M’ not gonna sleep, the nightmares. They’ll come and... er, it’s bad. I think. You’re very colorful. Did you know? You have the same gold as Ronnie.”

“Errr... alright. C’mon, Lys, we’re leaving. Put your arm over my shoulder here.”

Harry maneuvered me so that he supported my weight as we walked. Why did everything seem so much stranger? Cushions. Alright. I mumbled to him as we walked and he had to take my wand away when bees started going out the end. Bees, like the craterwiggle bees. Luna would like them. An alliance, right? Harry maneuvered me so that he supported my weight as we walked. We walked.

“Harry, did we walk already?” I asked, wondering if I had de ja vu.

He didn’t answer, but muttered to himself despairingly, “Ron’s going to kill me.”

I nodded, agreeing. “S’not good, you hav’to take care a’girls. Should’ve told Tom that, when he put me in a snake. Er... a pillar. He put me in a pillar. Now I have a cudgeon ‘cos of him.”

“Er- Lys, there, there, don’t cry...”

“Am I crying? Bloody hell! It’s Prat’s fault, Tom shouldn’t’a put me in a snake and Dietrich... gave me stars. Wow. No, another cusscushion. Merlin, I-’ can’t think at all are we walking? Tom died and I wachd and it hurts but I hav a cudgeon-can and it’s difficult dfcult to think.

Harry huffed out something like a laugh. Maybe. “Ron’s really going to kill me. You’re hurt and
“I’m not! Hurt. Not the way you think. I’m not hurt. I’m not.”


(Who was the friend?)

More than fifty years old, and I was taken apart by a child. Because I wanted a child to- to be my friend.

(We were friends, weren’t we?)

I never gave you permission t’call me Lys. Prat. But I guess you c’n. Whatever.

Harry’s arms were around my shoulders, trying to lift me up. He looked indulgent and worried. I hoped he wouldn’t get too beat up by Ron. He was a good kid. “Er, alright, Lys. C’mon, then. We’ll walk now, alright?”

(Did you know? I only let me and mine call me that. Did you know that? That means you are-)

“Check on Die’rich, please.” I slurred.

“He’s alright, Lys. Better than you are.” Harry assured me.

“Die’rich!” I called, worried again for no reason, “Are you ‘kay?”

“Yes, Lys. Come now, lean on Potter.”

(-me and mine.)

“We’ve got to move on, Lys,” Harry said gently, “Got to get Malfoy to Madam Pomfrey. Dietrich’s fine, he’s levitating Malfoy and everything. Let’s go on, alright?”

I nodded, making my vision blur and distort. “Right. On and on and on and on.”
Chapter 17

Chapter Summary

Hello, here's chapter 17 for you all! Had to edit it, add some stuff, it might be a little choppy because of it. Hope it's an okay wrap-up, at least.

As always, thank you to my readers, subscribers, kudos-ers, bookmarks, etc. I appreciate you all! :)

... 

The next thing I actually clearly remembered, was waking up and Harry grinning at me from his own bed.

Dumbledore was sitting in between our beds, a probably-Transfigured armchair supporting him, but with Fawkes on the shoulder of the seat. He — the professor, not the bird — glanced between the two of us with amusement. Eyes twinkling and all.

“I seem to recall another situation earlier this year, similar to this.” he said pleasantly.

Hm. Harry and I side-by-side in the Hospital Wing.

“Did Madam Pomfrey tell you how we wouldn’t shut up, then?” I asked with a grin.

Alby chuckled. “I seem to recall a verbal report detailing two patients causing disturbances in the middle of the night, one of which yelled, ‘Oh no, it’s the dragon-lady! Pretend you’re asleep!’ at one point or another.”

Me being a sassy little shit, I couldn’t find it in me to be embarrassed. Madam Pomfrey, sure, yelled at me a lot with how much I swung by — if it wasn’t my own injuries, it was Lu’s Quidditch or Harper’s clumsiness or something — but there was always a hint of (exasperated) fondness. I think what really endeared me to her was that I started learning how to heal myself, though it was tough goings with my rather Dark core. She saw me as most professors saw the demon twins, I think: kind of a nuisance, very ridiculous, but fun company all the same.

“How is it,” I asked, arching a brow at my old friend and mentor, “that you never sound sarcastic when you’re the sassiest old man I know, Alby?”

Harry spluttered. Dumbledore’s eyes twinkled.

“I’m afraid we can’t debate the nature of my humor, Lys, Harry.” he said finally, his eyes deflating back to their usual blue — no twinkles or sparkles, “I could not ask for the complete story the night you returned; both of you were heavily injured, and it was imperative you were treated as soon as possible. But I would like to inquire now, if I may.”
Harry nodded readily, but I frowned. “What did you tell the Bastions and the Malfoys?”

“The bare bones of it, my dear,” the Headmaster replied without missing a beat. “Harry, here, told us all about his investigation and discovery of the basilisk and the location of the Chamber of Secrets. Not much else, and certainly not what happened within the Chamber, due to the presence of the Malfoy’s, I believe. I explained that the Heir of Slytherin was in fact a young Lord Voldemort, Tom Riddle. After that, you two were brought to Madam Pomfrey for a well-deserved rest.”

I hmmm’ed to myself. Harry and I were the only occupants of the blank Hospital Wing beds, the three of us the only ones in the room at all. Which meant… “So the petrification victims got the Mandrake juice, then?”

“We are the only occupants of the infirmary, as Professor Lockhart has been transferred to St. Mungos, along with Draco Malfoy — nothing serious, fortunately.” he confirmed with a smile, “And, if it interests you to know, I awarded two hundred points to Slytherin, and four hundred to Gryffindor.”

The little bit of me that might’ve been slightly worried for Malfoy eased with that. Good.

But onto other things. I raised a brow. “Dietrich didn’t get any points?”

The lot of bit of me that was very worried for Dietrich rose up, but now didn’t seem to be the time. Later, I promised myself, he’s fine ’cos Alby didn’t say anything so later.

“No, you have not received your points yet,” said Alby pleasantly, “Which I shall rectify. Two hundred points to Slytherin, for an admirable rescue of your friend, Mr. Bastion. Like your brother and Mr. Potter, you will also be receiving a Special Award for Services to the School.”

My gut tightened. If I was correct, Tom had gotten that same reward when he’d turned Hagrid in... And Tom was dead. (Laughed a little — hysterically — and felt sick, he crumbled away like a broken bust-) I watched him die, and now that the diary was well and finished, I knew that it wasn’t an enchantment that made me hurt when I thought of it. Tom, in fact, had not wanted any of my darkest secrets or fears or soul. Maybe in the beginning, but… He had separated himself from me in some strange, misguided effort to protect me.

Ha. I’m such an idiot. I had, a small corner of my heart, sort-of liked Tom Riddle.

“I don’t deserve it,” I muttered, feeling sick again, “It was my fault. The entire thing.”

We are friends, Tom.

Albus Dumbledore only gave a gentle smile.

I glanced at Harry, who have an encouraging, if not puzzled, beam. It only made me feel worse. He didn’t understand he should’ve been blaming me for being stabbed by the most poisonous creature in the world. Fucking… so trusting, looking at me like I was chatting about Slytherin and magic, instead of admitting that I as good as planned out possession and murder. Shit.

“Malfoy and Dietrich almost died because of me.” I muttered.

“Lys…” Alby trailed off.

I shook my head. “It’s even more my fault with Malfoy. He got entrenched into the diary so easily because he was desperate. He was lonely because all of Slytherin was turning from him, desperate
because I was winning. Of course he got bloody possessed.”

“Yet Mr. Malfoy tried to get rid of it just as quickly, my dear.”

I snorted. “He’s a pureblood. A Dark pureblood. Of course he got suspicious when he couldn’t remember things and such.” I withered a little, glancing at Harry. “I’m sorry, Potter. You… Your arm… All that rubbish with Tom Riddle, it really is my fault.”

“I wondered…” Harry said softly, after I paused for too long, “Tom — Voldemort — said that you had the diary first. That he… that he failed with you, or something. That was true, then?”

Wringing my hands together, I nodded. “I found the diary in Ginny’s things. I knew it wasn’t what it seemed ‘cos of the- Oh, right, Harry, you’ve probably already realized by now that I’ve got Mage Sight.”

He nodded kindly. “You talked about colors a lot. Said I was a peacock.”

Dumbledore chuckled as I blushed; was I an idiot when concussed? God.

“You have colors reminiscent of those birds, yes,” confirmed Alby, “If I had any artistic talent, I could show you what shades. As it is, Lys is the better painter between us. I have always told her that she should pursue art.”

Years ago, when my tutelage was in full swing, Alby presented me an assortment of paints so that I could learn how to connect colors to people or magic or whatever else. Lots of watercolor sheets categorized messily, me trying to determine how to determine Dark and Light and Grey from rainbows. It was very kindergarten arts-and-craft-like, and we both loved it. (The man was a secret child, I swear to Merlin.)

I rolled my eyes. “Not the point right now, Alby.”

“Indeed. You were saying about the diary...?”

“Yes. The diary… it had colors. Like it was alive, but sleeping. Black and sickly. When I wrote in it, its colors started to change. It woke up. Sienna red, almost, but even darker than that.” I said haltingly, feeling very self-conscious with both the Leader of Light and the Boy-Who-Lived watching me with keen, unreal-looking eyes behind their respective spectacles.

I took a deep breath. Best get it over with, Lyssie. You told the same story to Dietrich now — who is okay, he’s fine, he is, you saved him, you did — didn’t you? Sure, it put him in danger, but he’s fine now and telling Harry and Alby now can only help.

“I guess… Well, since we didn’t quite graduate from the topic, I’m a Soothsayer. Type of Seer, as I said before.” I inclined my head to Harry, who looked curiously alert and attentive. “It’s a family secret. Only the immediate Weasley’s, the Heads of House, Madam Pomfrey, and Alby know this, alright, Harry? Keep it secret.”

“Perhaps Miss Granger and Mr. Bastion would benefit from knowing as well.”

“Perhaps I should announce it to the Daily Prophet.” I replied dryly.

“I won’t say a thing.” Harry promised, looking a little uncertain; I suppose the combination of a secret and the full blast of the usual banter between Dumbledore and I would do that to a person. If Mum knew how I spoke with the Headmaster, she’d whup me.
I smiled at the kid. “I trust you.”

Harry nodded.

Dumbledore took it upon himself to explain further, “Those born with Mage Sight, as Lys was, are born with the ability to sense magic through another one of their senses naturally. Some acquire Mage Sight later — naturally and not — but normally do so through meditation and practice. I listen to magic, and Lys is one of the extraordinary few who has two senses: sight and sound, is that correct, my dear?”

I nodded. “Your magic has a lovely voice, Harry. I’m pretty sure Alby did a ḷi-kondën ḷi-drixtā, though, since he knows how overwhelming his magic is, even when I tone down my Sight, or I’d otherwise be hearing it now.”

“Dî-konden An-drixtā is the Soothsayer Soothing spell. It’s to block out my Mage Sight. Currently, I’m hearing and seeing just like anyone else. One of the first spells I was taught to do wandlessly, since being in crowded places always makes me get a headache.”

“And you’ve got anaemia and asthma? Tough luck, Lys.” he said sympathetically.

I shrugged. “Seer-witches are magically powerful, more than most, but we’re physically delicate. It’s a balance, Harry.”

“Seer abilities often are,” Alby cut in, “Of course, due to the level of control one can exert over Mage Sight — especially in how sometimes it develops after birth, or one that learn it as you would any other skill with enough dedication and power — Soothsayers mostly faded into obscurity.”

Harry nodded. “Well, alright. Not so bad of a secret, I don’t think.”

Alby smiled. “And so it isn’t. But the Ministry’s Department of Mysteries is very interested in Seer abilities, and born Soothsayers are quite rare. The Weasley family would rather not be forced to register Lys as a natural-born Soothsayer and have her obligated to report to the Ministry twice a month, so secrecy is the preferred option. Now, then! Lys, you wanted to speak of the diary?”

With that, I took over. I told them much the same story as the one I’d given Dietrich, but with a bit more truthfulness to it. I’d dove right into gleaning information from Tom because I decided the risk was worth it (leaving out my interest in the Dark Arts, though). I told them about Malfoy stealing the diary from me and my frenzied search to get it back, ‘cos I knew how dangerous Tom was and though I was willing to brave the risks, I wouldn’t risk someone else — someone who didn’t have my Sight and didn’t know what Tom really was.

(“So we had the same diary?” Harry asked.

I blinked. “Well, yes. I told you about it a few times. Did you just not notice?”

“Er… I was a bit concentrated on how I was sucked into the diary to see Hogwarts seventy years ago, you know?”

A shrug. “Fair enough. Moving on!”)

I told them about Dietrich accusing me of obsession, about when I admitted to him that I needed help and why, and about how he began to help me look for the diary. The fear I’d felt when I saw Harry had it, my plan to track the diary back to the thief, hopefully to be able to get them out of
Tom’s snare. I explained why my reaction to the news that Dietrich had been taken was so bad: ‘cos it was honestly on my head. My carelessness had put my friend in danger, I didn’t know the why or how, but it did. The confrontation in the Chamber was easy, with Harry helping me, and when I got to the end...

“Harry passed out, can’t say I know why,” I said, telling the truth but wording it to mislead them, “And I spoke to Tom as he disappeared. It was slow, I suppose because Malfoy wouldn’t be able to take back all his magic and life-force at once or he’d die of shock.”

I ended there, but gave Dumbledore a look that meant I’d be having words with him later, that there was more. I was going to have to explain this to Dietrich, too… (Where was he? I wanted to know if he was okay.) God, it would be a lot of talking.

Dumbledore nodded. He announced his departure, thanking both of us for the time and the words, and left. I sighed; that was over and done with. I’d still have to talk a lot. Oh, and then I was going to explain to Ginny, Luna, and the other three firsties... Dammit to Merlin, this was a lot. In any case, I gave a tired grin to Harry.

He, however, threw something at me. (His pillow. The idiot.) I dodged, and gave him an incredulous glare. “And what was that for, o mighty basilisk slayer?” I asked.

“It’s not your complete fault, Lys.” he explained with a grin, shrugging. “You keep saying it is, but you didn’t mean for it to happen. Don’t, er, be so guilty about it. It’s not like you wanted Malfoy and Bastion to get taken.”

I sighed, crossing my arms and leaning back on my two pillows. “Should’ve just turned it in. Wards and healing and whatever else, they weren’t worth that. Malfoy and Dietrich. Mostly Dietrich, but you know.”

My attempt at levity was duly ignored. Harry was quiet. “You were tricked. Just because you’re a Slytherin doesn’t mean you can’t be tricked. Kicking Malfoy’s arse or not.” We both grinned at that. He sighed. “Even I liked Tom Riddle, and I only spoke to him for a little bit. I think, in the end, you sort of tricked him back. He wanted to possess you first, right? But then he-”

“Couldn’t.” I said. I ran my hands through my messy hair. “He couldn’t. When you… Ergh, I wasn’t going to tell you, but I should’ve kept Alby here since I am…” My heart hurt with grief. I remembered what grief was, when Pandora Lovegood died and bits of Luna and Xeno went with her. “While you were out, he said… He was dying, and he said he didn’t want to possess me, so that’s why he called out to Parkinson with his freaky evil telepathic power, or whatever it was.”

Harry blinked. Then he smiled a little, and it was a wistful thing. “You Slytherins, really. Pretending to be friends to use each other, and then accidentally becoming friends in the process.” He sighed. “I’m sorry, Lys.”

I frowned. “For what?”

“That you lost a friend.”

Laughing as he went. Crimson blood and black ink and pale fingers and a single, blue eye.

I smiled to myself, quiet. “Slytherins. We’re an emotionally stunted bunch.”

“Is that why Malfoy’s such a git?” Harry was smiling, trying to cheer me up. Sweet boy, this one. Good on Ginny, the future Mrs. Potter… if it happened; I wasn’t sure, with my interference with the possession and whatnot. Maybe.
“Of course. I’ll keep you updating on Slytherin’s politics next year, Harry. It’ll do you some good to hear the Git’s fall from grace. Probably next year, it’s not going to be a secret that we saved him, you know. Capitalize on that, hm?”

Harry rolled his eyes. “Slytherins. You’re all so weird.”

I mimicked him. “Gryffindors. You’re all so judgmental.”

“Take that back, Lys!” He threw a chocolate frog at me, being out of pillows.

“Oh, thanks!” I laughed, catching it — so it didn’t hit my face, Harry had good aim — and opening the box. “Are you card collecting, Harry? I can’t believe it, but I’ve got another Merlin. I gave my last one to Harper as an early birthday present, him and Lu went rabid at each other for it. I think they almost started a bloodfeud between House Harper and House Vaisey, you know, like the Malfoys and the Weasleys.”

Harry snorted. “Like I said. You’re all weird.”

“I will bet you twenty Galleons that if I dangle this in front of Ron — who I know for a fact doesn’t have one — and Lu, they’ll get into either a fist-fight, or a Quidditch match to determine who gets it.”

My green-eyed friend brightened. “Twenty Galleons. I want to fly, too.”

“Thanks for the money, Potter.”

Thanks, Harry.

“Any time, Lyssie.”

You’re welcome.

...

“Lys.”

I turned my face sleepily. I frowned, too groggy to filter my thoughts. “Really? Tempus... Midnight, Dietrich? Really?”

Dietrich raised an unimpressed eyebrow. The movement drew attention to a strip of gauze on his temple, which I zeroed in on even with the dark. Moonlight made it stark against him, even if he was pale as fuck.

“What is that? You’re hurt? What happened?” I fired away, bolting upright and flicking privacy wards all over the place. (It wouldn’t do to wake up Harry, who was sleeping behind the curtain there. The kid needed his damn sleep.)

Dietrich was kind enough to let me poke at his bandage, though he looked annoyed.

“What is the saying? Glucke. Mother hen, I think.”

“That’s German, you fake-”
“Lys.”

I stopped fretting, looking up at Dietrich when his tone sharpened. I slowly drew my hands away, guilt flooding me just as completely as grief did earlier. Maybe this was why I was so tired, with all these damn emotions all over the place. This was probably why I should practice my Occlumency more.

And my head was rambling.

And then Dietrich grimaced, which had me shrinking back, which had his eyes snapping up to me fiercely.

“How is it not?” I blurted out, eyes darting between Dietrich’s and the bandage above them.

Dietrich frowned. “I chose to be your Second, in all things. It is my pleasure to help you, Lys. That ce putain de livre abducted and injured me, it was not your doing.”

There was a stubborn set to his face. He stood straight and proud. Every inch of my friend screamed that he wouldn’t be budged.

I curled my fingers into my blankets. “I’m sorry.”

Dietrich shook his head. “I know. It’s alright, Lys. That’s… all I wanted you to know. Before the leaving feast. I am sure you will have no time tomorrow to speak, so this is all I wanted to say.”

“I almost killed you.”

“The book almost killed me. You simply trusted me. Pour moi, cela en vaut la peine.”

I smiled lightly. He was going to leave but I still felt… horrible. About it all. Horrible and guilty and sorry. But there was no time for anything but this. “You’re doing the thing again. Making fun of me in French.”

“I must have some fun, Lys.”

“You’ll… we’ll write about this, right? We’ll actually speak properly about this?”

Dietrich raised a brow, turning to leave. “By this, you mean that I will repeat, many many times, that it is not your fault, until you believe me? I suppose. If you would simply know that I do not blame you and I expect this to change nothing, then it will be easier.”

“I almost killed you.”

“Guinevere,” he sighed, “What is it you want to hear?”

I fumbled with my blankets. He’d just been about to leave, stupid, and then I’d forced him to stay back. What on earth was I doing? “Accusations? Saying you regret meeting me? Something like that, I suppose…”

Dietrich snorted. I frowned at him.

“Regret meeting you, Lys? I would sooner befriend ce petit livre than say such a thing. So go to
I flushed a little. “That’s not- You can’t say stuff like that, Dietrich, you git!”

Dietrich shook his head again. “Cette fille sera ma mort. Good night, Lys.”

He exited just as suddenly and silently as he’d arrived, and I tore down my wards, frowning. The guilt was still there, nestled in right next to the grief, but when I curled up to sleep, I felt just a little bit better.

He doesn’t care.

He should.

If the roles were reversed, you wouldn’t care.

But the roles aren’t reversed.

It’s the ‘if’ that makes trust. Trust your friends, Lyssie.

I closed my eyes. Trust was hard. Maybe it’d be easier when I had those letters.

... 

Good bloody Merlin, the feast.

With only the vaguest rememberings of the second book, and my visions apparently giving me respite with just nice, pleasant images of the Golden Age of Rome, Byzantium, and imperial Han China, I didn’t See it coming at all.

It was crazy.

It was a fucking magical rave.

Everyone was in their pajamas, the food didn’t stop coming, people were crowding around everywhere (focused in my spot in Slytherin and Harry’s place in Gryffindor, I think), and the Gryffindor banners hung merrily on the walls. Bloody Albus, he’d quietly given Hermione points for being the first to figure it out, and when I argued that I’d literally known what the monster was the entire time, he told me that Seeing didn’t count and, besides, we agreed that what you didn’t say aloud, you technically didn’t See.

But even the loss of the House Cup didn’t faze me, ‘cos it was a spectacular party.

I grinned into my pumpkin juice as I watched.

Malfoy’s group — sans Malfoy, who was still in St. Mungo’s, unharmed but recovering from severe magical exhaustion — had released a tension I hadn’t even noticed they’d been holding the last few months; Pansy Parkinson linked elbows with Tracy Davis, and Crabbe and Goyle trailed after the two substitute leaders brainlessly, Blaise Zabini was peripherally there-not-there; but they were all much more relaxed and relatively pleasant in their interactions with other Slytherins and the occasional pureblood ‘Claw.
At one point, Zabini and I locked eyes — a sea of people between us. He gazed contemplatively at me (Davis and Parkinson could flaunt all they wanted, but I knew who the true Second of Malfoy was). Then, cautiously, he nodded an elegant tilt of the chin to me. I smiled tentatively and returned the gesture.

*New beginnings*, was the message in any case. I would power — nothing could erase that, not after this — and so Malfoy and Zabini would challenge me and Dietrich next year. My replying nod made his lips curl into a smile that was not unpleasant — pleasant, really, seeing as Blaise Zabini was quite a pretty boy — and we did not see each other again.

His cousin, on the other hand, seemed more than tipsy from smuggled Firewhiskey, and she’d bodily picked me up in a hug and started babbling about how worried she’d been for ‘her favorite firstie’ and how I shouldn’t do it again, and then proceeded to snarl at anyone who tried to come up to me to talk because ‘Guinevere is my firstie! No more snakes are allowed to give her concussions!’

It appeared that Dietrich or Harry or Ron or all of them had told the other first years about my antics under a concussion, because people kept mentioning it. I was a bit annoyed at first, but by the thirtieth reference to my bloody loopiness, I just laughed along — I did sound rather silly, the way Harper acted it out.

Lu and Jay had done the nice thing and slipped through the crowd around me (begging for details, in their own Slytherin fashion *COUGH demanding information COUGH*) and grabbed Luna from the ‘Claw table... apparently they’d had to snark at some little ravens to piss off to do so, but now I had my best female friend with me and she was surrounded by people who would respect her, if only for her connection to one of the powerhouses of Slytherin.

When Daphne Greengrass’ tea kept exploding in her face, the four of us looked at Harper (“She punched Jay in the nose!” “I don’t mind anymore, Harper, it was a long time ago-” “She punched Jay in the nose!!!” “Shut UP, Harper!”)

There were only two quieter notes in the night. One was when I managed to slip away and speak to the Bloody Baron.

“So you triumphed over the Heir of Slytherin, young Seer.” he said.

I laughed a little. “I was just along for the side — Harry’s the one who did all the work.”

“Scopoccuo,” he whispered deviously.

“Wh- You were watching? In the Chamber of Secrets?”

“There are stranger places to have eyes, young Slytherin.”

_Ghosts gossip_, I reminded myself. My eyes narrowed. “…Myrtle followed us.”

“Oh, yes. But it was I who ran across her first, was told the full story,” the Baron said quietly, eyes flashing with something akin to hunger, “She will not be repeating the tale to any other, living or dead, young reincarnation.”

“And why,” I asked delicately, glancing at the silly antics of Sir Nicholas at the Gryffindor table (he was happy he was back), “would Moaning Myrtle agree to silence? I’m sure she heard interesting things… “ My eyes flashed. _Exorcizamius_, whispered in my mind. The end of a ghost. “Dangerous things.”
The Bloody Baron nodded, his silver chains clattering. “Very. But the girl has never been interested in anything outside of her own misery.”

“The ghosts gossip. She will talk.” And I will exorcise every single one of you if I must. That is information that I will kill to protect. I gave it only to a soul fading out of existence.

“She will not risk my anger when she has other pursuits. She will stay her tongue.”

“And you?”

“I?” The Bloody Baron leaned close, his eyes feral. “I am interested in what you will do. A reincarnation, a Seer, a girl who unknowingly managed to seduce a Dark Lord. Idle gossip has never intrigued me. No, Guinevere Weasley; you will entertain me enough to fill the century.”

With a promise that sounded more like a threat, the Bloody Baron floated off.

Geez, the guy had problems.

I trusted that the Baron could frighten Myrtle into submission. And honestly, the ghost-girl was an idiot. Self-absorbed, self-pitying... she would forget over the summer, and it would only interest her if someone asked. Who would ask her whether I was a reincarnation or not? No, I wasn’t worried about the girl.

The Bloody Baron, though... I didn’t think he’d tell, but what the hell did he expect of me?

Seduce a Dark Lord? ERGH.

I mean... Nope. I wasn’t even going to think about it. I refused. It was weird and despite being weird, it still hurt. Tom had been my friend, and I couldn’t even feel betrayed about the Imperius thing because I honestly knew what I’d been getting into. I knew the fucker was a Dark Lord, but I’d had fun with him anyway.

Stupid.

But that was just the first quiet note.

After Harper found me ‘moping’ (“I wasn’t moping! Shut up, Harper!” “You need to have fun, Lyssie — it’s practically your party anyways!” “Since when do you call me that, you little git??” “Since you gave me Merlin!” “Ergh, FINE you little brat!” “You’re younger than me, Lys!”), I’d been dragged off to watch an impromptu poker game between Prefect Zabini, Marcus Flint, Fred and George (of course), and a competitive Oliver Wood who was only playing so he could keep his rivalry with Flint alive and probably didn’t even know how to play poker anyways. It was a frightening match up, with the twins breaking the rules and working together — showing each other their cards and everything — and there was quite a crowd.

I will admit, I cheated.

My visions had been surprisingly docile after I’d gotten out of the Hospital Wing, and they bent to my will when I looked ahead — maybe my magic was trying to make it up to me or something? — and I managed to look ahead. It was flighty clips of scenes as usual, but I pieced it together soon enough, and. Well. Dietrich made arrangements on my grinning advice, since Fred and George would fold if they knew I was betting. Maybe I only Saw ahead because it was such a trivial issue, such a tiny bit of fun, it pitted me enough for this. Whatever the case, Dietrich lent me some money that I promised to pay back.
(I promised to pay a lot of things back, for him.)

Anyways, we made a startling amount of Galleons from that venture — Oliver Wood won, and we didn’t think he had a clue what he was doing but happily congratulated him anyways — and the party only got better from there.

Amazing, really, that it lasted throughout the night.

It was actually wrapping up already when the second point of quiet occurred, and I found myself sitting next to my twin sister.

“Hello, Ginny.” I said softly.

“Hi, Lys.” she replied in the same tone. Her voice wasn’t as low as mine, though.

“So... if you tell me you’re still mad about the Sorting, I think I’ll have to strangle you.” I said cheerfully.

Ginny laughed, pushing my shoulder. “You know perfectly well that I’m not mad about it anymore. I was only really upset for a little while. After that, I was just confused and trying to... well, find my feet I guess.”

“Did you find them, then?”

She beamed at me. “Yes. And, honestly, I can see now that if we’d been Sorted into Gryffindor together, it would’ve been harder later. Even then, when you weren’t talking to me, I know you were looking out for me.”

I rolled my eyes. “Who gave it away? Was it Ron? The prat.”

“No, actually it was Percy.” she giggled, shaking her head. “He’s been mothering me so much, I had to sic Fred and George on him to get him to quit it. He mentioned that you asked about me in your letters- Why’ve you started writing him again, anyways? We’re all in the same school.”

“I barely talk to you Gryffindor Weasley’s, that’s why-”

“As if there’s any other type of Weasley.”

“Pardon me, but I’m rather sure I’ve got an identical surname.”

Ginny gave me a mischievous grin. “Any type of proper Weasley, I mean. Obviously you were dropped on your head when we were little or something. And then you had to infect Ron, too — saving a Malfoy, sis? Tut, tut...”

We laughed and I felt warm inside knowing that I’d gotten my twin back for real. She had comforted me when I’d learned that Dietrich had been taken down to the Chamber, but this was concrete.

It was on the train that I’d excused myself from the cabin I’d followed my sister into (it was her, me, Morag MacDougal, Luna, Nicola Labelle, Sarah Ainsworth, and a few more of our female year-mates that Ginny was friends with): I’d poked around looking for my firsties, running into Prefect Zabini’s (who gave me a fond hug when I’d left her compartment) and Marcus Flint’s (he gave me a grunt and a nod) cabins before I stumbled across them.

Dietrich was reading in the window seat, Jay across from him and chatting softly, as he drew. Lu
and Harper were being loud and probably purposefully obnoxious, trying to get Dietrich and Jay to play Exploding Snap with them. They all looked up and grinned when I entered, and I had to grin back.

“Oi! Lyssie! You said you had important things to tell us!” Harper crowed.

“Yeah, what’s with you and Dietrich being all secretive lately?”

“Was that a joke? Merlin, Lu, don’t ever make a joke ever again. Ever.”

“Shut up, Harper.”

Jay beamed and scooted over to make room for me. I sat, feeling very loved with my friends all waiting for me to speak and arguing about why I couldn’t sit next to Harper and Lu instead... Bloody kids. They were annoying little scamps that needed constant watch and tutoring (Harper especially) but I’d given them permission to use ‘Lys’ — Harper, of course, didn’t need the permission — so they counted in the ‘me and mine’ category, and I loved them.

“Are you and Dietrich together now, then?” Jay asked, effectively silencing the entire cabin.

For a second.

Dietrich choked on nothing and hid his face behind his book, Harper and Lu burst out laughing at him; Jay smiled at me with excitement in his eyes despite the fact that I’d jerked my hands and pulled his hair (I was braiding it again). Dietrich and I were frozen, twitching at Lu and Harper rolling around in their seats with hysterical laughter.

I tugged on Jay’s hair, hard. He yelped.

“We. Are. Eleven.” I snarled (“Well, technically, most of us are twelve.” “Shut up, Harper!”), giving a sharp tug with every word, “We are too young to be thinking of that dating nonsense, you hopeless romantic.”

Jay gave a small glare. “How d’you know it’s stupid if you’ve never tried?”

Oh, believe me, children I’ve played the dating game. It sucks ASS.

But rather than say that, I rolled my eyes. “You’re not the ones who witness the hysterics of the girls when they’re in their dorms. Oh, no, Janet, my hair looks like it’s a mess! What will so-and-so think? Oh, Janet, you look fine — it’s me we should be worrying about, Cedric Diggory sits right next to me, oh, my nails aren’t painted! Utter rubbish. They cry all the time, too. Over being ignored.”

“You certainly cried when Dietrich was-”

“That’s a completely different story and you know it, Harper!”

“Shut up, Harper.” Dietrich finally managed, lowering his book enough to glare.

Lu did us all a favor and smacked Harper, then looked at me curiously. “If you’re not announcing that you fancy Dietrich-” (“Merlin’s sake, Vaisey!”) “-then what did you want to tell us?”

Dietrich and I shared a glance. We had gone over the story already. Dietrich had gotten to me before we’d finished loading the trunks to be put on the train by the House Elves. I hadn’t noticed it last night, but he looked ragged and exhausted. I did, too, and I think it comforted him that... that
he wasn’t the only one where it was sinking in. The only one with trembling hands and limbs like lead that couldn’t move, unable to be distracted by anything, fear concentrated into his head.

Grief had washed some of the residual fear away, grief and confusion and whatnot, but Dietrich didn’t have that. And it helped him, I think, to plot and plan when he was still trying to reconcile the fact that he’d almost...

_I did this to him, I did, I should just leave him alone so he can be happy and safe and-

_Shush. Trust, remember?

(Was this going to be a daily thing? A continuous battle? Guilt and grief and residual fear hurt, they did. I had to calm down. Summer couldn’t come soon enough.)

Well. In any case, we knew what we were going to say. Mage Sight wasn’t even that rare, really, not when one could learn it. Dietrich knew about that already; I’m rather sure he figured it out earlier, before I’d even told him. Besides. I think my boys would be more interested in the fact that I was almost possessed and Dietrich was almost killed, really.

I smirked, rather looking forward to their reactions. Because, you know, I was still a Slytherin that enjoyed messing with people. Mean little git, I was.

“Swear to secrecy, firsties. This’ll blow your minds.”

...  

“So, what was it that you wanted to speak to me privately about, Lys?”

The girl shuffled on her feet. Fawkes gave a reassuring trill — she smiled — small and pale with a messy auburn mop of hair on her head. But she stood straight, even though she played with the frayed ends of her robe sleeves — green-silver tie was neatly done and proudly borne.

“Sit, Lys.” Albus Dumbledore said, gesturing to a cushy, purple couch.

Stop.

Images of the Chamber flashed by... grey stone, red blood, white fang, black robes — Tom Riddle smiling as he faded away — Malfoy and Dietrich’s limp bodies on the stone — Harry bitten by the basilisk — Fawkes catching the diary — ink running across the floor, mixing with the blood — the dark crimson colors that struggled — the tiniest bit of indigo that was the last to fade.

Stop.

“I didn’t want Harry to know. I thought it was private. Told him anyways, of course...” — smile, sad but crookedly true — “But I wanted to ask you something and I have to tell you what really happened when Harry passed out for you to understand. I think. It’s all very muddled, Alby, especially since I had a concussion during the entire exchange.”

“Go on, then, Lys. I am always here to listen and offer advice.”

She swallowed, nodding — lost her nerve — My chest hurts and I feel sick — glanced at the bookshelf — Penseive behind it, hidden — Dumbledore nodded understandingly, conjuring a small
glass vial for her. My wand to my temple — thin, silvery strands of memory. — now-full vial to Dumbledore, — didn’t want to see it again.

Stop.

It still hurt. My friend had died, and I hadn’t really realized he was my friend until he was already dying. It was confusing as all hell, too, because I don’t think Tom realized it either.

What does one do, when someone who loves you dies?

When Dumbledore returned, his gaze was filled with newfound understanding and a tinge of sympathy, but mostly sadness. — “If you had been born in 1926, my dear, we would not have a Lord Voldemort.” — quietly, sadly, ancient and tired — “Never have I seen Tom truly smile before you gave me your memory.”

Returned the strands — back in her head, not wanting this to get out. Then Dumbledore banished the vial and they sat in abject silence for a moment, mourning together over a strange death.

“I have told Harry that what saved him from the Killing Curse was love.” sighed the old mentor tiredly, “That because Voldemort could not feel such an emotion, could not understand it, he was ultimately defeated by it... And yet, here you bring me proof that when I deemed him beyond reach, Tom Riddle had just been waiting to be saved after all.”

Stop.

You are ridiculous.

Red, flashing in his colors — shaking like shoulders laughing, withheld, hands covering mouths, bright eyes and — She smiled at the book, tilting her head to the side, strands of crimson messy against her combing fingers.

You’re the ridiculous one. Why wouldn’t I be pleased about Julius joining me?

You should be more cautious. You especially would not take betrayal well.

Is it betrayal if I’m expecting it?

I am going to no it’s no Guinevere. You do not expect it.

I think you’re getting old, with all these bloody ink splatters, Tom. I do too expect it. Also, especially me?

Silly, sentimental Slytherin. If those you’ve gathered betrayed you, what will you do?

I dunno. Cry.

Please don’t You shouldn’t No Never no Ah. Are you teasing me, Guinevere?

Of course. I wouldn’t cry, honestly. And yes, I’m teasing you. Friends, remember?

Would you cease being friends, if you were betrayed by me your Second, for example?

Hm... What sort of betrayal?
Is betrayal not simply that?

There are different sorts, I think. As many as there are lies and secrets.

So it depends on the circumstances?

Nice and vague, isn’t it? Perfect for a Slytherin to exploit.

wou ld you ha te me if I what woul d you do if I were to it’s — t e be cause
I do — n’t want to Guine ve ro u it’s be cau
he e cir um st an ces w A safe answer. I suppose, Guinevere.

A ridiculous answer?

Of course. It’s a flaw of yours.

Oh, shut up, Tom.

Stop.

“I’m sorry.” — “No, it is I who am sorry. Too long the world has suffered by my failures.” — “I’m beginning to understand that feeling.” — “...You grieve for your friend. That does not make you a bad person, Lys. In fact, it makes you a rather good person, for having seen past Tom’s arrogance and jadedness and finding something redeemable underneath a mask of cruelty.”

“A mask that eventually became his face,” — diary on Dumbledore’s desk — “Sorry, Alby. I don’t mean to bring up bad memories. I just wanted to know if you agreed with me.”

“Agreed with you, my dear?”

“That Voldemort was feared and hated, but above all, he should’ve been pitied. And that Tom Riddle was admired and fawned over, but he should’ve been loved... Am I wrong?” — “No.” — Dumbledore breathed, his eyes closing — “No, I quite agree. And once again, I am impressed by you, Lys.”

A smirk — “Like many others, Alby. Get in line.” — He chuckled — “You are astute and mature for your age, and though you’ve suffered greatly for it — and still suffer — you still possess an open heart and mind. Not many would gaze at a wand pointed at them and pity the wielder.”

She looked — “Bloody hell, Alby, I can’t believe you’re still single if you can pull that kind of bollocks on girls with a straight face.” — Dumbledore laughed — a crooked grin, bouncing back from the embarrassment right away — She’d gotten up and was halfway across his office—

Stop.

“Do you think he was telling the truth, Alby? Out of curiosity?”

The Headmaster’s eyes didn’t twinkle — smiled very, very gently. “I think that the proof is in the magic.”

Stop.

Deep red magic curling protectively around just one drop of indigo — thrashed as it was pulled to pieces but didn’t move, except for trying to hide the spot of foreign, cherished color in its velvety folds. —vague impression of a boy who looked a lot like Tom — dark hair blue eyes pale and thin and — curling into himself, protecting a small garden snake in his arms — others kicked at his thin
ribs... Inevitably, neither venture succeeded. The snake had been buried long ago, and the touch of indigo that he guarded jealously shattered into nothing.

Blackening edges of indigo were tinged with a scarlet that folded like velvet. She walked surrounded by indigo fog — curling around protectively — edges shone with his colors, pulsing like a heartbeat — My heart hurts, I feel sick.

Stop.

“Lys?”

I opened my eyes and blinked at Dietrich. Everyone was staring at me, and I scowled.

“What?” I asked, self-conscious.

“Are you all right?” Dietrich asked slowly.

“Why wouldn’t I be okay? It’s just a nap on the train.”

Harper was frowning. “You’re crying.”

I blinked again, then patted at my cheeks. There were definitely cool tears there, yup. “Oh. Huh. Weird. It wasn’t that bad of a dream, to be honest. Forget it, I said I’d teach you idiots how to play poker — Lu, get out your cards, yeah?”

“Erm. Alright, Lys.”

“Good idea, Lyssie, I’ve been wanting to learn since the feast!”

I shuffled the deck expertly — something I was extremely proud of but no one seemed to understand what a feat it was, which was slightly disappointing — and taught the four how the Muggle card game worked. All the while, I was comforted by the presence of that deep carmine tinting my colors.

A reminder, I suppose.

...entertainment enough to fill a century, the Bloody Baron had whispered.

Hm. The century? It’d be awfully premature for me to say we were done, then.

Five more books to go, Lyssie.

END OF ARC TWO :: THE CHAMBER OF SECRETS
Chapter 18

Chapter Summary

**WARNING! Long Author's Note here.**

Straight off the bat, this is the third arc, there is an actual FUCK TON of world-building in this arc. I don't know where it came from, but it wanted to be written, so there. But there's also a lot of really fun shit later, so: Welcome to the Third Arc, and I hope you enjoy! :)

Also, you guys are actually the fucking best. Like. Seriously, I got the nicest damn reviews for 16/17, one of which almost had me crying in happiness, and many of which made my days. XD So, thank you all for commenting and reading! I'm super glad you liked the second arc!

Also, I fucked up the timeline here beyond redemption, and only noticed when I wrote most of the arc and went back to check. So… Just pretend that the Weasleys went to Egypt earlier and shit. Oh, and Sirius Black escapes earlier, too. Shhhh.

Um, what else... Oh! I update every Tuesday when I can, just so y'all know. Every Tuesday, and usually in the afternoon/evening because I work and have school, so yeah. That's a thing.

Anyways. The show must go on, sorry about the long A/N, and here we go!

... 

As I heard Ron bellowing into the telephone booth — from outside — I realized (again) what a bloody idiot he was and immediately slammed the glass door open, startling my brother, and snatched up the receiver from him just in time to hear Vernon Dursley’s dulcet tones:

“WHO IS THIS? WHO ARE YOU?"

*I can’t believe I let Ron of all people use a telephone without supervision. What was I thinking?*

Wincing at the volume, I put on the most pleasant and meek voice my Slytherin persona could muster up.

“Hello? Is this Mr. Dursley? I’m terribly sorry about that, earlier. There was a bit of a mix up — I suppose my brother was just a bit excited to speak with you.” I said, nearly snorting as Ron’s eyes widened to the size of dinner plates and he mimed gagging.

(I didn’t like how fake I sounded. Irritated the shit out of me. I’m surprised Ron’s ears weren't
bleeding, at the very least.)

“What? Who are you? What do you want?”

“It’s just, we’ve heard a lot about you from, er, Harry. Only good things, like how you’ve, er, climbed the ranks of…” The fuck was the company name? Grimbles? Wait no- “…Grunnings so quickly and all that — we on our side wouldn’t know anything about that, you see.” Ron seemed to either be dry-heaving or laughing his arse off silently, ‘cos he’d sunk to his knees and was keeled over, trembling. I struggled to not do the same. “My name is Guinevere Weasley. Would you be so kind as to put Harry on?”

“Weasley- You’re one of them, then, are you?”

Fuck. That was disgust, wasn’t it? Buttering up wasn’t working. It was like I started in the negative numbers for just being a witch; little points wouldn’t make a difference right now. Shall I fall back on my specialty?

Veiled — or unveiled, really — threats.

“A school-friend of Harry’s.” I answered pleasantly, “Is he not available? I have plenty of siblings, Mr. Dursley, I can have someone call back every hour or so to see if Harry’ll talk then. I’ve heard you actually met some of them last year, when they went to pick your nephew up in the family car — if you’d rather not waste the telephone bill, we could always do that again…”

Within seconds Harry was put on the phone and I handed the receiver back to Ron (who’d apparently been overcome with horror and amusement at my Slytherin-ness) with a smug grin on my face. He gave me a disgusted look.

“You are such a Slytherin. It’s disturbing.” he muttered.

I stepped out of the booth, rolling my eyes. “Talk normally, you dolt. I’m going to look around. Tell me if you need more Muggle coins.”

“Yeah, that was Lys, she just magicked the bollocks out of your uncle.” Ron said into the speaker suddenly, then he nodded to me. “Thanks, Lyssie. Don’t go too far, yeah? And keep your wand on you! Anyone looks at you funny, Statute or not, you hex ‘em!”

“Yes, yes!” I said, then mumbling to myself, “You fight a basilisk once, and all of a sudden you can’t look after yourself…”

It was nice, the first few days of summer, having absolutely nothing to do. Because of the whole ‘Guinevere went into the Chamber of Secrets and dueled Tom Riddle’ thing (an over-exaggeration of the highest proportions, Tom kicked my ass and then confessed to me while I was concussed, pretty much), Mum let me laze around for a bit after a lecture about endangering myself. Dad had quietly pulled me aside — I’d felt really bad, about how panicked he was, how pale he’d been when I first came home — and had asked if I’d known, and when I did in fact confirm that my Sight had told me it would happen, asked me why I’d let it happen, why I hadn’t turned in the diary immediately.

“I changed things a little, but in the end, it was important that it happen.” I answered.

“Important? How?”

I gave one of those I’m-Seeing-things-you’re-not smiles. “When the war comes, Dad. It’s important for when the war comes.”
Speaking of war, it was 1993 and that meant things were about to get serious.

Hah. Serious. Like... like Sirius Black.

I’m so glad I will never, ever say that aloud. The grief I’d get for such a shitty joke, it would ruin my entire reputation. This is why I never let myself get bored, I either start convulsing with visions or my mind goes to dangerous places.

After those first few days of lying around and doing nothing but goofing off, I began to study again. Last summer had been filled with meditation in preparation for a new, magic-saturated environment and relaxing before the real deal, you’re-a-witch-now-Lys stuff started. Then it had been me writing to Tom all the time, trying to trick him out of his vast amounts of knowledge (I could ward now, had a beginner’s introduction to Ancient Runes, and knew enough Healing spells and paraphernalia that I could function as an emergency battle-healer if need be). Now, however... well, this summer I concentrated on the Dark, and just a bit on my spell repertoire.

A lot of that came from when Dad won the Daily Prophet Draw. Seven hundred Galleons, most of which we used to go to Egypt and visit Bill. Visiting Bill — seeing Bill again after years — was fantastic, and like the good little Slytherin I was, I made sure to grill him on the basics of cursebreaking and got a list of some nasty things I’d love to look up later...

“Your colors changed a little.” I told him on our last night in Egypt.

Bill, his hair long and tied back and a new fang-earring on his ear, raised a brow.

“It’s not that light blue anymore, it’s a bit greyer now, more electric.” I explained, looking at his calming magical presence with interest, “And rather than just purple edges, you’ve got faint mauve rings all around. There’s violet streaks in them.”

Bill had laughed, ruffling my hair. “You change when you’re thrown into new places, Lyssie. I bet you’re a bit different after Hogwarts, now, aren’t you?”

I nodded. Persian indigo, blackening at the edges; every beat of my heart, those black furls would pulse with a deep crimson. And always, the silver threads — much like Penseive memories — floating through the depths and sometimes shining gold when I looked for too long. It was the deep red, though, that I liked to look at...

Anyways.

Unable to actually do wandwork — stupid underage thingie — I trained my wandless magic until I was sick of it and would get up to do things just to remind myself that I could. I read through my brothers’ old books and notes, searching for anything interesting — invented spells, secrets, the like.

For Harry’s July birthday, I’d put together a small handbook for wandless magic training, as he had expressed interest in it a year prior; it wasn’t a real book, but I’d bound the parchment with magic-reinforced twine and spent quite a bit of time making sure my handwriting was perfect and diagrams were clean. (I’d gotten Percy to write a bit of it, actually, with his bloody perfect handwriting)

Faced with nothing more to do (in my house arrest masquerading as protection) — besides stay up late reading about the Dark and dangerous — I spent every other afternoon with Luna at our favorite spot at the brook, helped my mother with the house, chatted with Percy about his
apparently (?) fading relationship with Penelope, helped Ginny with her homework (I fuckin’ finished that shit first week of summer, I wasn’t having any of it around in Egypt), wrote letters to my boys, and attempted to play Quidditch with Ron and the twins — I was now only 90% hopeless, apparently, as opposed to the 99% I’d been at last year.

And when Sirius Black’s escape was plastered over the Daily Prophet, and it coincided with Scabber’s sudden illness, I took a bit of interesting in trapping and pest-control spells that Mum had a book of under the kitchen sink.

And I watched the little shit, of course.

Closely.

This was the year I’d finally be rid of the fucker, after all. Best make sure he didn’t do anything funny beforehand.

... 

“LYS!”

I jolted. I’d been talking to the attic ghoul (it was a one-sided affair, but sometimes I’d get bored!), and nearly smashed my head against a low-hanging beam. I scrambled down the ladder, screaming back, “YES, MUM?”

“BREAKFAST!”

“ALRIGHT, MUM!”

I kicked at Ron when I clambered down, who had somehow not woken up at the exchange; he shot up at the mention of food, though his morning sentiments were dotted with yawns and he didn’t quite seem to know where he was going. I dragged him downstairs by the sleeve, where Mum had cooked our usual hearty feast, and all the Weasley’s sat and chattered sleepily; Dad was reading the paper — apparently the Ministry made arrangements with their Muggle counterpart to depict Sirius Black as a dangerous, armed criminal.

“Don’t read over your father’s shoulder, Lys, dear.”

“Oh. Sorry, Mum. Ron, can you- Ron, you pig, pass the butter!”

“Sh’ uh’, ‘Ishy.”

“Ron, don’t speak with your mouth full. Lyssie, don’t call your brother a pig.” Mum sighed.

“Yeah, Lyssie, you can do much better-”

“-as the only Slytherin at the table. Go on-”

“-insult Ron like he were Malfoy!”

“Shut up, demon twins.” Ron muttered, swallowing his pancakes.

I rolled my eyes. Well, since I was here… “Because the demon twins will stop if you ask them to.
Oh! Maybe this is why you and Malfoy get on like a house on fire, because you actually expect the ponce to stop being a ponce when you ask him to.”

Fred and George snickered.

“There’s our little Slytherin!”

“Bit weak, though, for being a leader-”

“-of the snakes. Going easy on Ronniekins, then?”

Dad looked up from his paper in interest. “Leader of the snakes?”

My face felt a bit warm. I scowled at Fred and George, who seemed to have expected our parents to know about my insane political struggles... I suppose with the hype of the Chamber of Secrets, I may have conveniently forgotten to mention it to Mum and Dad... I mean, it’s probably not something you want your children doing, right? The Slytherin thing. Mum and Dad probably wouldn’t like it... And really, no one understood Slytherin politics besides Slytherins, and the bloody demon twins for whatever reason.

They grinned at Dad’s question.

“Lyssie!” George said, putting a hand over his chest.

“You’ve been keeping secrets?” Fred asked, mimicking his twin.

I narrowed my eyes at them. Gits. “It’s not important, Dad.” I said, just an edge of warning in my voice, “Just a silly school thing.”

Warning received and promptly ignored. Of course.

“What?”

“A silly school thing? Why, Lyssiekins-”

“-how could you say that? After fighting for the parvus potesta with baby Malfoy-”

“-and everything!”

Dad looked at me in alarmed confusion. “You fought with the Malfoy boy?”

Ergh. After that, I was forced to explain to my parents that Slytherin worked very, very differently than Gryffindor. It was actually probably more vicious in their time, though, before Voldemort was too big of a thing — before the Death Eater’s children (Malfoy) thought they owned the place because they were oh so big and bad.

Fred and George certainly helped in my explanations, proving themselves far too knowledgable in private House matters — how, how did they know about the potestas? Those were House secrets! — and I’d had to crush Ron’s foot under mine to prevent him from talking about my duel with Parkinson. Ginny, however, picked up on it and after the table was cleared, dragged me off to our room so I could tell her in more perfect detail about how I destroyed Pansy Parkinson. The gleam in my sister’s eyes as I spoke made me think that I’d have a very willing dueling partner in a few years.

And the days passed like so.
Peaceful, I suppose.

If I remembered my books correctly, this year would be very much the same as the summer for me. There was no need for me to interfere with the adventures of the Golden Trio until the very end — I’d rather Ron’s leg not get broken, but maybe I’d leave it alone... it all turns out well, after all. It was after this one that I might try to dabble in things — last year had taught me to be even more cautious, with what happened.

(The red in my colors glinted, as if agreeing; I wondered if our magic was more sentient that I’d been taught to think of it as)

Then again… if I wasn’t really going to die, and I could interfere positively… that’d be a good thing. Petter fucking Pettigrew had a lot to answer to, perving on my brothers all these years. Plus I had to actually take the parvus potesta, since I wasn’t sure if Malfoy would treat us all nicely if I didn’t. On top of that, they were going to let me out to Diagon Alley, soon. With Percy as escort.

As soon as I knew Percy was — once again — my designated Diagon Alley escort this year, I saw.

Hand holding hand — small and weak and the other large and calloused — the little girl with dark crimson hair — the crowded, crooked bookshop and darted towards the historical section immediately. Hours. Hours. Hours and hours of poring over books — watched like a hawk, skimming his own book.

Again. Hours — hours — the bookshop — crowded and hot — robes of many colors blurring the background like globs of Impressionist paint.

Again. She didn’t look up from her books, only ducking her small head in one after another. They grew in number — the stack beside her — towering over her — threatening to fall.

Again.

Again.

And finally the escort — tall and gangly and bored — left her alone. He walked out to the Quidditch shop — it would be the same. As he left, her eyes — icy blue — flickered up, and behind the leathery pages she pulled off a devious smirk. It would not be the same.

Stop.

Ah. So it was time, then. Helvynya Prevett and the Dark Arts were finally entering my sphere of interest again.

(Peaceful. Hah. I didn’t have time for stuff like that.)

... 

Welp. No time like the present.

I gathered my things — told Percy I was just going to go read while he met up with Oliver Wood and Nicholas Rowle again — and slipped into the crowd, quietly making my way closer to Knockturn Alley. Not quite there yet, I sent wandless Reducio’s at all of the bags I had and stuffed
them into my pockets. Red hair was a bit too flashy for my taste, so I pulled back as much as I could — that was the trouble with shorter hair, wasn’t it? — and tied it together. One of the sets of robes I’d gotten from the secondhand shop last year had a hood, which wasn’t Hogwarts required, but did an excellent job of casting shadows over my more identifiable features.

_Mum would bloody kill me. Percy would have a heart attack. Oh Merlin, and Ron…_

Ron was always very protective. Partially because of the river incident, where I was knocked into a coma for two weeks trying to save him. He always kept an eye on me after that, and got twitchy when I said I’d be going to the brook with Luna (never following, of course, because he was afraid of water.) After the Chamber incident, he became more so.

_Ron would probably try to destroy Knockturn, honestly._

I wasn’t going to lie and say I wasn’t sweating bloody bullets. Knockturn Alley was goddamn shady and I had zero experience in there. And the protectiveness of my family was through the roof recently. It was a bloody _miracle_ Percy went off alone.

_Well, what they don’t know won’t harm them, yes?_

_I’m gonna die. Again. It wasn’t very pleasant the first time. Which is an understatement._

_But the after-effects were quite pleasant._

_Oh, shut up. This sucks. Everything sucks._

Did my nervous babbling habit evolve into talking to myself? God, it got _worse._ But really, I had to do this. As much as it hurt me to have to set aside all the research on Helvynya Prevett and the Dark Arts, it had to be done for some Hogwarts adjustment. I still had things to do in Hogwarts, of course, but that was mostly covered.

Allies — _friends_ — to be able to fall back on if I got too wrapped up in my head; a position in Slytherin that would make sure I was a little comfortable; a good understanding of the sociopolitical situation that dominated the students, though I was woefully underinformed about the professors. Things that might put me and mine in danger were mostly taken care of, and I’d use this year to put Malfoy down and set up some sort of way to protect Luna from cruel little fuckers dressed in Ravenclaw blues and bronzes.

This was all well and good.

_It was time to concentrate on that question:_

_What was taken, so I was given to the Weasley family?_

Because there truly was something different about this world, something much more violent and vicious than what I remembered. The vision-nightmares told me of death beyond those I knew, of scars and wounds harsher than should be there. And the way Tom- the way the diary Horcrux died, I knew for a fact it was quick in the books and movie, and Harry was awake and got off with nothing more than a rounded scar.

_But that’s not what happened. Harry had passed out because the basilisk poison was much stronger and Fawkes had to sob just that much harder, and the magical backlash rendered him unconscious._ (Madam Pomfrey loved ranting about one’s injuries to their faces, which others could easily overhear, to make them _stop getting injured._) And if I wasn’t _blind_, there were odd, discolored veins all down Harry’s wrist last year, peaking out from underneath his robe sleeves. Scars from
the poison itself, not just the fang.

There was something wrong with the damn world, it probably had something to do with why I was given Clairvoyance on top of Mage Sight on top of reincarnation, and Helvynya Prevett was my only clue.

So, yes.

Into Knockturn Alley I go.

... 

It was noticeably cooler in Knockturn. The shadows seemed more menacing, the upkeep of the shops seemed to descend into dust and cracked glass and grime. Moss grew in between the cobblestones, ivy grew up dilapidated street lamps with barely any light to them. Flimsy stalls lined with organic odds and ends sprouted out of nowhere. The crowd was not bright-eyed and laughing, but shuffling and dark colors and hunched shoulders.

Was it odd that I felt strangely comfortable here? Not as in, I would definitely walk into the alleyways and only expect a bit of trash and maybe an employee taking a smoke break — Diagon Alley hid those away with flowery gates and stuff normally, though — but… Well, I didn’t feel afraid, when I thought I would.

A flick of my fingers, barely a mutter, preparation for a headache, and I dismissed my Dī-konden An-drixtā.

Ahhh, this was why. These colors, they were very geared towards the Dark. Very slow, sighing songs and gentle-pulsing colors. Some were inhuman, they moved more erratically, there was a glow to them and a ripple in them that gave them away. Some were wispy and blackened with Madness. Some songs were screaming, some were whispering, and it made a very sinister picture, the shadows of the alleyways glowing with magic.

I fit right in with the black robes and hood, though, which was a bit amusing.

And then I was grabbed, my wrist jerking to the side.

“You!”

I Occluded the instinctive flinch away. And I tilted my head to the side consideringly. “Yes?”

“Magic so beautiful. Lovely lovely lovely.”

What the fuck.

The man was old. Stick-like limbs, the mottled skin stretched over his bones like balloon rubber, teeth jagged and browning. Wild, white hair, dirt and what looked like sewer smeared all over his raggedy clothing. Crazed eyes, blank but also very sharp. A clear sort of blue, pale like the sky through the clouds. I clenched my jaw, recoiling not at the sickening state of the vagabond, but at his colors, at his magical core. It was weeping, and the colors were splintering, writhing like orange maggots.
Instinctively, I drew my indigo in, pulling the crisp edges away; I didn’t want my deep, deep crimson to touch his fragmenting magic. The silver lines were wrapping around my indigo, trying to wrap themselves into a net to keep his magic from fucking molesting mine. God, I was so glad I didn’t have the touch or smell sensation of Soothsaying; it would’ve been slimy, and it would’ve been shit. I could just tell.

“I will fucking end you if your disgusting magic touches mine.” I snapped out impulsively.

(So I was protective of my magic. Wasn’t everyone?)

The man froze. I thought he was dead for a second, the way he froze and his magic began to wilt into some gross mix of brown and black, but then his broken pieces of magic slunk away from mine. Like they were shattering into pieces too small for me to see anymore. It was extremely fucking disturbing. Magic shouldn’t have been like that, all... all sharp and robotic and clunky and broken, like you were looking at a bird with twisted wings or a baby with gnarled faces or something messed up like that.


“Baldwin!”

Both of us turned at the voice. It was another grungy old man, though he wasn’t smeared with excrement and had salt-and-pepper hair riddled with... something. Lice, maybe, but they were too big for that. And there were swirly tattoos all over his exposed, waxy skin. He ran up, pulled the crazed man away from me, and bowed shortly.

“Oh sorry, miss,” the man said — friendly and polite for a vagabond, which was always nice to see — “’E dint mean no ‘arm, miss. Not Baldwin ‘ere.”

I frowned. Well, I was a bit of a bitch, too. Not that it was unwarranted; the day my magic became that glassy and fragile as Baldwin’s would be the day I asked for a core-bind myself. So I shrugged.

“No harm done, I suppose.”

“’E gets li’ this, ’e does. Was a real good wizard ‘fore this, I swear! Best in our Brother’ood! But ’e wanted to force ’imself to be a Soothsayer, eh? Dint do it righ’, Baldwin. Gotta have the power, eh? Dint have ‘nuff, made ’imself a tad spare.”

I was, internally, horrified. What the fuck. This is what happened when you trained yourself to be a Soothsayer badly?? ALBY could’ve been that guy? Fuck, man!

But outwardly, I just nodded. “Right. I’m off, then.”

“G’day to you, miss! Brother’ood’s blessin’s!”

The rest of my journey through Knockturn Alley was punctuated with odd incidents like that.
Things big enough to scare and bruise, but nothing that I couldn’t get out of. It helped, I think, that I knew to stay away from the Madness-tinged magic, from the really frightening-looking inhuman cores; the ones that just didn’t sound right, worse than just twisted wings and gnarled faces. There was okay-ness with the haunting tunes, but magic that shrieked and went brittle was just…

There’s a certain beauty you can see in creepy things, right? There’s a togetherness that works, and maybe you personally don’t like it, but you can see how it might be appreciated? I avoided the clouds of color that didn’t have that, that were shattered beyond repair and stiffened and cracked like stone. When your core was broken, it was worse than not having one. They looked it, too, and I stayed away; I didn’t care to be murdered, thank you very much.

It was slow goings, though, because if you looked to be in a hurry, eyes were watching your every move. That, and Knockturn Alley was all twisty and tricky, so I painstakingly memorized odd landmarks that weren’t viable to change, backtracking over and over, making sure I’d be able to get out. And it took a while to find a place that looked to have books; not shady enough to deter my senses, but shady enough to have the autobiography of a Dark Lord (Lady?) with Clairvoyant powers.

The place I chose was called The Rookery, tall and thin and imposing. Dusty yellow windows filled with books stacked all up and around, dead vines hanging onto mismatching, grey bricks. There were iron bars over the glass and an iron gate on the door, open.

The door had one of those old timey bells, but instead of chiming, it was a high-pitched flute note. Odd.

“Werewolves hate that sound.”

I looked at the… at someone at the counter. They were wearing what looked to be an abaya, those long black dresses that covered everything but the face, making their wearer formless. Only, instead of a face gazing at me, it was just a white mask. There were no eyes, just a smile of rounded, melting teeth. Shit, that was eerie.

But I nodded politely. “Are the iron bars outside to deter Fae, then?”

“Astute, young miss. Indeed. A shame, you see, as I have no problem with the Unseelie. But Seelie often like to spy for the Ministry, and it’s a bit bothersome. Were you looking for something?”

“I was, actually. Sollertia Augurium.”

The figure was silent. Then, quietly, “…My, my. Bit young for such an undertaking, aren’t you?”

I stepped closer to the counter, mindful of the books all stacked in shaky columns and the fact that the shadows in the corner I’d just passed were moving slightly. “I’d rather get it over with while I’m young and healthy than wait until my creaky bones can’t handle it, wouldn’t you?”

“Oh. Young and foolish and reveling in it. Well, then. I will tell you now, young miss, I doubt you would be able to afford Helvynya Prevett’s magnum opus. You seem to be a sprightly little thing. You do not do business in the Dark much, do you?”

Looking down on me, eh? Well, that was vaguely annoying.

“Please don’t misunderstand me. Sollertia Augurium is valuable to me for more than its obvious Dark magic.” I retorted as politely as I could, keeping my voice pleasant.

“Oh? A budding Legilimens, are you? I know you are an Occlumens already.”
Well that was disturbing. Knocking on my shields without my notice. I couldn’t even see his… her? …its eyes.

“Something of the sort.”

The masked figure chuckled. “Well, young miss, I ask you not to misunderstand me, in this case. *Sollertia Augurium* is a rare text in this world, and I would only take it out for its buyer. Judging by the state of your robes… you are not.”

*This fucking-*

Nope. Occlumency. Calm. Do not attack the creepy cryptic shopkeeper in the shady bookstore in possession of a book of knowledge you need. Bad idea, Lyssie. I was sorted into Slytherin for a reason, and losing my cool results in bloody glass and screaming and sister being hurt. Not something I ever want to experience again.

(Besides. As much as I was good at wandless, I couldn’t just make shit up at once. It took practice. And I never used it offensively, not yet. And my physical state was weak; this thing could probably suck my brains out. Or something.)

Deep breath.

I sighed, shaking my head. “Damn. Well then, if that’s all, thank you for the conversation. Good day, and whatnot.”

Well, I tried to keep the annoyance away. If it didn’t work, was that really my fault?

The figure nodded to me, white mask bobbing in the ink-black of its everything else, and that werewolf-prevention bell sang out its note as I walked right back out into the street. What little sky I could see between the looming rooftops was still bright, so I had time to look for another book shop, if I wanted.

But really, I was bumbling around. It was embarrassing. And dangerous, because what if someone really wanted to know who that little shit was, looking for Helvynya Prevett’s work? Maybe I was used to being able to pull contacts out of portraits and gossipy students, information out of allies and enemies, loyalty from friends and family, but floundering around in the Dark was idiotic. And what if I needed to access Knockturn Alley more than just this?

Alby refused to teach me the Dark Arts. Mum and Dad would, too. All I had was my visions, which weren’t that dependable; magic was too fickle to learn about through my wavering Clairvoyance. Electricity, sure. That was constant, and there was no risk of- of dismembered limbs or curse scars or whatever, if one made a mistake there.

But magic that called to my core — Dark magic, which I would instinctively be better equipped to handle — I could only get that here. Helvynya Prevett’s *Sollertia Augurium*, which might have answers to why I was given such abilities and put into this world; it would be here. The Dark was my core-allegiance, where I would find answers, and how I would get strong enough to match a Dark Lord bent on murdering my brothers. Goddammit, I wanted to at least accomplish one thing this summer, (fucking house arrest really fucked me over) and if anything, it should be accessing *Sollertia Augurium*!

Well. This was why I had friends, wasn’t it?
You idiot. You went into Knockturn Alley alone? You have a death wish, don’t you? I know you do. It was obvious. My best friend is suicidal. Dear Merlin, what did I do to deserve this?

I’ll also have you know that my family is mostly Grey, and foreign. I cannot help with the Alley, I have never been to Knockturn. I would write Julius or Lucas — their families are notoriously Dark. Harper is also Grey, though I have suspicions that he is Grey-Light, if anything. The boy is too happy to be anything else.

The figure you described is possibly a cambion. Half-demon, one of the old ones that made deals for souls and such. They’re extremely illegal now, but their children still walk around sometimes. I had thought they were exiled from Britain, though. Your Ministry does not like Dark those kinds of sentients. Especially this one you wrote of, it sounds like they follow the old tradition.

In societies where they are allowed, their tradition is no longer legal. The cambion are born with distinguishing demonic features, depending on the parent. Tradition dictates they wear masks and cloaks to hide themselves in the day, and uncover only when they are about to hunt. It is so no one can tie their kills back to them. Not very useful, when there are so few of them; they cannot hide within a crowd that is not there.

I can’t believe the first time you step foot into Knockturn Alley — which even we in Germany have heard of, you idiot, that is how dangerous it is! — you come across the Brotherhood of Mirrors and a cambion. Only you, Lys.

You want to purchase something from the cambion? You can either use currency, which you are lacking, or you can try to appeal to the demon side. But for that, you must discover what the cambion wants. Demons are different, and their children more so. Some desire souls, some blood, some secrets, etc. It is a Legilimens of some sort, yes? That is mind magic, intruding magic, I would think it would desire a secret from you. A memory, perhaps.


In fact, don’t do anything. I am going to ask my parents if I might not visit in Diagon Alley for a while. And then we’ll talk about this. I cannot believe I had to write you fourteen letters disparaging your guilty conscious before you wrote back — a summer’s worth of letters, Lys! — and then the next thing I see after your apology is a bloody letter detailing your desire to bargain with a demon. Besides your description, everything was very vague.

What are you purchasing? Why? Do your parents know? No, of course not. Whatever. We will be having words, Lys. I demand to know what is going on.
Oh, I could feel the irritation leaking from the paper. (Even if that last bit made me smile at the very Hufflepuff loyalty he had for me.) The only thing Dietrich could’ve done to make it better was to send a Howler, which he’s much too dignified to do.

I received similar letters from Lu and Jay, and Harper’s was just full of questions and worry. I mean, all of the letters were worried, but besides Harper, all of them had the same incredulous irritation with underlying panic. It was kind of funny, actually.

Back to topic, though: I didn’t know cambions were a thing. I mean, I knew of them, as a general thing, but in the Harry Potter universe? Stupid Ministry-approved textbooks. This was why I wanted to go into Knockturn Alley, so I learned real information without it going through a Light filter. Seriously, I studied everything about Knockturn I could, but I was still surprised. And Mum and Dad would ask questions if I asked them, so that was out.

I laughed, though. Dietrich had been forced to send me fourteen letters with only one message on them (“FOR FUCKS SAKE LYS, IT WASN’T YOUR FAULT, GET OVER IT, ARE YOU A SLYTHERIN OR NOT?” was the gist) which I was sure was a joint effort between all of the boys, not just Dietrich. Dietrich didn’t have a potty-mouth (in English), that was all Lu. But he was probably frustrated with my apologies and ‘Are you okay?’s and ‘If you’d rather not be friends, I understand.’s and such. Really, though, I almost got him killed, I felt very justified.

Of course, leave it to the Fake French fuck to sneer and call me a stupid, noble Gryffie… Wait. That might’ve been Lu, too.

They all wrote each other and mixed news together, and I’d heard of a lot of meetings between Lu and Jay because they were Dark purebloods and Death Eater families, and their parents knew each other, so their visitations were acceptable. Dietrich was at home in Germany, of course, so Flooing was expensive and troublesome, and Harper’s family — he was a branch of the main — was a bit of a joke, so no one big in the pureblood circles liked to associate with them. The best he got were the Carrows, and that family was unusually sadistic, so Harper didn’t really like them.

But yes, in between studying my arse off with more wandless spells (to not die in Knockturn, that was a fantastic motivator) and playing with Luna in the forest (because I’d neglected her so badly over the year, and even if she understood and had a much less miserable year than she would’ve, I still felt guilty over it) and hanging about my brothers (overprotective prats they were), I was writing to my boys. The demon twins liked to tease because I seemed to have built myself a bunch of big brothers in Slytherin to replace my Gryffindors ones, but whatever.

Speaking of the demon twins.

“More letters from your firsties?” George asked.

I looked up. Sitting in the windowsill was relaxing. Reminded me of my first life, and afternoons
on the rooftops. Flying was nausea-inducing, because I just didn’t have the balance or the stamina to be confident I wouldn’t fall, but it wasn’t that I was afraid of heights. I don’t think.

George flopped down on the bed. I raised a brow at him messing up my nest of pillows.

“Where’s Fred?” I asked, “Are you trying to convince someone that there was only one of you all along again?”

Fantastic prank. When they were younger, they almost got Charlie; our big brother was so close to really believing that he made up George in his head and that there was only Fred this whole time. Mum spoiled it, but we still made fun of Charlie for almost being gotten by that one.

George laughed. “Right in one. We’re trying it on Ron this time.”

“Did you bribe Ginny properly?”

“She’s out with Mum. We bribed Percy with books. Sweet, lovely books.”

I rolled my eyes. “You took those from my collection. Don’t think I didn’t see you this morning, George. I want those back, I nicked all of them from the idiots in my House.”

“Oh? Has Lyssiekins become a little thief?”

“Not so. Dietrich and I are friends with the House Elves, we asked them to bring us any vaguely educational books that people’ve lost and not claimed last year, and voila!”

It had been Dietrich’s idea, since we ate so often in the kitchens. He took all the Dark stuff, though, since I didn’t want to be caught. We traded them back and forth when we needed to, using his owl, since Errol was just about dead. My poor family owl.

George grinned deviously. “Ohhhh. So that’s why I found a book called Romancing the Dungeon Ghoul: Chains and Blindfolds.”

I choked. “WHAT?” That was bloody horrifying. “Is- Is that what it sounds like?”

My brother grinned. “Me and Fred were busting our guts when we saw it, didn’t you hear us?”

Now that I thought of it, I remembered ridiculous laughter earlier today, right before lunch. Ginny and I had shrugged at each other; when the twins were laughing like that, you stayed out of the line of fire. Period.

I cracked a grin. “Tell me that’s in the pile you bribed Percy with.”

George scoffed. “What do you take us for, Lyssie? Amateurs? Of course it is!”

I snorted. Then I frowned, thinking too deeply. “You… you don’t think he’ll… actually… read it, do you?”

George blinked at me very slowly.

“I do not ever,” he said, “ever want to think about that. Ever again.”

I nodded, feeling my face pale. It was… It was one thing to talk to percy about, you know, his Penelope problems. Or whatever. But thinking about…

Nope. Absolutely not. I was not going to ruin my image of my favorite brother with this. No way.
“I’ll get to learning a wandless Obliviate.” I said dutifully.

George was almost turning green. “Dear Merlin, I’ll never be able to look at Prefect Percy again.”

Nope, nope, nope. Eroticas were a topic never being brought up again. Especially in the same thoughts as my family. Gross. Fuck, that’s so gross. I turned to George.

“Putting that topic away for forever, what’s going on? You don’t come in here for the hell of it, you know.” Somewhat true. Everyone was very used to going in and out of my and Ginny’s room, since I usually slept better — aka, didn’t have nightmarish visions — with someone there. “Did you need something, George? Do I have some sort of secret of the universe you desire?”

My brother perked up, taking the chance to lighten up the conversation immediately. “The location of the Slytherin common rooms?”

“Over my dead body.” I said cheerfully.

George sighed theatrically. “Why, oh why, don’t you love me, little sister? O twin of my twin’s sister? O basilisk slayer, Soothsayer, Seer, wandless wonder witch?”

“My dear brother, twin who is not my twin, I don’t know what you mean.”

He grinned at me as I went back to reading letters. “You alright in Slytherin, then, Lyssie? You’re getting letters from boys. Snakes, sure, but still: boys.”

I looked up to see George, still flopped about on my bed, waggling his eyebrows at me. Cue another eye-roll. “I’m doing fine. Me and Malfoy’ll be fighting for the parvus potesta next year, since he only retained his position by the grace of his father. And nothing was concluded from the Chamber incident. Slytherins will be much nicer to me, I guarantee you. And I’ve got my firsties; they’ll watch my back. I’m doing fine in Slytherin.”

“Hm. Just wanted to make sure. Little Lyssiekins, all grown up.”

“Is this the part where you expound about how you held me when I was a baby?”

“Nah, I’m good. Though I did do that. You wouldn’t stop trying to poke out my eye, little brat.”

George was already rolling off the bed, starting to leave the room. He’d only come in here to make sure I was alright, I suppose. In his own way. That, and boredom.

“That was Fred.” I corrected nonchalantly, skimming letters as he ruffled my hair in the passing, leaving me to my work.

Work. Ergh. If I thought it’d be a right long time before I had to work again before (my first life’s job… my god, what an adventure that place was… retail, I’m telling you), I was proven wrong now. Not that it wasn’t worth it, of course. I don’t think I’d be able to handle it, losing one of me and mine’s colors in the world.

“Finite,” I said quietly, cancelling the Dī-konden An-drixtā.

George’s deep violet and plum colors were trailing, very lightly, out of the room. Outside of the room, the trail was wispy and fading, but I could hear his playful, gentle core-song, muffled. Above me, in Percy’s room, was his own hum, more peaceful and more finicky, the sky blue leaking through the floorboards and raining down into Ginny and my room, saturated with our own colors. Outside, if I concentrated, I could see the faintest outlines in the woods, obscured as they
were by distance and old wards. Ron and Fred were together, burgundy-lilac and sunset-orange. I was missing my twin’s maroon, my mother’s candy-red, my father’s royal blue. And I’d been missing Bill’s grey-blue and indigo, and Charlie’s jungle green, for a while now.

Yeah. These were the colors I’d want around for the rest of my life. Maybe a few more, steel-blues and teals and corals and a moss green that I’d gotten used to, maybe some peacock-like colors and a certain spring green and a lavender-teal that lived across the woods.

I’d like to do without that sickly yellow — Fucking Pettigrew — though. Ah, well. It was only a year.
Chapter 19

Chapter Summary

Yikes, I almost forgot to update. Ughhh. Not gonna lie, I don't really like this chapter. It's... preparation for later, yes, but it's pretty much filler. I drag out the summer in this arc. But this arc does get fun, I promise. Later. :) 

As always, thanks for reading/commenting! Hope the world-building's at least interesting to those who don't care much for that in fanfic. :D

... 

“I’m going to kill you for this, Lys.”

Proving Dietrich wrong about my lack of self-preservation (my, how un-Slytherin!), I ducked behind Harper. The boy was only two inches taller — though his head of silky curls gave him a bit more height, in a very fluffy sort of way — but he just had one of those innocent faces that you just couldn’t attack without feeling bad. We must’ve made quite an odd scene, scrambling around Harper near some quieter corner of Diagon Alley.

Harper flailed as I clung to his robes like a limpet. “Lys! Get off! Dietrich’s gonna kill me!”

“No one would kill you, Harper, you’re too adorable.” I countered, peeking out over his narrow shoulders and resisting Harper’s half-hearted attempts to shrug me off.

Dietrich sighed out his irritation, then rolled his eyes. “Fine. Stop causing a scene. We are going to… What is it? Fortescue’s? I will scold you later, when you cannot hide behind Harper.”

Well, that wasn’t menacing at all.

Harper brightened at the same time as I let him go. “Florean Fortescue’s, Dietrich, it’s the best ice cream parlor in Britain! You’d like it!” said our friend happily, starting to dig around in his robe pockets for money.

I smiled. “I am sorry that I keep worrying the hell out of you, you know.”

“Bah. It is...” Dietrich fumbled for the words, stepping in beside me as Harper led the way cheerfully. “…in your nature. You like playing with risks. For noble reasons, I suppose, but it is still giving the rest of us heart-attacks.”

Harper slowed down to join us, taking my left flank as Dietrich was walking on my right. “Mm, you should be careful in Knockturn, Lyssie,” said Harper, “Maybe it’s because your parents never took you inside and taught you about it right, but there are a lot of nonhuman neighborhoods that
aren’t sectioned off well. Like… It’s like… Reserves, I suppose.”

I frowned — reserves sort of made all sentient magical nonhumans animal-like, aka subservient or whatever, which was a dangerous line of thought — but nodded. “I thought they, er, the neighborhoods were blocked off? Guarded and such?”

Harper laughed. “Of course not! Knockturn Alley is in such a horrid state, it’s like a bunch of death traps all lined up. Humans can wander in certain places, but otherwise, they’ll get eaten or something. The Ministry says they’ll punish other races for killing humans, but they won’t, not really.”

Dietrich scowled. “Half of your magical center is lawless? Dumme Briten.”

“Wha- That was German! I thought you were French!”

“I’m going to curse you slowly, Harper.” Dietrich growled.

I laughed and we crossed the sunny Alley and reached Fortescue’s. There was a queue already, which we stood in to wait. The place was as magical as always, and I’d already cast my Di-konden An-drixàtâ a while back. There were people running all over the place, children playing, Hogwarts students grouped together. Hot and brilliant and magical.

In an ice cream line, it wouldn’t do to draw suspicion with talk of Knockturn Alley and demons. So… “Seriously, though, who are the Brotherhood of Mirrors?” I asked.

Dietrich raised his brows. “You do not know?”

Harper ordered for all of us, and we handed him coins as he glanced back. “They’re not very big in Britain, Dietrich. Erm… I think they’re only in Knockturn Alley now, because they’re famously Grey. Not a lot of Grey out in Diagon, yeah?”

Plain chocolate for me, butterbeer-vanilla for Harper, and something peanutbuttery for Dietrich. We took our cones and started to walk around, trying to make it difficult for anyone to catch too much of our conversation. I had a feeling someone would object to three second-years whispering about the Dark Arts and Knockturn Alley this intelligently.

Dietrich started to explain. “They’re a religious sect. Worship the oneness of the world, connected through magic, I believe. I do not know their exact principles — the religion is found more in Asia and Asia minor — but the Brotherhood pursue something called the Will of Magic, which apparently leads them to destitution.”

“How?” I asked, intensely curious. I didn’t know there were religions in the magical world.

“They treat everything as magic. Nothing belongs to them, all things can do is leave impressions upon them before they pass, as the Will of Magic dictates.” Harper chimed in matter-of-factly.

Dietrich and I stared at him.

He shrugged, looking more interested in his ice cream than anything. “My mother is an Egyptian merchant. She deals with Turkey and India a lot, and there are lots of Brotherhood in those places. They’re very nice people.”

I blinked. “Harper, why do I have this funny feeling you’re secretly a genius?”

Harper blinked innocently back. “What do you mean?”
I snorted. “You are. You definitely are. It’s so secret, not even you realize it. You’ve got the Avalonian Mandates or something memorized to the line, don’t you?”

Harper responded — unconsciously — by starting to fidget in place, still looking around at the Alley. It was the ADHD, I think; it was hard to remember at school, because we had a very nice schedule in place for Harper, but I saw it now. He was trying hard to talk to us, but he’d start getting caught up in looking around or eating or he’d just get distracted. Just like before, when we didn’t have a nice routine guided by classes and Lu’s obsession with being outside (for Quidditch).

“Well, back to topic, then. How do I ensnare a cambion?” I asked jokingly.

Both of them winced.

Dietrich muttered, “One does not ensnare a cambion. They are half-demons, you do not want them about you.” Then he frowned, and his voice rose a little bit. “Why did you go alone? Into Knockturn? Are you trying to get killed? Vous attirez le danger tout comme les fleurs attirent les abeilles! What do you want from the cambion? How did you even find it? You must’ve gone very far in!”

I shrunk a little. Here was the lecture. Dietrich was just reminded of how much I annoyed him with my lack of forethought. Whoops.

“There are worse things than a basilisk, Lys!” Dietrich went on furiously, “The cambion, do you even know what type it is? Pourquoi mon meilleur ami est-il si fou? Natural Legilimenses can make people go insane if they try hard enough, never mind half of their blood being demonic! And the Brotherhood, a failed Soothsayer, too? Mon Dieu, Lys!”

It was too late to hide behind Harper, wasn’t it?

Harper gave me a pitying look. Dietrich was his main tutor, so he was subject to these rants, too. Little bits of French interjected meant a lot of emotion. Usually irritation, for this one. Dietrich’s smile was his resting face, and his scowl was everything else.

Reminded me of my mother. Had to get everything off her chest in one go, after building it up.

That was a little funny. Dietrich and I were similar in that regard. I liked to think I had Dad’s temper, which meant my capacity for emotion was a bit bigger. Took me a little bit to really start reacting emotionally, which was good for now, but might be troublesome later. Like with the bloody basilisk, I really had to talk myself into that one.

(Hah. Maybe it was good I was concussed afterwards, that’s all I remembered. The abject terror was a little dulled after an experience like watching a friend die and hating yourself for not even being able to say goodbye properly. Stupid Tom shouldn’t have concussed me, the bloody bastard.)

Harper grinned a little, cutting into Dietrich’s tirade with practiced ease, “We both know you were just worried, Dietrich. I’m sure Lyssie had a good reason for going into Knockturn Alley! Have a little faith, yeah?”

Dietrich blinked, looking a little surprised at himself; he regained his composure admirably quickly, and nodded to me. There was a bit of guilt in his frown. “Ah… Apologies, Lys. I should be listening to you, too.”

I shrugged. Why wouldn’t I forgive Dietrich for being that worried about me? “Mother bears in rage, I’m used to those. Just sit tight and wait it out, yeah? You should meet my mum, you can swap intimidation tactics.”
“I am not sure if I like the comparison.”

Harper laughed. “I like it! You’re very mum-like, Dietrich.”

“I do not like the comparison at all, now.” Dietrich said flatly.

I grinned at him. “Too late.” I shook my head. Gotta stop distracting myself. “I guess I deserve that. The, er, lecture, I mean. I just… You both know I’m a Soothsayer, yeah? My core’s naturally Dark, you know? First in my family, but it’s been warped a lot with how surrounded by Light I am. I just want to… I want the Dark Arts, I want to learn it so well that I can keep it all away from me and mine if I have to.”

They were quiet.

Then Dietrich snorted. “Nobility, as I said.”

I rolled my eyes. “Whatever. Any more questions?”

“You really want to talk to this cambion, Lys?” Harper asked, blue eyes rounded in concern.

Unable to resist, I ruffled his dark curls. Fluffy-headed boy, he was a gift to humanity, really. “The cambion had a bell to ward off werewolves and iron bars on the windows. They didn’t want any Ministry, they were deep in Knockturn, but they didn’t attack. They’ve got true history in there. Not just… propaganda, or whatever, but actual…”

There was a very obvious tone of wistfulness in my voice. And why wouldn’t there be? The Dark Arts were evil. Dark magic simply required stronger, usually negative emotions. Was it evil, to feel so much sadness that you cast an Imperio to keep someone from killing themselves? Was it evil, to feel so angry, that you cast a Bloodboiling Hex on someone trying to kill your family? It was too situational for black-and-white mentality like that.

And my very core called for that sort of magic. Magic that depended on feeling so strongly, that you did something about it. On piling up enough emotion inside you that you burst. As long as I controlled when and where and what, there was nothing wrong with that. Dark magic required that, a more precise control in your actions, and that was it.

Whatever. I was drawn to the Dark Arts, I wanted answers, I wanted to use them to know how to protect my family, whatever. There were too many reasons to name, to justify what I was doing. Because, you know, such was the world that I was conditioned into feeling guilty for being a naturally Dark-cored witch.

Harper was smiling softly at me when I snapped out of my funk.

“Harper?” I asked.

He grinned. “You should’ve been a Ravenclaw!”

“What?”

“Chasing after knowledge.” Dietrich explained, crossing his arms, looking very resigned.

“Well, I mean, I suppose? I like Slytherin, though.”

“I’m glad you’re in Slytherin! Would’ve been right boring without you, Lyssie.” Harper laughed.

I grinned at both of them. “Right? So, then, cambion? Any ideas?”
Dietrich sighed. “Ah. Let’s get to work. You want to go into Knockturn and catch a cambion, we’ll make sure you are ready for it. I think my estate’s library will have some books on the Mind Arts we can cross-reference with a blood abilities text of some sort…”

—

...—

-easiest to make a deal with a natural Legilimens through candor, which you have an abundance of — how you are a Slytherin is sometimes questionable, in this way — so with demons’ tendency to know when someone is lying, that is the route you will want to take.

I suppose politeness is also called for. But not weakness. Be respectful, because demons — and I assume cambion — are proud creatures, but humans that are submissive are prey. No full name, obviously. Possibly will want to feed on a secret or a memory, though I am unsure if it will be completely taken from you or simply shared. Cambion are fickle like that.

Good luck, Lys. Be safe.

Dietrich Bastion

P.S. I am sorry I lectured you. I should also learn to trust you, after the amount of trust you have put in me. I will try, though you are a very troublesome leader and friend.

—

Glancing at the bottom half of Dietrich’s last letter, I took a fortifying breath. Dietrich, Harper, and I had done quite a bit of brainstorming and research on cambion and natural Mind Arts (which Helvynya Prevett popped up in again, as she was a rare, natural Occlumens) and we thought we had a good way to deal with the cambion. Dietrich wished he could be with me when I went, but international travel was a pain in the ass to get paperwork done for, so he refrained. Harper had to go to Egypt to visit his grandparents. And Lu and Jay, who I hadn’t seen but were in on this, were… well, they were Death Eater families, and I was a bloodtraitor.

Just me and my Gryffindor-blood and Slytherin-mind.

Which was fine. Harry and Ron and Hermione faced down crazier shit than this. No one’d be writing stories about the twelve-year-old who bought a book.

The singing bell rang out again as I opened the door. The inside of The Rookery was dusty and
badly lit and interesting as it was before, and the figure behind the ancient — but lovely — cash register looked up. I did notice, this time, that the black robes were a bit fluttery, as if they were under water; which reminded me of dementors, which was not good.

The white mask was still grinning.

“Ah. So the young and foolish reveler returns. Welcome, human.”

I suppose that was fair. I mean, under my hooded robes, I didn’t hide much. Just my face and my hair, which was tied back.

Politely, I nodded. “Hello, again.”

Shit, I only just noticed, this fucker didn’t have any colors. Which was impossible, I didn’t cast a Di-konden An-drixat at all today, I used it to navigate the Alley. But there was nothing. How? How did it pull its magic so far into itself that a Soothsayer couldn’t see?

Suddenly on edge, I gathered my indigo and silver and crimson closer, wrapping it around my body in layers.

The cambion chuckled. “Such control, for so young a human.”

My eyes darted from its lack of aura to mine. I let mine disperse, unwrapping it from itself; all I was doing was making myself a beacon, not hiding. Funnily enough, I’d never even thought about how to hide my magical aura. I mean, I didn’t think anyone but a Soothsayer would be able to tell, unless I was spell-casting or something…

“I… never thought about hiding my magical aura like you do. Is it possible for humans to learn?” I asked, very interested.

The cambion cocked its head to one side, mask tilting. “It is. But it is a practice you humans do not bother with anymore. Once, your people hid yourselves in order to prevent mine from hunting you. The book is on the second shelf of the third row’s fourth cabinet, towards the middle. The Magick of Man-Hunters.”

Well, then.

I gave a crooked smile, after aborting a step towards that very area. “I wouldn’t be able to afford it, would I?”

The cambion hummed. Affirmation, then. Dammit. “Will you be leaving again, young reveler?” asked the cambion, voice as staid and steady as it always was. (And clear, too, despite the mask.)

Straightening, I approached on soft footsteps. “Ah, actually… I was hoping to substitute Galleons with something else.”

A spark. It was too quick for me to make out, but there was a flash of color. The cambion’s magic wasn’t simply hidden away, it was somehow rendered invisible to my senses. Fuck, I wanted that book so badly. But two books meant two secrets, or memories, or whatever the cambion wanted from me that would satisfy its demonic blood.

But it was certainly interested now.

“I hope you realize, dear reveler,” the cambion said silkily, “that to give aid to an exile of your Ministry is punishable with Azkaban. Perhaps you would be able to get away with it, given its
recent breakout, but… well, those of demonic descent are not looked on favorably.”

I smiled, only putting a bit of sharpness into the expression. Dietrich and Harper warned me about it: interaction with the cambion was bordering on illegal, therefore actual equivalent exchange would definitely be Azkaban-worthy. As if I cared. As if the cambion would care. Dietrich and Harper nodded when I said as much; we were Slytherins, after all. Rules were guidelines and suggestions and obstacles, nothing more.

“What’s your price, cambion? I would know the terms first, before the bargain.”

The cambion chuckled again. Then it stepped from behind the counter — its footsteps were as smooth as gliding — and motioned for me to follow. “Not here, reveler. For all my precautions, there are always Ministry dogs watching. Come.”

I hesitated. “I don’t mean to be rude, but you aren’t going to murder me in your cellar, are you?”

Another laugh. “Oh, no, reveler. If I were of that sort of bloodline, I would not be manning a book shop. On my blood and honor, you will not be preyed upon.”

With that promise — though it was conspicuous that the cambion didn’t say that I wouldn’t be harmed — I followed. It led me to a backroom rather than a cellar, an archway all that separated it from the tall shelves of the store. It was dingy and cramped with Victorian furniture, the walls lined with shelves rather than paneling.

“Tell me, reveler, for I am curious. What do you expect to give?” The cambion sat on a dingy couch gracefully.

I sat across from it. “A secret. A memory. Maybe a name. That’s… I figured, with you being a natural Legilimens, it would be a sacrifice of the mind and intellect.” Well, Dietrich and Harper figured, but they explained to me and I agreed with them.

The cambion nodded. “Astute. Very much so. Very well, then… What would you like, that I can offer to you?”

“Sollertia Augurium.” I replied immediately. Then, quieter, “The Magick of Man-Hunters, as well, though that one isn’t quite as important as Helvynya Prevett’s work.”

“Hm. You are determined to read the Mind Eater’s work, aren’t you?”

Good god, that was a telling nickname. Who on earth was my ancestor?

I nodded. “What would you like in exchange?”

The cambion’s aura flickered again. Too quick to tell, again. “Memories and blood.”

Shit.

“To be consumed or to be shared?” I asked, trying to work out how to get out of the blood-thing.

“Shared, is all I ask. The blood will augment that.”

“Blood exchange is dangerous.”

“I ask for it only because you are a Seer. Of what sort, I’ll not pry, but Seer-witch blood is potent and powerful. If it sets you at ease, reveler, I am not interested in using it for anything but sustenance.”
That… could possibly be okay. Blood was dangerous — very, very, very dangerous — to give out and leave around everywhere, but only because of the magic that could be tied in with it. But consumption was fine; people donated blood to vampires… not all the time, but they did. And there was no worry, because their faces and names were anonymous and the vampires drank it.

Consumption was safe. It would cancel out any individuality within the blood, so no one could track or control me.

“You’re not going to… vomit up the blood and then use it to bind me to your will or anything, are you?”

“That would be a gross waste of what is considered to be a delicacy, reveler.”

“How much of each for *Sollertia Augurium*?”

The cambion leaned forward slightly. Excited, I reckon. “Three memories of fear, three memories of pain, and a teacup’s worth of blood. The Mind Eater’s *magnum opus* is rare, and my edition is rarer still, for being written in English rather than Italian.”

I fought with myself for a while. The memories were a little… well, anything I gave the cambion would be dangerous. If they were *my* personal memories, it would know more about me. If they were memories of visions, it would know what sort of Seer I was. The blood wasn’t an issue, since the cambion seemed honest enough, and blood isn’t a rare meal for Dark creatures.

It already knew I was a Seer. And, really, if it didn’t connect that I wanted *Sollertia Augurium* — a book written by a Clairvoyant — to my Seer ability, well… I had doubts. The cambion sounded old and intelligent, so keeping as much attention off of *me* and more on an easy-to-interpret fact would be better.

“I accept the terms.” I stated quietly.

“Ah. Lower your Occlumency barriers, reveler, and bring up your memories.”

My eyes slipped closed.

*Hello, reveler.*

... 

The grass under me was soft, but it still itched through my T-shirt. Despite the shade of the tree I was laid out under, *Sollertia Augurium* was resting, open-paged on my face. My eyes were closed, but the words were dancing across my eyelids.

“Goddammitttt.” I groaned, for probably the twentieth time this hour.

Fucking Middle English.

I mean, I should’ve expected it. Helvynya Prevett lived in the 1400’s or so, that’s before *Shakespeare*. Which is already a pain in the ass to understand, but then going back another evolutionary step in English, it’s almost a different fucking language. Fucking. Middle. English. I kept having horrifying flashbacks to college and studying *The Canterbury Tales* in every fucking
class. The only saving grace was that Helvynya Prevett’s odd writing style, for her time. Sometimes, I’d be able to read pages of her personal diary — which was focused on her rather lackluster childhood — without slowly feeling my eyeballs burn.

Still, though. A week into the translation, and I wanted to smash my head against a wall. I might’ve been an English major once upon a time, but my specialty didn’t lie in fucking Middle English.

On the plus side, when I got too irritated, the cambion had given me *The Magick of Man-Hunters* as a bonus. Seer blood was just that delicious, apparently; the cambion wanted to encourage me to return and strike more bargains, I think. Which I might, after I deciphered with this fucking monster of a book. Fucking Middle English.

A new, familiar song joined the quiet, barely-there whisper of mine. If I opened my eyes, I’d probably see the gentle silver-blues and lavenders joining the deep indigo and black-crimson of my own colors.

I smiled underneath *Sollertia Augurium*. “Hello, Luna.”

“There are wrackspurts all over you today, Guinevere.” she said mildly. I felt the earth when she sat down next to me.

“I’m thinking very negative thoughts because of this book.”

“It’s a rather Dark book, yes. I’m sure the Umgubular Slashkilters would like to read it.”

“This was a pretty pricey book. I paid for it in memories and blood, I don’t want to share it with the Umgubular Slashkilters.”

Luna let out a silvery chuckle, which sounded very much like her magic’s song with its whisper-like, but honest quality. “Maybe that’s best. They’ve got Loser’s Lurgy, you know. Minister Fudge has one, you know. He sends it out to infect his political opponents.”

“I see he hasn’t quite gotten Alby.”

“The White Bee isn’t his opponent yet. The Minister’s infected, too, only he’s the Minister so everyone ignores it. Say, Guinevere, isn’t that bad for your book? You shouldn’t treat it roughly. You were much nicer to the book last summer.”

I blinked my eyes open, looking at too-close pages that stank of Dark magic and age.

“Because they were weak? — “No, because I was.” — black ink, pale hands, grey stone, red blood — scales like chips of jade and obsidian, laced together on a great beast of a creature. Don’t look at its eyes, don’t look at its eyes — red crown on its head, mocking the symbol that would be its death — he knows that monster is of his blood, stolen from his nest, so it is his voice that kills the basilisk. There is no loyalty to kin when they are — monster, brother-killer!

Stop.

“Don’t hurt her, don’t hurt her!” — “Devil’s child! Monster!” — curled around the snake, protecting its writhing form with his too-thin ribs — grooves between them, buttons of his spine, hunger in his belly — crimson and black, curling around indigo desperately. Don’t hurt her, he thought, don’t — “I wish you had been born in 1926.” — She would have coaxed the laugh out of him.

Stop.
I sighed. My Clairvoyance was quite tied to my negative emotions. This was why Occlumency was important; I had accidentally trained my Clairvoyance to be stronger with my distress, because that’s how I’d react to it for so long. I had to wean it from that, now. I had to try to train it back into ambivalence, if I could. Difficult, but possible, since my core hadn’t matured quite yet.

Helvynya’s work started with that notion, actually. That Clairvoyance took on aspects of accidental magic, in that it was inherently tied to emotion and childish perception. She described her own childhood, mired with visions, which were also tied to her distress. I’d like to know more, but I had to translate the damn thing.

“I’m sorry, Guinevere.”

I startled at Luna’s voice. “What for?”

Sollertia Augurium was slid off my face, and I tucked it into my side protectively and I turned to look at Luna. She was still beside me, but she didn’t lie down; she was hugging her knees, chin resting on her arms. Her colors were gentle and airy, floating around her playfully.

There was a touch of wistfulness in her voice. “You’re very, very infested with wrackspurts.”

My lips twitched upwards, crookedly tugging a smile onto my face. “That’s why I’ve got you, isn’t it? How do I get rid of them?”

Luna’s smile slowly came on. “You ought to put your book away and come fish for gulping plimpies with me, I think.” She paused, studying me, and then nodded decisively. “Yes, that will help you, Guinevere.”

“I would like nothing better.” I said with a grin.

I rolled over and up, dusting off my jeans and pulling Luna to her feet. We headed down the dirt road, and she took my hand in hers when we crossed it. I gave her an odd look.

“Are you babysitting me?” I asked, amused.

“Have to hold hands when you cross a road, of course.” Luna said breezily, “Otherwise fairiefiddles like you and I will be abducted. As much as I like moon frogs, I think we ought to stay here for a while. Your swarm still needs you. It’s not complete, yet, either.”

“And here I was thinking it might be because we’d be in danger of being run over.” I murmured.

Luna squinted at me. “Why would that be a danger? You’ll magic the Muggle-thing away. You’re the queen.”

I believe that was a compliment on my abilities with wandless magic and my position in Slytherin. Or maybe not even a compliment, but a statement of fact that I was doing well in both areas. Luna never did things like flattery or comfort; she stated facts of truth, of her own special brand, but truth nonetheless.

In the woods, we felt much more at home. The trees were tall, but spread out enough that it would be really dumb to get lost. And the canopy didn’t grow so thickly entangled that it was dark, but it was shady and there were splottes of yellow and shade all over us as we trotted through the undergrowth. The river here was shallow and soft and slow — not at all what it would be in a mile or so, as Ron could testify to — and Luna and I waded in without fear, starting to dig into the silt.

At one point, I splattered mud all over her, and she retaliated in kind with that innocent, wide-eyed
look that both she and Harper had down to an *art,* and it would’ve been demeaning of my ability to withstand puppy-looks if I didn’t respond in kind. When we were thoroughly caked in mud and dirt and grey sand, we both walked along the river to a deeper part to wash off. We took the time to polish up our wands and I showed her a bit of wandless, and then we sat with her feet in the water and nothing but our underthings on, everything else drying in the sun.

Silvery glints in the water told me finger-sized fish were darting between our legs, so Luna and I both went very still so we didn’t scare them. All the while, Luna chatted about her creatures and good things and I forgot how irritated I was.

“Hm, the wrackspurts are gone.” Luna remarked suddenly, cutting into her explanation of Heliopatric powers.

I blinked. I looked at *Sollertia Augurium,* which was safely sitting away from the water, and under a few wandless protection spells. It didn’t look nearly as menacing.

“Hm, yeah. I guess I needed a break.”

Luna smiled wanly. “You’re very sickly, Guinevere. The nargles and the wrackspurts love you.”

I was sickly in a lot of ways. Even the bit of river play made me tired. But I suppose, yes, I was prone to a lot of danger and annoyances. Which was why I surrounded myself with people I trusted and hoped they’d be able to combat that stuff, while I faced the threats lingering on the horizon. When Voldemort rose, which would be next summer or thereabouts—

Flick.

“Ow!”

I rubbed my ear, frowning at Luna with a mockingly hurt expression.

Luna blinked at me. “Wrackspurts. I could almost see them without the Spectrespecs.”

My friend, who preferred drifting about alone but always welcomed what little attention I could give her. So very disarming to everyone, unlodging you from your comforts and normality because she just didn’t see things the same way. But whenever I needed her — or maybe not even her, just something to save me from being bogged down by visions and pressure and work, work, work — Luna was a lovely way to get away and breathe. Just like Harry, provided there wasn’t an arguing Ron and Hermione there to watch.

“You’re very busy with lots of things.” Luna said thoughtfully. “And you always have a reason, but it’s not good to forget about the nargles nipping at your heels. The book last summer was good for you, for a little bit, but this one isn’t nearly as nice.”

*You’re focusing too much on Sollertia Augurium, Guinevere,* I heard as clear as day in Luna’s soprano voice. Luna would be the absolute last person to judge me for enjoying the Dark Arts, not batting an eye at Dark creatures, but that didn’t mean she wasn’t aware of the dangers the Dark presented. And a full week of me simply studying a single Dark text like this, with breaks into another, other Dark text… well, it didn’t set a good precedent for my forage into the Dark Arts.

I smiled a little. “Well, good things I’ve got you. Watch out for me, Luna?”

Luna nodded faintly. “If you want, queenbee. But it’s easy for me to see if you’re alright. We’re both fairiefiddles, though I’m more of a distant cousin, you know. I know if you’re lost. Your swarm needs more help.”
“Ah, yeah. I’ll be a bit more open with my Slytherins. Dietrich’ll scold me if I’m not.”

“Secrets are sharp, you know, Guinevere.”

“Mm, I learned that the hard way. Don’t worry, Luna. I think I’ll ask my boys if they want to help with this project of mine. It’s a little Dark for your tastes, though.”

Luna nodded. She was a Light witch, through and through. “As long as you’re not alone. That’s how the wrackspurts and nargles get you.”

“Sounds horrible.”

“Not as horrible as the aquavirius maggots! They’re very tricky, and they…”

Luna explained to me all about the aquavirius maggots, which I think was some sort of parasite that controlled brains, but only brains. Not too clear on that.

But it was good. And a reminder, that as much as my father’s genius was passed down to me, I had to take things slowly and as they came. I couldn’t learn a language in a week, and I couldn’t become a master of the Dark Arts in such time, either. All I could do was rotate my study schedule a little, try to stop becoming obsessed with one subject, and meditate a lot.

That’s probably all I’d be doing this year. This was the last year of peace, after all.
Chapter 20

Chapter Summary

Aaaaand here's Chapter 20! Out of curiosity, since I am showing off my OC's so much, does anyone have a particular favorite for any reason? :D

Ah, and this is a... fluff chapter? Filler? I dunno. This shit writes itself, I tell you.

And before I forget: Thanks for reading and commenting these last chapters, guys! :) Always glad to hear from you.

... 

Harper couldn’t stop laughing.

“It’s not funny, Harper!”

Dietrich’s eyes were dancing with amusement. I pointed at him.

“You too!”

My Second merely looked away haughtily. “Such is karma, Lys. Blood was on our list of things you should not be giving to anyone or anything freely, you know.”

I groaned, collapsing onto the table. It was a busy day in the Leaky Cauldron, which hid us quite well. Everyone was all aflutter with Sirius Black’s escape from Azkaban, but not so much that anyone was nervous. It was pretty fucked up, to be honest. No one was scared because everyone knew that Black would either be looking for Voldy somewhere else, or going after Harry Potter.

Pretty fucked up. Goddamn sheeple.

But I had my own problems.

“It’s in fucking Middle English. Bloody Canterbury Tales-esque English! Goddammit!” I moaned.

Harper started laughing again, looking through Sollertia Augurium.

The book itself was creepy as shit. It wasn’t sentient like Tom Riddle’s diary had been — I’d checked for that thoroughly after Luna mentioned the two in the same breath — but there was an icy blackness to it, a glow. The pages were yellow and soft and worn, the cover made of neat, brown leather embroidered with golden thread, old brass buckles keeping it shut. It didn’t look like that now, though.

I’d taken another week to throw some sort of glamour on it, making it look like The Monster Book
of Monsters; the glamour was from The Magick of Man-Hunters, somewhat. I had to experiment a fuck-ton with wandless and copying other spells, but I managed it. It would’ve been so much easier with a wand, but spells didn’t work quite the same way with and without — not to mention the bullshit Trace — so I had to be content with making shit up and burning a few of Ginny’s old Boy-Who-Lived children’s books.

(I’d tell Harry about it later. I had the best present in the works for him, so when I wrote his happy birthday and whatnot, I think he’d get a kick out of it. I think Ron made him read one of Ginny’s books in their first year; Harry had been horrified.)

“What’s Canterbury Tales?” Harper asked, after he calmed himself down.

All three of us had looked through Sollertia Agurium because none of us could fucking understand it. Dietrich had gone cross-eyed trying, Harper’d gotten too bored to even get past what I deemed the preface, and I’d been trying to decipher it for two weeks, in between figuring out how to not get caught with it and making sure I made time for other things, too, to combat any Madness that might creep in with such a blatant study of the Dark Arts.

“Muggle stories from the 1400’s or so.” I explained to Harper, “Very famous. ‘Whan that Aprille with his shoures sote / The droghte of Marche hath perced to the rote.’ That’s Middle English. I can’t even bloody understand it anymore.”

Harper grimaced in sympathy. “Sorry, Lyssie. Can’t you cast a translation charm?”

“Too much magic in the book,” Dietrich said, poking at the disguised cover, “It may not be the original, but words have power. I think there are diagrams and such inside as well? Personal notes? It is a biography, a magical one, and those tend to develop… personality.”

I nodded. “I might destroy it if I tried. It’s just too old for me to try.”

Harper frowned. “Merlin, that’s tough. Sorry, Lyssie, you’re going to be translating this for the entire year! Probably more. Maybe there’s a dictionary you can get? If I see anything when I’m on my Mum’s business trip, I’ll ask.”

“Are you going to Egypt, Harper?”

(Harper’s mom was an Egyptian merchant master. Halfblood, I think, which was why Harper’s family didn’t get on with the main branch.)

He perked up. “Yeah, actually! You were just there, weren’t you?”

I smiled. “Only for a little bit, to visit my brother.”

“Next time you will come to Germany,” Dietrich said, looking at me fondly, “I will search the library of my estate, perhaps there is an easier way to bypass such magic. A translation spell of that sort will be useful.”

“I really, really want to explore your castle, Dietrich.”

He nodded, grey eyes glinting with pride. “Schwarz vogelschloss will welcome you when you do, Lys. Meine Mutter has been wanting to thank you, and your brother and Potter. I believe my father is trying to devise a way to gift your family with something.”

Harper laughed. “Ask him to write a marriage contract between you and Lyssie, Dietrich.”
Dietrich narrowed his eyes. “Why do you keep bringing that up?”

“Because you fancy-”

“Ta gueule! For the love of Morgana, Harper. That was months ago.”

I cleared my throat. “I’d like to point out that I have seven older siblings that will happily murder anyone that threatens my innocence. Ron and Percy especially. And I don’t doubt that they’d bribe the twins into joining their mindset. My father’s also really frightening. Oh, and I still think we’re all too young to be dating.”

Harper frowned thoughtfully. “Really? Twelve or thirteen is when purebloods start entering betrothal contracts, so everyone’s already thinking about it.”

I reared back in horror. “What? Twelve? But… But… Wait, is that why Parkinson’s always all over Malfoy??”

Dietrich scoffed, crossing his arms and looking very unimpressed with both of us. “Ce n’est pas important. I already have a contract. You British do things so slowly. I have been slated to marry my betrothed since she was born.”

I turned my horrified look at Dietrich. “WHAT?”

Harper looked curiously at our stoic friend. “Does she go to Beauxbatons?”

“Yes. Amelie Lefevre, of la Famille Lefevre-Maillard.”

“Mine, too. Catarina Sefa. I think she’s from a branch family of Köken Sefa, descendants of the old kings of Anatolia.”

I slammed my hands against the table. “Wait, wait, wait. Both of you are engaged???”

“Yes.” they chorused.

“Have you even met these girls?”

“No.” Harper said, shrugging.

“Mon dieu, I wish I hadn’t.” Dietrich sighed. He looked at me curiously. “Why do you not know this? You are pureblood.”

I rolled my eyes. “I’m a bloodtraitor. Besides-” I shivered a little. “-if any boy thinks they’re going to marry me, he’s going to have to duel at least three of my brothers, Ginny, my father, and probably myself beforehand.”

“I pity your future husband, Lys.” Dietrich said, shaking his head.

I grimaced. “Yeah, me too.”

As if I’d have time for such things when the war was coming. I was a translation away from a key to my existence and the difference of this world from what I remembered, which would no doubt help me personally, but I still had shit to do. Spells to master. People to talk to.

I’d actually forgotten to speak to the Sorting Hat like I said I would. For god’s sake, that’s how busy I was. The thing had been in Harry’s goddamn hand, and I’d been too concussed and grief-stricken to remember something that interesting. Why wouldn’t I remember that the Sorting Hat
wanted to talk to me?

I checked Dietrich’s watch. Grimacing, I muttered to both of them, “You two have got to go, right?”

Harper actually pouted when he peeked over at Dietrich’s wrist. “Yeah, my mum’s going to scold me for putting off packing for so long. We still have to get the paperwork sorted out, I haven’t updated mine since I was five.”

I winced. “The Department of Magical Transportation’s international travel sect is really disorganized. Dad complains about them all the time, and seeing it firsthand... you best get there as soon as possible, Harper. Have fun in Egypt!”

Harper accepted a hug cheerfully enough now, but he grabbed onto both Dietrich and I — we barely managed to leave some Sickles for the food and butterbeers — and dragged us with him to the Floos. There, he took another hug from me, and Dietrich ruffled his hair. (Boys, honestly, they just couldn’t hug, could they?)

“I’ll see you two on the Express in a month or so.” Harper said in goodbye.


In a flash of green fire, Harper was gone.

I turned to Dietrich. “When’s your Portkey?”

“Two minutes,” replied my Second, “What are you going to do now? You have five hours until your brother comes for you.”

“I was thinking of going back to The Rookery.”

Dietrich blinked. “You think the cambion will have a translation spell of some sort?”

Well, that was nice. I was all ready for a lecture and everything. I nodded, smiling at the fact that Dietrich really was trying to put more trust into me, despite my shitty track record. “Hopefully. Or maybe I’ll see if it doesn’t know a way to get my hands on Wit-Sharpening potion, so I can learn Middle English more quickly.”

“As long as you can pay its price safely.”

“As safely as I can. I watched it drink the blood myself, last time.”

Dietrich nodded. “Write me before you go kill basilisks again, Lys.”

I laughed. “Of course! I wouldn’t go creature-slaying without you.”

Steel-grey and cobalt colors gently rippled with amusement, and then he brought out a quill from his pocket. His international Portkey, which whisked him away in just a moment. I blinked away the residual wind and the dust stirred up by the sudden, magical exit. The Leaky Cauldron continued on as normal, and I turned to enter Diagon Alley, Sollertia Augurium tucked under my arm securely, whispering a Notice-Me-Not on myself as I left.

I wondered if the cambion would mind if I just talked to it. I really missed having a mentor. It was my dad for a while, but then we all started going to Hogwarts and he had to work so much more to pay for it. Then it was Alby, but then Harry Potter started going to Hogwarts, so he had to keep an
eye on him and man the turbulent waters of the British political scene. And then it was Tom, and we all know how that ended. I just wanted someone to help point me in the right direction.

Maybe Baldwin would talk to me. Hah. Nah, I’d see if the cambion was free. I should probably learn its name.

... 

I used to be an artist, a long time ago. Nothing special, it was just a hobby, but I did make money off of what I drew occasionally. Used that money to try to pay for my English degree, not that it made a difference when I died in a car accident.

But yeah, I used to draw a lot. And then when Alby figured out that my Mage Sight was through the eyes and ears, he got me to learn how to paint. It’s not like we made masterpieces together, but it was a steady start and addition to my old skills.

So, of course — keeping in mind my lack of money (the Galleons I made from gambling last year were stowed safely away, for emergencies) — the only presents I could give were my talents. For the cambion, it was memory and blood; that was easy enough. For everyone else, I had to rely on my art, Percy’s handwriting, and a lot of research.

“Did you send Potter a birthday present, Lyssie?”

I looked up from my breakfast, at Percy’s questioning gaze, and nodded. “Yeah, Harry’s my Hospital Wing mate. I think I went more than he did, but every time we were bedridden, Madam Pomfrey put us next to each other.”

“Bedridden? You and Harry were bedridden?” Mum asked, concerned.

“Madam Pomfrey’s a worrier, Mum. I got stabbed by a plant and she wanted to keep me overnight.”

Percy sat down at his place, having been tending to Errol. Mum whipped out a quick Scourgify at his hands, which he thanked her for politely, and then he placed two letters down on the table. “Well, you and Ron have a reply from Harry.”

“Where is Ron?” Dad asked, still reading the Daily Prophet.

“Sleeping. The twins are, too.” Ginny answered, looking curiously at the letter that was now in my hands.

I shooed her away. “Back off, back off, I’ve got secret correspondence from my fellow infirm.”

“Ginny, dear, would you get your brothers?” Mum asked, waving her wand and dishing out food.

“I’m not putting one foot into Fred and George’s room, Mum.” Ginny warned, rising from the table and stealing one of my pieces of bacon.

“Oi! Get your own murdered pig.” I complained.

“Let’s not talk about murder at the breakfast table.” Dad commented mildly.
“You oughtn’t to be reading about murder at the breakfast table then, Dad.” Percy pointed out, smirking a little when I grinned at him.

Dad lowered his paper just enough to give us both an unimpressed look. It was a common sight to see, though it was usually directed at the demons twins. I wonder what would’ve happened if I’d been Percy’s twin instead...

THUD-CLANK-BANG!—“GET UP, RONNIEKINS!” was heard from upstairs, muffled just a little. All of us looked up, wincing a bit for Ron’s sake. Then Percy started talking about being Head Boy, and Mum remembered and got all excited about it again, and Dad went back to his paper. I started on my letter, wandlessly shoving Ginny’s bacon onto my plate lazily.

——

Lys,

Thanks for the book, it’s really brilliant! I didn’t know there were books on wandless magic exercises like this, or maybe I would’ve gotten Hermione to sneak us some when we were in the Hospital Wing. If it weren’t so thin, I would’ve thought it was a proper textbook.

I sort of skipped to the middle of the book, though, and tried to move things around. The one time I got it, I thought I was going to pass out. How did you make it look so easy last summer?

Thanks a lot, really. I heard from Ron you stole a bunch of books from the Slytherins? Is this one of them?

Oh, and I wrote Ron already, but congrats on the Daily Prophet Draw. Hope Egypt was interesting. I’ll see you at Hogwarts, Lys.

Thanks again,

Harry

——

Aw. He was so grateful. And he actually thought I bought or shadily acquired it. I suppose it didn’t look *that* handmade. I did learn how to printmake in my last life, and I had to do a lot of weird shit with wandless and such to get the parchment pages to be all crisp and sturdy. Percy did some of the handwriting — like, all the titles and headings and such — because Percy’s bloody handwriting was beautiful.

And it was really fun and useful to make it. Got me to review everything I knew about wandless,
and then I memorized it more penning it down and drawing for it, and now Harry would have a little one-up on Voldy when it happened. Hopefully, I’d be able to encourage Harry to learn a wandless *Protego* or *Accio*, since those were really useful to have on hand. Maybe I’d force Alby to mentor Harry a bit more, since Alby did a pretty spiffy job with me.

While I was reading, the twins, Ron, and Ginny trudged downstairs. Ginny reclaimed some of her food, and started sniping at the twins, whose room apparently ambushed her when she tried to wake them. They were groggy and blinking the sleep from their eyes as they tried to eat their own spoons, seemingly unaware of both Mum and Ginny lecturing at them. Percy was talking to Dad now, and Ron was squinting suspiciously at me.

“Is that a letter from Harry?” my brother asked.

I arched a brow at him. “You recognize the handwriting? It’s almost as atrocious as yours.”

Ron scowled, and starting skimming his own letter. But soon enough, he went back to looking at me oddly. “Why’d you get a letter from Harry? What’s in it?” The *‘I’ll bloody kill him if it’s what I think it is’* went unsaid.

“It’s a love letter. We’re going to elope next week.” I said flatly.

“Oh, har har, Lyssie.” Ron grumbled, rolling his eyes.

I tucked the letter into my pajama pocket and started messing with the twins’ food. Their scrambled eggs slowly started to slip onto Percy’s plate, piling up as Percy was too busy talking to Dad. The twins wouldn’t notice for a while, with how sleepy they were, still.

“He said thanks for his present.” I answered, nudging my indigo to animate fried tomatoes and mushrooms to roll towards Percy, “I thought it’d be nice to give him one, since, you know, he’s my friend and he was a key factor in me not becoming basilisk food.”

Ron grimaced at the memory, but was smirking as he watched the twins’ breakfasts roll by. He reached out to stab a few tomatoes with his fork, claiming them. “You’re not… you don’t, erm…”

“Fancy your best mate? Please, Ron, I don’t want to be murdered by my twin.”

“I saw you drawing that book, though. Pretty fancy for just a present to a friend.” he muttered.

“I’ll make you one, too, you git. Harry’s was a test-run-”

“OI!”

“Percy, you pig!”

“What’re doing with all our breakfast-”

“-it’s not like you’ll eat it all!”

“I didn’t steal your- What- Lyssie!”

Percy turned to me with accusative eyes.

I blinked. “Oh, that was fast. I’m off to go play with Luna!” I said quickly, taking my buttered toast, the book that was actually *Sollertia Augurium*, a Middle English to Modern English dictionary, and escaping out the back door.
“Be safe!” Mum called.

I waved quickly, and dodged when Fred chucked a piece of toast at me. Inwardly mourning the loss of the toast, I grinned at him and saluted. “For shame, Fred, how can you call yourself a Gryffindor Beater with aim like that?”

“Says she who won’t even mount a broom!”

I laughed and left, intent on finding Luna. August was a good season to look for gulping plimpies.

... 

This was probably illegal or should’ve been.

“All those bruises and cuts, you know.” I said, looking at the assistant’s battered fingers with rather fake-but-believable sympathy, “You’ll either waste magic healing them, or spend a few Galleons on potions and creams for them. Plus! The pain, though momentary, of being attacked by a book that acts more like an animal?”

The weedy looking fellow — probably fresh out of Hogwarts, honestly — seemed to wince at the memory. Dietrich was browsing the bookshelf behind me, Lu poking his wand curiously (and dangerously) at the cage of The Monster Book of Monsters books. There was a rare lull in Flourish and Blotts, the manager apparently having gone to the back for a cuppa, and I stood quite innocently in front of the assistant.

“It is quite painful,” he said nervously, “but thirty Galleons?”

I smiled. “Well, think of it this way: you pay me thirty Galleons for telling you the secret to taming these horrid books, and then you ask your manager or coworkers for forty Galleons. Maybe more if you play your cards right...”

Oh, he was tempted. His burgundy colors rippled with interest.

And the fact that Dietrich had his eternal poker face on behind me as I smiled innocently definitely covered the fact that thirty Galleons for such a tiny piece of information was a complete con. The poor guy — I was willing to bet he used to be a ‘Puff — would never be able to do what I was doing, not to a superior.

He swallowed, looked around quickly, then nodded. “Alright. But, er, don’t go spreading this around.”

I rolled my eyes. “As if I would. The secret is to stroke the spine — they go docile right away. Pleasure doing business.”

I took my thirty Galleons and turned, hearing the assistant mutter under his breath, “Bloody Slytherins.”

Smirking to myself, I was quickly followed by Lu and Dietrich (the only ones who could meet up with me today, as Jay was Death Eater kid — Lu was, too, but he lied to his parents — and Harper was still in Egypt with his Mum). We were shopping for our second-year supplies, the books having been saved for last ‘cos they were so heavy.

Lu blinked, then glared. “You’re doing magic outside of school! The Ministry-“

“Don’t be daft, Lu. The Trace is on the wand. And this wand is from that poor sod’s pocket, he just walked past with the thing hanging out of his trouser back. Idiot. Anyways, hold my things while I give it back.”

“Wha- Lys!”

“’Scuse me, sir, I think you dropped your wand.” I said, holding the wand delicately by the end with the handle facing him. He turned and looked very surprised at seeing it.

Then he grinned sheepishly, scratching a scruffy beard. “Thanks, lass.” he said, Irish accent strong, “Wouldn’t’ve noticed meself.”

I nodded graciously, and returned to a bemused Dietrich and a gaping Lu.

“Wha- You- He just- Lys, how do you get away with these things?” asked an exasperated Lu.

Grinning, I answered, “Lots of luck, I s’pose. Fortescue’s?”

(I knew those visions of thieves and shit would come in handy. But, seriously, you can’t just stick your wand in your back pocket. That’s just asking for it.)

My luck proved strong. We arrived just as the Golden Trio were leaving, and I broke off from Dietrich and Lu as they placed their orders (chocolate mint and butterbeer-vanilla, respectively) to say hello.


“Just finished, actually. Dietrich and Lu are back there.” I replied, “Hello, Harry, Hermione. Pleasant summers?”

Hermione beamed. “Very! France was wonderful. Their magical counterpart to Diagon Alley was quite interesting, though I didn’t spend much time there. I’ve heard it’s the prettiest in the world, they’re very proud of it.”

Harry nodded. “Best summer I’ve had so far. Thanks for getting me that book on wandless magic training. It looked rather fancy, though — I hope you didn’t spend too much on me.”

“Oh, Harry showed your present to me earlier! It looks like a very informative read, where did you order it? How much was it?” gushed Hermione, looking excited at the prospect of ordering reading materials.

I raised a brow, looking at my brother. “You didn’t tell them?”

“Tell us what?” Harry asked.

I replied, “I didn’t buy that, Harry. I made it.”

Hermione gasped. “Really? But it’s so beautifully done! You decorated every single page with Celtic borders, and you drew all those diagrams! Lys, that’s amazing! I thought it was ordered from somewhere!”
Ron rolled his eyes. “I told them, but they didn’t believe me.”

Harry actually pulled it out of his back pocket, looking at it as if it were the first time he’d seen it. “Wha- You drew all this? Wrote all of it?”

I shrugged. “Percy wrote quite a bit. His handwriting is ridiculously pretty- Hermione, honestly, I’ll make you one for your birthday in September.”

“What? Really? Oh, thank you, Lys!”

She rushed forward to hug me and I returned it, laughing. “You’re acting like Christmas has come early! What subject do you want, then? I can do some of the more popular wizarding fairytales, Beetle the Bard stuff, if you want... I assume you wouldn’t know of those, being Muggle-born.”

Ron looked annoyed. “Where’s mine?”

“I’ll make you one, too, I said I would. When your birthday comes around again. Now, shoo. Scabbers has been sick lately, right? Have you already been to the Magical Menagerie?”

Ron frowned, poking at his pocket. “Yeah, he’s getting pretty old. Probably some late after-effects from Egypt or something. We’ll see you back at the Leaky Cauldron, Lyssie. C’mon, Hermione, she’s not going to get started now.” Ron had to pull Hermione off of me, and she looked a bit abashed as she was dragged away.

Harry gave me a very grateful smile. “Thank you, Lys. No one’s ever put this much work into a present for me before.”

Knowing those stupid Dursley’s, that doesn’t surprise me.

But I grinned. “Don’t expect something that fancy every gift-giving, Potter. Even if it’s not that heavy of a read. It does take quite a bit of work, even with magic to duplicate things or erase mistakes in ink.”

“I’ll keep that in mind. See you, Lys.”

I rejoined Dietrich and Lu, both of whom would receive similar presents for their respective birthdays. It was nice, actually, to have kept such a skill from my last life. When I was younger, I refrained from intricate sketching and developed a better sense for color (splashing random experimental color palettes together passed off as toddler-level art, I think). It had been my only natural gift besides excellent memorization skills, and it helped a lot with quill-penmanship and the more abstract part of magic (I was very good at imagining things before my magic took over, which was why my best class was Transfiguration and Charms).

Hm. When I learn how to make my drawings move, that’ll be fun.

A project for later. Schoolwork, Occlumency, Seer abilities, and increasing my spell arsenal seemed more like very, very fun things for work. Art was, as it had been before, a hobby for relaxing. I could take my time with it and no one would fucking die for that.

Dietrich looked at me as I sat down. “Chocolate. Plain.” he said, handing me just that.

I beamed, pleasantly surprised. “I didn’t know you knew my favorite flavor.”

Lu nodded. “You told Harper last year sometime.”
“Oh, right. He made fun of me, the little git.”

“Nothing wrong with plain chocolate. Not that I can say anything, mind, I get the second-most expensive one.” Lu said, looking very content with his butterbeer-vanilla. “I suppose I’ll have to cut down, though. I’m trying out for the Quidditch team.”

Dietrich rolled his eyes. “We know, Vaisey. You have only told us once every hour.”

“And we really wouldn’t have been able to tell, with how you dragged us out to practice every week last year.” I added.

Lu scoffed. “Dragged them out. You only flew twice, once for the first flying class and once when you apologized to me for sneaking about our dorms. Silly of you, Lys, ‘cos we honestly wouldn’t have noticed.”

“It’s the Gryff blood,” I said solemnly, “I haven’t immersed myself into Slytherin enough yet. Maybe next year I’ll be a bit better.”

“Try this year,” he replied with a short laugh, “Lys, you’re practically the queen of Slytherin! Malfoy’s sure to challenge, since you know, everything’s all wonky with no one knowing which one of you is the parvus leader. Plus, Zabini’s in N.E.W.T. year and she’ll be distracted...”

Dietrich nodded in agreement. “We will have opposition from third-years, fourth-years, and fifth-years, no doubt. The seventh-years are too busy, the sixth-years too underneath Zabini’s thumb.”

“Maybe from the sixes,” I countered, “Bole’s always hated me.”

“Slytherin Quidditch team. Chaser, I think? Wait, didn’t Bole send you a valentine last year?” Lu asked.

I snorted. “It was hexed. Doesn’t like bloodtraitors, much, that one.”

Lu frowned, and looked up thoughtfully. “He shouldn’t be too much of a problem. Bole’s an idiot. Like, Harper’s an idiot, but Bole’s an idiot. Derrick might be worrying, though, he’s Bole’s best mate, and he’s popular in his year. Lots of friends in the raven’s House.”

“I’m not popular in Ravenclaw,” I admitted with a sigh, “I’ve disrespected their upperclassmen too much. Bloody gits. If they didn’t start up the whole ‘Looney Lovegood’ shite and encourage the younger years to it, I would’ve left them alone.”

“Hm. Might not have been wise.”

“Oh, piss off, Dietrich. It was for Luna.”

“Not sure it worked, though, Lys.” said Lu quietly, “I’ve never seen Lovegood with anyone other than you or your sister.”

I sighed. “At least they don’t attack her anymore. I used to heal her bruises! They’d push her down stairs and rubbish like that. If I find one bruise on her again this year, I’m going to do something drastic.”

Dietrich snorted. “Not to wish ill on your friend, Lys, but I am very interested in what your definition of ‘drastic’ is. Was dueling Pansy Parkinson into a mess not enough? You threatened to break her legs.”
Lu, having finished his ice cream a while ago (pig), leaned forward on his elbows. “Please tell me this plan involves the demon twins.” he said, smirking.

“Hm. Hadn’t thought of them. Maybe, if I’m feeling merciful.”

“Merciful? The demon twins, _merciful_?”

We looked at each other, and began to laugh. The twins, honestly, could be one of the worst enemies you’d ever make. They honestly belonged in Slytherin, I don’t know why they weren’t.

Dietrich glanced at his watch. “Hm. I have to Floo back soon.” He glanced up at me. “You are not the only one whose family has become very protective. I have to practically duel my father every time I have come to Diagon.”

“At least you get some dueling practice in,” Lu laughed. But then he frowned, peering over the table. “This late? Shite, Edward’s probably waiting for me! My pissant of a brother, he’s left me behind before.”

“Well, go on, you two,” I said, rolling my eyes, “It’s not like there’ll be basilisks out and about.”

Dietrich nodded agreeably. “There are cambion, though.”

Lu snorted. “I actually _can’t_ believe you’re friends with one.”

I rolled my eyes. (I felt like I did that a lot.) “Not friends. Acquaintances. It gets bored by itself, and sometimes I can trick a few answers out of it without giving any blood. Anyways, I try not to go too often, I can only shake my escort so many times.”

Lu grinned at me. “That’s pretty much friends, you know. Next time you go, tell me! I’ve never seen a cambion before.”

Dietrich groaned. “Do not become as troublesome as Lys, for Merlin’s sake, Vaisey. Harper already wants to meet the Mirror Brother... that man, Baldwin. Lys cannot go _one season_ without doing something incredibly reckless like such.”

I made a very affronted noise of protest. “Excuse me, who was the one who went gallivanting into the Chamber with Malfoy?”

“Inconsequential. You are a trouble magnet, Lys.” Dietrich replied.

“And you’re a horrid best mate. Bloody Fake-French git.”

“I’M HALF!”

Lu was snickering into his hands. “C’mon, Dietrich, we’ve got to go. See you on the train, Lys.”

I waved at them as they disappeared into the crowd. One day, I promised myself, I’d get used to the Mage Sight thing and I’d be able to track people more in crowds. That’s one of its more useful applications, after all, but my magical core just wasn’t mature enough for that level of control. Always a work in progress, I suppose.

The rest of the afternoon was spent in the Leaky Cauldron, me eating my ice cream and ostensibly reading _The Monster Book of Monsters_. If anyone — like my brothers — asked, I was interested in Care of Magical Creatures. It was such a good idea, disguising _Sollertia Augurium_ like I did.

I grinned to myself. Helvynya Prevett was starting to get into the Dark Arts, which would make for...
some interesting combinations. She wasn’t a Soothsayer, but I’d figure something out. Maybe my own ancestor would be my mentor for a while.
Chapter 21

Chapter Summary

Hi guys! I'm at, like, 300 kudos and a ton of bookmarks and WOW that's so awesome! Thank you guys so much for supporting this fic! I'm super grateful that y'all seem to like it. ;)

So yeah, this is an early chapter. The reason for this is because I'm driving 7-8 hours tomorrow to go home for the holidays, so I'm just... not gonna post tomorrow. :P And I MIGHT skip next week's post, too, for holiday reasons, and also because I got some REALLY good conversation going last chapter in the comments and I want to edit the third arc a bit more, so that might take some time. XD Just a warning!

That's it! :D Here's your weekly chapter, a bit early!

…

Motherfu-!!

“HARPER! You bloody idiot, what did you do??”

He actually *did* cringe (rare, for the normally unapologetic kid) and rubbed the back of his head. “Sorry, Lys. I was trying to clear up Lu’s nose — from his cold and all — so I don’t really know.” he said sheepishly.

“Finite Incantatum.” Dietrich intoned, waving his dark-colored wand — nice and polished, the neat freak — gently in the vicinity of my scrunched-up face. He raised a brow at me. “Better?”

I shook my head, my sleeve covering my nose. It was giving me a headache, smelling *every single scent* this strong. Like it was all magnified a thousand times. *Every. Single. Scent.* And it was pungent as hell, like the things were being shoved up my nose and into my brain, pushing up on the back of my eyes painfully.

The compartment my firsties found was near the middle. For the first half-hour of the ride, I’d actually been with Luna and Ginny. But Ginny went off to find her friends, and Luna shooed me off to do the same, and so I found my boys. It was actually almost the end of the train ride, and the five of us had been busy catching up and chatting, preparing for the year. Jay had been very interested in *Sollertia Augurium*, but my pages of notes of translation only went barely a fraction into the thick tome. I was starting to get frustrated with the translation, as I had to do a LOT of guesswork when it came to magical words that the Muggle dictionary wouldn’t have. Ergh.

My voice was muffled by my hand and robe sleeve. “I’m in pain.”

Harper looked like I’d run over his dog. “I’m so sorry, Lys! I can try to-”
“Experimenting with spells isn’t a good idea, Harper,” interrupted Jay apologetically, “Everything you make or create tends to be very dangerous.”

Which was so true, it wasn’t even funny. Harper should honestly talk to the demon twins more often. I’d tell him so after my fucking face didn’t feel like the bones were going to shatter with all these scents stuffed in my head.

Lu’s voice was very congested. “Baybe you should get one ob your books, Lys.”

“I can’t take my hand off my nose,” I answered crossly, “I’ll die. You hear that, Harper? You’ve killed me.”

“I’m sorry, Lys! I’ll make it up to you!”

“You might want the counterspell soon, Lyssie,” Jay said, frowning, “Do you know it?”

I shook my head. My magical spell studies encompassed very specific things in lots of detail: Hogwarts curriculum, Grey-Dark rituals of Celtic origin, and general combat magic. That was… something I’d have to fix. Even if it forced me to get creative, I’d need a better spell library.

“Granger’s a knowledgable witch. Zabini would be good, too.” Dietrich suggested.

I nodded, standing and swaying when the smells shifted through my sleeves. “I’ll find Hermione. She’s got loads of books, there’s got to be something to fix me.”

_Stupid Harper. I’ll have my revenge later._

I cringed as I opened the compartment door, new smells rushing through my weak barrier of cloth and flesh. There was dirt, pond mud, sweat, too-strong perfume, the ozone-like scent of rain. Metal and wood and carpet ingrained with years and years of cleaning magic and a layer of new shoe-prints. The scent of the Burrow on my sleeve, my own salty sweat, iron of the blood underneath. I must’ve made quite the picture, stumbling down the train. We’d gotten a compartment near the end, and if I remembered and Saw correctly, so did the Trio. They were sitting in a compartment with a sleeping professor, in fact.

When I slid their compartment door open, I jerked at the sudden _Wolf running through the forest — dark trees and darker shadows — howling in the background — golden eyes — rat scuttling away between dead leaves — the full moon — black cloaks in the sky — a silver stag—_

_Stop.

_Dark, dark cloth fluttering in the air — frigid, icing over the windows — “Piss off!” — The dog was swimming in the sea, freezing, bones sticking out from his raggedy fur, black ghosts gliding above him obliviously. Black dog, black water, black prison, black ghosts — the train halted, shuddering, arms around her as she shivered and shook — “It’s really cold, it’s really, really cold…”_

_Stop.

“Lys? D’you have a nosebleed or something?”

Hm. Bloody visions were getting sassy again. Coming whenever they wanted to again, like before. After the Chamber incident, I almost felt Sovereign; maybe the magic of the ability had realized I had been in a lot of danger? Gave me a bit of a break. _Now_, though, it was coming back all Acquiescent. Fucking magic.
Meditation and Occlumency time again. Yay.

I shook my head.

“No, Ron, but Harper — the idiot — managed to make my sense of smell a million times better and I’m getting a headache. *Finite Incantatum* didn’t work, so please, Hermione, for the love of Merlin, tell me you can fix this somehow.”

Hermione looked at me sympathetically. “Oh, Lys - *Riminatius!* Did that work?”

I sniffed tentatively. Then I flinched at Hermione’s rather nice-smelling but too-strong shampoo. Oh, and… “Nope. I smell chocolate.”

Hermione looked bewildered. “Chocolate? Er, do you know what spell Harper used?”

*Indagus Melius.* I muttered unconfidently — maybe that’s what he used, but I’d been talking to Dietrich about the absolute bullshit of translation *Sollertia Augurium* and braiding Jay’s hair at the same time, so I wasn’t too sure about that.

“Oh, then you’ll need the counter-spell... I think it’s *Meliollo Retex.*”

Another reluctant sniff. I smiled gratefully and pulled my hand away. “Thanks, Hermione! You’re the best. So, is that our new Defense professor in the corner, then?”

Remus Lupin was, in fact, sleeping in the corner. He looked a little disheveled, thought quite a bit nicer than the werewolves I’ve seen prowling Knockturn Alley. He had smelled like something feral, but clean. His colors, as I flicked them on, were a dark maroon flecked with shining gold, his center a bit more leaning to a cool violet. They were sad, beaten down colors. Dark, probably because he was a werewolf and all that, and sluggish with sleep.

“Pretty colors,” I muttered to myself, pressing down on my core to make the colors shrink and fade until I could only see vague outlines around people. Enough to know they were themselves, but not enough to know anything about them. The Mage Sight thing was getting to be a lot more Sovereign than the Clairvoyance thing, with the help of *The Magick of Man-Hunters.*

(Who would’ve thought that so many magical predators had a sort of magical sensing ability? Which is how the earlier natural Soothsayers learned how to make their abilities more useful, way back when.)

Harry glanced over, then shrugged at me. “Seems he must be. He was in here already, and the rest of the compartments were full. Guess he can sleep through anything, we tried to wake him.”

“Anything? Excellent. ‘Scuse, Ron, I’ve been hungry and Harper ate all the trolley things we bought because he’s an idiot.”

The chocolate smell had been coming from the pocket of the coat Lupin was using as a makeshift blanket. My fingers were light and quick as I plucked out one of the many bars inside. Plain milk chocolate, my favorite.

(I’d need this, according to the visions. Dementors, right. Harry Potter’s third year. Yup.)

Hermione looked absolutely *scandalized.* “Lys! You can’t steal from a professor!”

Ron gave her a funny look. “Is it the stealing or the professor part you don’t like?”
I was exiting already, having thrown a bit of the bar to Ron, who was now gobbling it down. I gave a helpless shrug. “Looks like I just did. Slytherin, remember? Besides, he’s got lots, and I’ll need it.”

“You’re one to talk, Hermione. You talked us into filching ingredients from Snape, remember?” Ron reasoned as I walked back to my compartment.

Harper had, indeed, eaten most of our sweets. Which meant there was no chocolate left. Which meant that when the stupid fucking dementors waltzed in later, we’d be very unhappy afterwards. Which meant I needed chocolate. Which meant my luck had somehow pulled through and Harper had, the accidental genius he was, given me an excuse to find Lupin and take his chocolates.

It all worked out rather nicely, but I was still going to strangle Harper for making me go through all that pain. How he’d managed to overpower a tiny charm like that much was beyond me. Never really fell into my studies, so I hadn’t known how to cancel it. Thank Merlin for Hermione, then.

Harper barreled into me as I slid the compartment door open, and I grunted.

“Harper? What?”

“I’m sorry Lyssie are you alright now please don’t kill me-!!” cried my friend.

“He’s been waiting for you in tears.” Lu explained, his congestion apparently having been fixed while I was away, even if he still looked exhausted with sickness, “He hugged your brother, Prefect Zabini, and almost Malfoy doing that.”

I snapped my gaze to Dietrich, for confirmation. He shrugged. “It was funny. I am thinking we should simply have Harper hug Malfoy whenever he steps up to challenge us — it will get him to back out quickly.” Dietrich said.

“Dietrich, was that a joke? You made a joke! I’m going to write this in my diary!”

He glared at me, having flinched at the word ‘diary’.

I carefully peeled Harper off me and sat down. “Too soon?”

“It will always be too soon.” he muttered irritatedly, “Bloody book.”

If we had all been born in the 20’s, I have a feeling Tom might’ve made an enemy right away. Dietrich can’t even stand to hear his name. I thought, feeling a little amused but mostly sorry. Dietrich… did not like to think of it. I know he trained hard during the summer, his family’s pureblood paranoia shooting through the roof, but Dietrich didn’t talk much of it. I think he was… ashamed. Yeah, ashamed; that he’d been taken by a possessed student, that he’d accidentally forced me to pursue him and get injured in the process, etc. Dietrich was…

Incredibly prone to looking at mistakes and responding by punishing himself, while also making himself better. It was almost self-destructive, but gave results just enough to justify sleepless nights and whatnot. Oh god, Dietrich was becoming me.

(That was… a frightening though. Stop thinking about it, Lyssie.)

I had to bat Harper away from me eventually, though. “Harper, gerroff! I’ll get you back later, you idiot, which means when we’re safely ensconced in Hogwarts. Go play poker with Lu and Jay or something.”
Harper was, by the way, one of the best bloody poker players I’ve ever witnessed, let alone played against. Rather than remain stoic, as Dietrich did, he managed to lie the shit out of the game, trick us into assuming his cards and such. Bloody brilliant, really. More surprising than us finding out that Dietrich was actually bollocks at the game, because he just didn’t know what the hell he was doing. Purebloods.

As Harper scooted over to do just that (“I’m going to win again, yeah?” “Shut up, Harper!”) the train shuddered, lights flickering. We all were forced to grab onto the edges of the seats or lean against the walls to keep from toppling on the floor.

“Bloody hell! What was that? Are we stopping?”

(Fear.)

“It’s gone all dark — Harper, what did you do?”

Oh dear. I hadn’t felt this primally afraid in…

“Why’re you blaming me, I wasn’t even holding my wand! Lu, you’re a prat.”

“Merlin, it’s cold…”

(Fear fear fear.)

“Jay, you’re wearing your robes. You- Oh, lookit that, it is cold.”

“Shut up, Harper.”

“Aha! That’s twice already! I’m keeping a tally this time, I will!”

… a very long time. My body was shaking-

“Shut up, Harper. Wait- is someone outside?”

Dietrich reached for the door and I stiffened. “DON’T OPEN IT.” I barked, effectively making him freeze in his tracks and silencing the rest of the compartment. I curled up tighter, feeling cold and knowing they were coming. “Don’t go near the door. They’re out there.”

Jay looked alarmed. “Lys, what’s going on?”

Colder. Colder and colder and colder. Ice on the windows. Shadows on the walls.

(Fear.)

“Dementors,” I whispered, making everyone’s eyes widen, “Dementors on the train, searching for Sirius Black. They’re not going to Kiss anyone, but it’s so cold…”

Then it was here.

A figure, gnarled and unnatural, shadowed in the foggy glass. A rotted hand sliding the door open, black hood peering inside. Ice on its putrid breath, shadows in its crumbling robes. I shuddered, remembering blood and metal and asphalt and fire. Oh no, oh fuck, I’m a Clairvoyant the fucking things will destroy me- Hands paling in mine, warm to cold — Tom Riddle smiling as he died — Fred’s empty eyes — The screams of the Longbottoms, the sounds of the Potter’s bodies hitting the floor, the vicious snarls of Death Eaters, Ariana Dumbledore tormented by Muggle boys, Gideon and Fabian Prewett falling, I did not bloody think this through, shit, I should’ve learned the
“Piss off,” I breathed, barely able to with how violently I was shaking, “There’s no Sirius Black here.”

Trench wars in the early 1900’s, the shot heard around the world, a red flag burning, Gellert Grindewald dueling Albus Dumbledore and laughing maniacally as he cried — the girl lost in the woods — the body buried underneath the tree, the rotted corpse hanging on the gallows as his wife stared and starved and waited.

“Because I was weak?” — “No, because I was.” — indigo and crimson and splintering, turning pale and glassy and shattering into nothing — the death of a magical core, of a consciousness carried by a book — “Are we friends, Lys?”

But you let me die.

It was you or mine. You weren’t one of mine.

I could have been.

You were—I know.

Stop.

Gore splattered against a wall, Death Eaters marching on London, kill the spare — Because I was weak, no not at all because I was, Dietrich lying in the Chamber, Muggles tearing apart her magic, magic bound inside his core — it hurt it hurt it hurt oh god help — “Arianna, no!” — Kill the fucking Muggles, kill them all, hurt my child, my daughter, my sister, my friend-

Stop.

“SHOVE OFF!” Lu snarled, standing abruptly and placing himself in front of me, his arms spread out to keep the dementor away, “WE DON’T HAVE YOUR BLOODY SIRIUS BLACK, FILTH! GET AWAY FROM US!”

Jay had his hand buried in his hands, rocking back and forth. Dietrich was pale, paler than ice and colder still, looking at the dementor like he could never look away. Harper was scared, but he slid across his seat and shoved his hand in mine, trying to transfer heat — any kind of warmth, anything... Lu was fixated on shielding me if only physically from the monstrous thing, in spite of the tremor in his arms and the shakiness in his voice.

Broken bones splintering, white shards all over the place — “Run! Run!” she cried, gurgling as it — feet were just blood and torn skin, muscle wasted, blistered over, he couldn’t get away — “I don’t want to die.” — twisted metal and burning rubber and blood pooling underneath, cooling, sticky and copper-scented and — “Someone help me, please, I don’t want to die-” — again-

Because you were weak, you’re weak, you are — BROTHER-KILLER, MURDERER! Crimson eyes blinking, blinking, and — Pay lesser witches no mind, Guinevere, not when you are a parvus potestas reigning.

...You’re kind.
Only to you.

Flattery gets you nowhere.

And neither do petty insults, whispered in the privacy of the loo.

You’re kind, and you try not to be.

Slytherins are not kind. Kindness is weakness. Kindness will have you betrayed by your peers, and used by the other Houses. You know this.

I wanted to make a place where that wasn’t so. I’m not… ‘No good for anything now,’ they said… I need to be much more than anything, for what I want.

We both know, Guinevere, you don’t always get what you want.

I try.

Trying won’t bring your friend back. Tom Riddle is dead, you foolish child. It’s time to stop wallowing.

Stop.

I thought I was going to go insane.

“I killed Sirius Black, I killed Sirius Black!” — “I’LL KILL YOU LESTRANGE!” — Bill flying back, red hair streaming out like blood, glinting in the weak light of — “AVADA KEDAVRA!” screamed the masked Death Eater. Bill dodged, green reflected in his eyes — Blood-stained teeth, sharpened, blue eyes luminescent, lunging at the throat, hands clawing into shoulder — Curled in the corner, she wept, tried to press herself into the walls so hard that it hurt. — There is no good or evil-

Stop.

Every bad memory you ever had? What if I remembered the entire world’s bad memories?

Cars smashing into each other, metal bending and twisting and — smell of gasoline, burning rubber, coppery blood, the stench of vomit. Dripping from her mouth, bloody lips and — “Fuck! Someone help me!” she screamed — I don’t want to die, I don’t want to die, I don’t want to-

STOP!


I don’t want to die, I don’t want to- Blindness. Ice flooding my throat-

Stop.

It was an hour or maybe several or maybe just a second later that Harper was tilting my head back roughly and shoving my stolen sweets in between my chattering teeth. He’d taken it upon himself to chuck the rest of the bar at Dietrich, whose hands fumbled as he broke it into pieces and he passed it around. The dementor was gone but Merlin knew that I’d just seen all the worst of the world’s past, present, and future in just a few minutes...

Lu squeezed in between me and the window and put an arm around me, trying to warm me up. It was probably a few hours (?) no, no, a minute or so (?) no, definitely a few minutes later when I
felt I could move again.

Pale faces had color returned to them, and there was an air of leisurely relaxation that was obviously faked: Dietrich was reading, Lu still had an arm around me but he slumped in his seat sleeping, Harper and Jay were on the floor with a deck of Exploding Snap. But once Dietrich noticed me looking around, he kicked Harper (who yelped), who nudged Jay. They all looked at me.

“Hm,” my voice rasped weakly, “Th-that was something I never w-want to do again. M-Make a note of it, Dietrich, I’m very, very bad against dementors. I-I don’t quite remember what happened. Did I black out? Wh-Where are we?”

“Nearly at Hogwarts,” he replied softly, “where you will be going to the Hospital Wing immediately.”

I tried to glare but it was a bit weak. Everything felt weak, come to think of it. “I-I don’t need to go to the Hospital Wi-Wing, Dietrich! I’ll sleep it off. I-It was no different than the usual nightmares. Just... er, m-more I guess.”

Lies, of course.

“You can’t even speak properly, Lys.” Dietrich said flatly.

Which Dietrich knew. He seemed to always know when I was lying.

“And you’re shaking. Do you still feel cold?” Jay asked.

I looked at my hands, which were quite visibly unsteady. “Alright... you a-all win this round, bu- but know that I don’t like it! A-At all.”

Harper reached up to hold my hand, blue eyes wide with concern. “You just stared for hours, Lyssie. Shaking and crying and staring, no blinking. It was sort of creepy, but we were mostly worried. Did you want to talk about it?”

They all assumed I had some sorta traumatic thing happen to me before or because of the Chamber, maybe it had something to do with the Mage Sight thing? Maybe dementor’s colors were bad? (I hadn’t looked, I couldn’t have if my life depended on it, with how the memories were drowning me) I mean, I regularly went into Knockturn Alley, I might’ve seen something horrible. I dealt with a cambion every other week, too. There were lots of excuses for something like that.

Harper was still looking at me in concern. They all were, actually.

I managed to chuckle. “M-Maybe later, wh-when I don’t sound like a... like a Weasley v-version of P-Professor Quirrell.”


Ah, right. They didn’t know about the DADA professor before Lockhart. I did, because I did my best to See my brother’s first year, just to keep tabs on the events of the first book. “L-Later.” I said, waving them away.

“We’ll be at Hogwarts soon,” Lu yawned as he woke. His eyes glinted with something, though. Protectiveness? Something. He smirked. “If you want to keep cuddling ’til then, I’ve got no problem with it.”
I gave him a flat stare, but the smug grin on his face had my lips twitching. “Sh-Shut up, Lu.”

“I’ll take your place, Lu, everyone knows I’m more cuddly.”

“Shut up, Harper. Not something to be proud of. Or at least, it won’t be in a few years and you start fancying people or something. Go on and nap, Lys, you deserve it. Bloody buggering beasts, those dementors.”

“C-Couldn’t have said it better myself.

They all made a bloody big deal of it, bringing me to the Hospital Wing straight away; I barely had time to look at the thestrals pulling the carriages for the first time — not that it mattered, Luna and I fed them all the time — before Dietrich dragged me to McGonagall, and we once again met with the Golden Trio. Right, Harry had fainted... his memories are pretty shitty, I mean, he watched his fucking parents die. Even I hadn’t done that.

(Well, maybe I could argue that I watched my brothers die enough, but still. It wasn’t real. Not yet.)

(Never, something in me snarled viciously.)

Anyways, my boys were coddling me to kingdom come. The four of them. I suppose they recovered from their own personal dementor experiences more quickly because they’d seen me, and how I had been going a little insane for a few minutes. I don’t think I could really blame them, though, especially the more emotionally-ruled Harper and Jay: I hadn’t stopped shaking, even after they’d gone to Prefect Zabini for more chocolate, and it was difficult to walk by myself.

But still.

Bloody hell, that was tad embarrassing. Even if it was touching, that my firsties all gathered around me like this.

...  

“At least I’m not alone,” I murmured.

Harry nodded. “Malfoy’s not going to let this go, though...”

Because of course, the ponce hadn’t changed at all after the Chamber incident. (Which I was... I suppose, glad for, because really, if he came back quiet and traumatized or something, I probably would’ve backed off completely. My responsibility, my fault, my...)

I sighed, agreeing. “The bleedin’ ponce’ll be making fainting jokes from now ’til summer, I think. I can try to help you out, Harry, I’ve got to keep the stupid git in check this year anyways.”

Harry groaned, lying back in his white, Hospital Wing pillows.

We were Hospital Wing mates, like I told my family. Same bloody beds and everything. Madam Pomfrey took one look at me and confined me to a stay overnight. I’d been rather pleasantly surprised to see Harry, though. Even if we were both surly at being stuck in the damn Hospital Wing again, at least we were going down together.
We chatted back and forth, mostly about much pleasanter subjects (I was extremely touched when Harry said he carried my little wandless magic guide with him everywhere, so he could do the exercises whenever).

“You should’ve gone to the feast, by the way.” I said during a lull in the conversation.

“Er, what?”

I grinned. “It’s not like I couldn’t hear, Harry. McGonagall almost let you out.”

Harry rolled his eyes. “As if I’d leave you back here. We’re Hospital mates.”

I laughed; seems my friend had a similar vein of thought. “Well, I suppose I’ll be obligated to break some bone or other every time something ridiculous happens to you, Harry.”

“Don’t jinx it. I’d like a peaceful year…”

“Hopefully. Dad warned you about the dementors and Sirius Black, right?” I asked.

Harry had, actually, stayed with us for a bit. Not that I noticed; the boy followed Ron about our home like a lost puppy, only saying quick hello’s and such to me. And I’d been busy agonizing over Sollertia Augurium and getting Percy to take me to Diagon so I could sneak off and see the cambion, which didn’t happen nearly as often as I wished. Anyways, Harry had been pulled aside by Dad at some point — in the Leaky Cauldron, I think? — and I guessed that he was warning Harry about Black, since my Dad considered Harry peripherally one of his, for his connection to Ron.

(Dad was a lot more… private about the me and mine thing. He gave the idea to me, but I expanded it to my friends with ease. Dad… was careful to only let his ferocious, quasi-Dark protectiveness of his extend to his immediate family, and no one else. He was, after all, a Light wizard, my father.)

Harry nodded. “Black was a Voldemort supporter, right? What I don’t get is, why isn’t he going after Voldemort? It’s not like I can do much.”

I frowned. “It’s the symbolism of the thing, I think. A lot of older magic is based on symbolism and ritual, because there’s so much intent to be considered in symbols. Ritualistic magic is usually Dark, though.”

“There aren’t any Light rituals?”

“Rituals are all about the preservation of balance. What you sacrifice in order to gain. Unless you’re sacrificing yourself, it’s Dark. Light magic is all about correcting imbalances to the benefit of others, or sacrificing your magic, blood, etc. for someone else’s sake. Healing and protection, you know?”

Harry thought for a moment. “But… there’s got to be healing spells or shields or something that don’t do that. Right?”

I grinned at him. “Too right. But it’s easier for everyone to sacrifice their magic or themselves, even if they don’t realize it. That’s the thing with Light magic, the intent isn’t really important anymore, which is why it’s weaker. Safer, of course, but weaker. People don’t like hearing that, though.”

“Huh. So… me being a symbol…”
I shrugged. “It’s not that if Sirius Black knifes you that’ll do something immediately. Rituals aren’t that thoughtless. But symbols are important, and Dark wizards and witches understand that more than Light or Grey.”

He nodded. Then he threw a crooked smile my way. “Every time we meet, Lys, you’re always teaching me something. You really like reading, huh? But Hermione doesn’t seem to know any of this stuff, I asked, and she’s a bit more…”

“Ravenclaw-like?” I suggested.

“Bookish, yeah.”

I hummed to myself, looking up at the high ceilings. “Well, I suppose that’s because Hermione’s a Light witch, and she’s more interested in more substantial things. Everything I study is Dark or Grey and magical theory. Advanced magical theory, technically, because I’ve got a Seer ability and those sorts of magicks lead into that.”

“You got a head start, I suppose?” Harry said.

“That, too. Hermione’s playing catch-up, and trying to reconcile differences between Muggle and wizarding worlds. She’ll know all this rubbish in a few years, don’t worry.”

Harry laughed. “Well, until then, I’ve got you.”

I nodded. “Of course, Potter. Doesn’t seem to bother you, I notice, that I’m a Dark witch.”

He shrugged. “Doesn’t mean you’re evil, right?”

I blinked at him. Huh. You know, for some reason, I thought everyone would be a bit more prejudiced against Dark-cored people and Slytherins, but… Oh. Oh, right. Well, I suppose this was butterfly effect. The stigma was probably still there, I just wasn’t feeling it, because my entire Light family was all around me. Ron, who was the biggest source of wizarding culture for Harry, didn’t care about Dark or Grey or Slytherin, because I was his sister. The flower crowns I made — a tradition that ended with Ginny and me coming to Hogwarts, unfortunately — were a Grey-Dark ritual, but they all loved it.

I… I don’t know, I was surprised.

But it meant that my presence was worth something, right? No more did the hero of the wizarding world look at Slytherins and think, ‘Voldemort supporters’. Or, maybe he never did in the first place. Snape wouldn’t be his only window into the truth of Slytherin, at least.

(It meant a change. I’d… changed things. That was good. That meant my brothers would be safe…)

I smiled at Harry. “Yeah.” Then I snickered. “Can you imagine me evil?”

Harry grimaced. “From watching you go against a basilisk, I really hope that never happens.”

“What? I wasn’t even the one that killed it!” I laughed. I peered at his arm, the one that had been stabbed with the fang. “You’re alright, aren’t you? The basilisk venom and whatnot, it looks like you earned a scar or a hundred.”

Harry blinked, then rolled up his sleeve a little, for my benefit. It obviously wasn’t bloody or anything, but it looked as fresh as the day he’d gotten bit. The scar was sharp and darkly discolored, and the veins spreading out around it were darkened, the blue and greens standing out
at the edges and darkening as it approached the round-ish scar. It was like a black sun took root in
his veins and arteries. He smiled a little.

“It doesn’t hurt, if that’s what you’re asking. No one’s ever really survived a basilisk bite, so
Madam Pomfrey wasn’t sure if this was normal or not, but I think it’s faded a bit since.” he said,
shrugging.

Did anyone else find it odd that Harry never went to St. Mungo’s for all his crazy shit? What the
fuck, Alby? Then again… the hospital meant a certain loss of privacy, as it was a government
institution, and information going to the government meant information going to Malfoy Sr.

“Huh. Well, I wouldn’t remember, I was loopey as hell when you were bit.”

Harry snorted. “I remember. You kept conjuring bees, did you know?”

I grinned. “I remember something of the sort.” Harry rolled his sleeve back down. “Hey, at least
your scar is wicked-looking. Even if no one believes you about the basilisk, they’ll think it was
some sort of poisoned knife, which is just as interesting.”

He looked away, shrugging. Uncomfortable, I think.

“All I’ve got to do is brush my bangs away a little bit, and everyone thinks I’m interesting,” my
friend muttered.

Definitely uncomfortable.

I frowned, a little guilty. Didn’t mean it like that. “Hey. Don’t worry about it, Harry. You are quite
a character, you know? Not everyone would’ve gone down to the Chamber to drag Malfoy’s
pompous arse back out.”

Harry laughed a little. “And Bastion, can’t forget him.”

“Yeah, and for a firstie you didn’t even know. I dunno if I ever thanked you, but really. Thanks.
For… for trying to get him out. I don’t know what I’d do without that kid.” I said hesitantly,
feeling embarrassed.

“Anyone would’ve done it.” Harry replied automatically.

I raised a brow. “Not Lockhart. And not really. Don’t sell yourself short, Potter. I’m having a
moment here.”

“Oh, were you? Sorry, continue.”

“Want me to sing you a poem or something? I’ll ask Ginny if she has any copies of that one she
wrote last year…”

Harry choked on his own laughter. “Ergh, no! Just- No. Don’t. Lys, don’t.”

I grinned. Here, this was where I was comfortable. Teasing and banter. Must easier than heart-to-
hearts and whatnot. “His eyes are as green as a fresh pickled toaaaaad…” I started, trying to
remember the rest.

Harry was trying to withhold his laughter. “Lys, stop!”

“Erm… hair as… black as a blackboard, I think? Shite, I’ve forgotten… Malfoy wouldn’t stop
singing it for two days, all of Slytherin knew the bloody song…”
Hah. A night spent chatting about stupid things and magical theory and wandless magic, and trying to pretend we were asleep when Madam Pomfrey walked around. Feasting on chocolate and comparing textbooks (“All you had to do was stroke the spine, Harry. Honestly.” “What? Why didn’t you say so earlier!?!”).

Despite the dementor thing, it was a good start to the year.
All I could do was roll my eyes as Malfoy was talking nastily about Harry’s black-out from yesterday. He was entertaining quite a few of his own year, some fourth-years, and a gaggle of sixth-years led by Derrick and Bole.

(This was undeniable proof, wasn’t it? Malfoy must’ve been in correspondence with Zabini the younger, who was hanging around… Which means he knows we’ve got a clean slate. And this is what he does, first thing off? Provoke my friends and allies? The little shit didn’t change at all.)

(I… I didn’t know whether I was relieved or disappointed. Maybe a bit of both.)

I suppose we, on our own, made quite the picture as well: us second-years (though I still loving called them my firsties) walking past him quite purposefully and imperiously. I think Lu even curled his lips in a grimace — like he happened across some particularly disgusting garbage — and I know I saw Harper give a condescending smile.

Malfoy might have irritated me with pretending the entire Chamber thing didn’t happen — no gratitude, no change in character, what the fuck?! — but… well… Oh, I was so proud of my firsties.

“Hey, Potter!” called the shrill voice of Pansy Parkinson, as I’d been halfway through my favorite buttered toast, “Potter! The dementors are coming, Potter! Woooooo!”

It was — to my gleeful surprise — Dietrich who said with an air of the haughty pureblood he would’ve been (without my presence), “Impressive, I think, how I am continuously disappointed by the intelligence of our House-mates.”

It was made perfect because of the French accent.

Abruptly, the jeering stopped. Malfoy’s group turned to us, Malfoy with composed, cold eyes and Parkinson with an unsightly blotch of red on her face.

Lu chuckled, and the contemptuousness of the sound made me want to break into hysterical
laughter — he was copying how I sounded when I spoke to that camp. “Now, that’s not very fair, Dietrich. You can’t look at Parkinson and not be disappointed.”

“How dare you, bloodtrai—”

“Careful, Parkinson,” interrupted Jay, his voice calm and low, “The Vaiseys won’t stand for such an insult to their line, second son or not. Someone will speak up for them if you finish that word, hm? And Edward Vaisey is, without a doubt, a better dueler than Lyssie is. And we all know how that duel went, now… don’t we?”

A shiver. Merlin, Jay was scary when he went all ‘I’m-smiling-but-there’s-a-knife-behind-my-back-right-now’ mode.

All I could think of that prompted my boys’ sudden aggressive behavior would be… oh. Right. Okay, so Malfoy’s people were making fun of Harry for his reaction to dementors, so they all remembered my reaction to dementors. If Malfoy had bothered to stop in on us yesterday, he’d be mocking me to my face.

As it was, my firsties had made sure that the rumor mill believed my Hospital Wing stay to be due to accidental injury caused by Harper’s normal idiocy. Not unbelievable, with how much he fucked up on a daily basis. (Seriously, though, everything he did somehow had the potential to be weaponized.) I had decided to hold off on avenging my nose because Harper had happily taken the mickey for that in public.

Anyways, there was also the fact that the boys followed Dietrich’s lead if they weren’t following mine, and Dietrich felt he owed Harry for the Chamber thing last year. (And Malfoy conspicuously dismissed it… A mistake I would not be emulating, as a life debt from the little shit could very well save Harry’s life later.)

Malfoy took in our cool countenances, hesitating. This was the part where he got all fired up and we traded barbed words… But alas, he seemed to have learned something from last year, because he merely glanced at me and Dietrich — perhaps any gratitude was reserved purely for the Slytherin part of his rescue? — then gave a jerky nod. He looked at Parkinson pointedly.

“Shut it. We’ve got class.” he sneered.

Hm. I’d have to figure out where we stood, if he was going to be so… half-arsed about this. Was he grateful or dismissive? He couldn’t just ignore Harry’s part in the Chamber, but somewhat remember mine… could he?

Shit. He totally could. Purebloods were all delusional.

But Malfoy and his left without any further trouble, very careful to adhere to the presentation of unity. I myself felt very satisfied in even a small victory, as it hadn’t really been mine — I hadn’t spoken at all, in fact. My firsties had gotten the win themselves. We settled down to the rest of our breakfasts peacefully, and I spotted Dietrich and Harry exchanging significant nods.

Smiling to myself, I knew that the two were too different to really be friends, but they at least seemed to be on amiable terms now.

Dietrich reached over and plucked my disguised Sollertia Augurium from its place next to my toast. He thumbed through the (extremely thin) section I’d translated, the loose pages of parchment bound to the pages they corresponded to, stretching out from the margins with a tap of the wand. That fucking spell had been such a pain to come up with, I’d actually needed Dad’s help for it.
Some mixture of an Undetectable Extension Charm, a *Revelio*, an *Aparecium*, and a lot of wandless shit.

Which I explained to Dietrich and Jay when they asked, poking at the pages.

“See, it’s like the page unfolds out, and then the writing appears? That was the Revealing Charm, but I bastardized it, and-”

“And we’re going to be late to classes, you know.” Jay said gently.

We all craned our heads to look at Dietrich’s watch. He threw us all annoyed glances.

“I am going to have to buy you all watches, aren’t I?” Dietrich sighed.

Lu shrugged. “I’ve broken every single one I’ve owned.”

Harper nodded. “Me too.”

“Yes, but in Lu’s case, he probably tries to punch quaffles with his wrist, and you probably accidentally make yours explode while you’re adjusting the time.” I said, standing and starting out of the Great Hall for potions.

“Lyssie, how’d you know?” Lu asked, grabbing extra toast for me.

I gave him a grateful smile and took what was offered. “Who’s been the one patching your bruises up after you and Harper try to kill each other on brooms?”

“Er…”

“What? I’d never try to kill Lu!”

“Shut up, Harper.”

Harper pouted a little. He bounced right back, our little favorite idiot, but still. I slunk my arm around Harper’s, grinning. “Wanna partner up for potions, Harper?”

He smiled, nodding fervently.

Dietrich, Jay, and Lu all went paper-white.

“Dear Merlin, they’re going to kill someone.”

“YOU TWO ARE NOT ALLOWED TO PARTNER UP IN ANY CLASS, EVER!”

“Pourquoi est-ce ma vie?”

…

Oho. Well this was an interesting situation.

He wasn’t going to speak first. It was very dramatic, how he was standing in the shadows behind me. But Mage Sight did have its uses, and even flipping through *Sollertia Augurium* and translating, I knew someone wandered into my favorite corner of the Slytherin common room.
My firsties were bonding over another trip to Madam Pomfrey’s after another Quidditch accident (honestly, it was the first day back, what the hell were they doing?? …wait, I know the answer: Lu was practicing like mad for the Quidditch try-outs… yeah, that would do it) and I refused to return to her domain more than I had to.

Waiting for them in our dark, comfortable corner in a mostly-empty common room had led to me being stalked.

I smiled to myself. “Did you know that Helvynya Prevett invented sleeping Legilimency? Otherwise known as dream-walking. Merlin, she was a scary woman. I’m only in her very early childhood, but she mentioned it.”

“Sollertia Augurium is one of the most banned texts in Britain.” said a smooth, but young voice.

I chuckled to myself. Gave off a careless-but-competent air, even as I wondered whether my precious book was actually going to be taken away from me. That’d be really… really bad. “Are you going to tell on me?”

“No,” came a sigh. And then a weight shifted on my couch, and there was a boy sitting beside me, body slouched across the couch, legs lifted onto the coffee table. He shifted to meet my eyes, expression confident. “There’s no point to that.”

I carefully made sure I didn’t grit my teeth.

“I carelessly greet Nathaniel Wilkes.” I greeted neutrally.

Behind his frameless glasses, black eyes narrowed a little as he smiled. “Guinevere Weasley.”

Even sitting, I could tell that the boy was taller than any of us firsties, about as tall as Ron was, actually. But he was much thinner, his face all angles and sharp edges, skin almost sickly pale. Very dark hair hung down his long, solemn face, which was just pretty enough for one to overlook the rather sinister smile, if one was an idiot. His colors were very, very Dark. A very deep scarlet, about as dark as my own crimson edges — as Dark as these colors I’d inherited from a fucking baby Dark Lord, hello — dominated most of his colors; it moved deliberately, like mist, creeping around my indigo-crimson, probing my inky magic.

(For weaknesses, maybe.)

There were very few people that I was cautious around at first sight. Nathaniel Wilkes was one.

“What do you want?” I asked my Slytherin year-mate.

(One of the half I hadn’t gathered to my side. He, Sebastian Flint, and Edwin Rosier still followed Malfoy around. It was… acceptable, I thought, though I was always quietly concerned for Harper, who roomed with them.)

“To do well in school, marry my intended, and carry on the name of Wilkes. Like all proper purebloods, of course,” said Wilkes with a little laugh. He pushed up his glasses. “What do you want, Guinevere Weasley?”


Wilkes laughed, then. Fuck, I hated this dodgy-politics-bullshit, especially when I wasn’t prepared beforehand. Gimme a nice duel or a good session of insulting banter or whatever, and I’d be perfectly happy. This? This was plain annoying, and I felt like I was standing in a minefield; one
wrong step and it’d blow up in my face. Wilkes was an actually dangerous opponent, especially since he could cause quite a bit of damage.

(And he had. Dietrich would have been driven away from Hogwarts because of this boy. Harper and Lu would’ve been damn idiots, easily-manipulated little puppets that were no better than Crabbe and Goyle because of this boy. Jay would never speak his mind, never be proud of his gentle qualities even if they were a bit too feminine to ignore because of Wilkes.)

(He was a threat to me and mine, and I disliked being blindsided like this. He never gave indication of hostility towards me, of even noticing my existence, so…)

“So? What do you actually want? It’s not like you’d need tutoring like Lu or Harper. And I actually think you like tearing people to shreds mentally, so you’re not like Jay, either.” I said conversationally, looking at the odd emptiness of the common room.

Hm. Somehow he’d gotten a private meeting with me. Hmmmmmm. Suspicious.

“No, I’m actually a little like you, Weasley, aren’t I? You like tearing people to shreds, too.”

I closed my book. No use trying to concentrate if I had a snake at my throat. “It’s a little fun, yeah,” I admitted, As long as I’m tearing enemies apart, and not mine, of course… “Really, Wilkes, what do you want? Arranging a nice secret meeting in the rare chance I’m alone in the commons.” I smirked. “Are you going to confess?”

Wilkes snorted. “If you’d like me to, I certainly can.”

My smirk widened into something a bit more real. “I demand it in sonnet form.”

Back and forth, banter. See, that was something I could do. Dancing around each other, playing coy (intentionally), being passive-aggressive — I could do it, but I really just would rather get straight to the point. Bloody Gryffindors, they ruined me. Growing up surrounded by people you’d die to keep alive, by people who’d kill for you if they truly had to, and knowing that… Well, it was weird to adjust to Slytherin again, after a summer of that. And no firsties in sight.

(They made me a better Slytherin. If I knew they were behind me, there was no choice but to go forward, right?)

Okay, but the banter was helpful. He was… hostile, not exactly, that much I could tell already, with that tiny exchange. Peaceful colors, no insults that were so bad that I couldn’t look past them (*cough cough Malfoy*). And really, banter was… fun.

I didn’t know what Wilkes wanted, but it was… interesting. Of all the boys, only Dietrich would mouth back at me like this. Harper was too kind and sometimes sarcasm and wit flew over his head; Lu got bored and just wanted to go flying (Quidditch nut); Jay would smile a little and expertly change the subject to something easier.

Don’t get me wrong, they were all good lads. But in the same way I liked getting into little snarling fests with Malfoy — not because I liked the little fuck, but because it was amusing — I was enjoying Wilkes.

Huh. That’s dangerous. I like people really easily. Shit. I mean, that was made obvious by me accidentally befriend a Horcrux, but geez. I had to plug up that particular weakness; fuck, I was a rubbish Slytherin alone.

“Tell me, Weasley,” Wilkes said after a quiet lull, “does your family know you’re Dark?”
“I’m a bloodtraitor, Wilkes.”

He smiled a Cheshire grin. “Ah, but you are Dark. It’s fun to pick people apart, right? You like conquering. You like winning. Do your bloodtraitor brothers know how easily you threatened to snap Parkinson’s bones?”

My Occlumency shut down on any sort of enjoyment I was feeling. I felt myself ice over. “I warn you now, Wilkes,” I said softly, “You’ve already hurt me and mine. Touch my brothers or my sister, and I will make life very difficult for you.”

Wilkes’s lips curled. “A poor attempt at a veiled threat.”

I laughed coldly. “Veiled? As if I care. Touch me or mine, Wilkes, and I’ll fucking end you.”

He blinked, and then studied me for a moment. The piercing gaze from behind his glasses had unnerved more than one Slytherin as far as I’d seen, but I was goddamn serious. My firsties were snakes, and they’d be able to handle themselves now, but my siblings wouldn’t be able to handle Wilkes’ caustic tongue and sharp intelligence and keen eyes. (Ginny especially… Ginny, who reacted so easily and acted on emotion… Percy, maybe, whose pride was comparable to a Slytherin and wouldn’t be able to handle Wilkes’ insults…)

This boy cut people apart, performed vicious “pranks” and reduced Dietrich into a mess last year. Now that I knew Dietrich as well as I knew Luna, I knew that was a lot. My Second was an Occlumens and had been trained to be a pureblood lord since he was born. He took that very seriously, and for Wilkes to have cracked his calm mask in a little over a few weeks, first-year status notwithstanding…

Wilkes was dangerous, and dangerous things were dealt with if they tried to come near my family.

“Well?” I asked, not liking his observant silence.

Wilkes broke out into a rather creepy smile. It was definitely on purpose. “In one week, Malfoy plans to start debasing you. Anything to make you look bad, so no one looks to you. He’s bullied the first-years already, but it would be very simple to get them to support you. Blaise Zabini, Theodore Nott, and Daphne Greengrass might stand aside, but Nott respects you well enough. Most of Slytherin does, because there is no way the new scar on Potter’s arm is anything but dangerous, and he’s told his House that you helped him kill the creature that made it.”

I frowned suspiciously. “And what price am I paying for this information?”

“I’m not an idiot, Weasley. You’re poised to take Malfoy down. The arrogant child believes you too Gryffindorish to use the Life Debt, which I suppose is true, so he thinks if he reaffirms his position but treats you courteously this month, all will be well. But you won’t be satisfied with that… right?”

Ah, so that was Malfoy’s game. Well, then.

“Surprise, surprise, Wilkes. It was never my intention to take the parvus potesta. But I suppose, since I can, I will. I’ll certainly treat my snakes better than he does. And it’s a pain, to be dodging Tripping Jinxes and hiding my things behind shitey wards all the time.”

Wilkes chuckled. “The sixth-years are very impatient.”

I nodded. Damn pranks weren’t devastating — I lived with the demon twins, nothing was devastating at this point — but the sixth-years were persistent.
“Bole and Derrick, I know.” Then I blinked at him, wondering how on earth he managed to shut down the common room entrance for this long. Ten minutes wasn’t that much, I realize, but still. “So? You never answered. What do you want, Wilkes?”

“Don’t be thick, Weasley,” Wilkes said with just a smidge of irritation, “Just… don’t forget that I helped. And that I can still help.”

“Ah. You want to ride my proverbial coat-tails. How Slytherin.”

“Not just that. I’ve watched how you operate, Weasley. When you rise, I want to be treated well. I, of course, can give you everything on every enemy you’ve made in exchange. I was one of them. Wouldn’t it be a boon to know how Malfoy duels now, since his father has groomed and polished him to competence over the summer?”

I narrowed my eyes, watching Wilkes. He wasn’t asking for non-aggression when I tore Malfoy from his throne, he was asking for a place in my court, to complete the analogy. On my say-so, my firsties would be grudgingly fine with taking Wilkes into our group, because they trusted me and understood the implications of having a resource as clever and devastating as him. But call me Gryffindorish, it didn’t sit right with me that the tormentor of my boys would get away scotch-free, just because he had what I wanted.

My boys deserved more than that. The people I called me and mine deserved everything in the world.

“I don’t know what you did to set up this private meeting, but you’ll be slipping away again.” I said, voice hard and eyes narrowed, “You’re going to meet me in the abandoned classroom a corner-turn away from Snape’s office. You’re going to meet all of us. And if the first words from your mouth aren’t a polite apology, I have never needed anything other than what I have, to steal a throne from a stupid prat.”

Wilkes twitched, paused, and then — very slowly and jerkily — nodded. “Not so heavy a price, compared to what I definitely would have done, were our roles reversed.”

Were our roles reversed, Wilkes would’ve been a monster. I have no doubt about it. If I disliked him more than I already did, as part of the consequence of messing with mine, I might’ve easily been that monster, too. I was Dark, after all, and I did so like destroying threats.

I grinned, and it was more like a baring of my teeth. “Pleasure doing business with you, Wilkes.”

He smiled, no teeth showing, but still managed to mirror my own passive hostility. “I have a feeling our business is far from concluded, Weasley.”

…

“Bloody political machinations.” I muttered.

Next to me, Ginny giggled. “You like being a Slytherin, though. Admit it!”

I smiled into my book, which was covering my face. “Sure, sure.”

It wasn’t hot — this far up north coupled with memories of the Mojave desert made it impossible
for me to call this sunny weather hot — but it wasn’t humid, either, despite Ginny and I sitting on a
tree near the lake, so it was good. The grass was longer here than at home, more wild and thick
with how much magic Hogwarts was giving off, and it was also softer. Luna was ankle-deep in
the lake, looking for particularly shapely pebbles to offer to the dabberblimps.

So early into the school year, and I was already tired and in need of a break from Slytherin. Those
came in many forms: the demon twins, writing to Percy and my other older brothers, exploring the
forest with Luna, and now, chatting with Ginny. She herself sometimes needed a break from her
Gryffies, she had admitted to me; as much as she liked them, it was sometimes odd for her to
interact with girls who weren’t as thoughtful and quiet as I was. Or so she said. I took it as the
compliment she didn’t mean to say, of course.

There was a loud SPLASH! and Luna squealed, and I forced myself up to see if she was alright.

“Luna?” I called.

“This one, Guinevere! The dabberblimps will love it!” Luna said delightedly.

I grinned at her while Ginny snorted. She and Luna weren’t particularly friendly — to my sighing
worry — but they interacted politely enough. Ginny used to be annoyed with Luna’s oddities,
which I suppose was understandable for a child who couldn’t comprehend why their friend was
suddenly different. But now she felt somewhat bemusingly amused at Luna, and seemed to think
she was still a very sweet and gentle soul underneath the odd. Luna, for her part, remembered
Ginny fondly and their childhood friendship wistfully, and treated Ginny — as she treated most
everyone — with amiable politeness.

“You would know best, Luna.” Ginny responded with a slight smile.

“Luna, you should make a book of all the creatures these plebeians don’t believe in.” I laughed,
tucking Sollertia Augurium — which still was glamoured to look like The Monster Book of
Monsters, complete with growling and everything — into my bag.

Then I stripped off my robes, rolled up the sleeves, and starting peeling off my sneakers and the
thigh-high socks (decorated with flying pigs, because Luna) so I could join Luna in the water. The
spot we’d commandeered was popular because this was one of the few sections of the lake that
was beachy rather than muddy or rocky, and the sand sifted between my toes as I waded over. A
splash behind me told me Ginny was joining us, probably with a fond roll of her eyes, and for a
while we simply marveled at odds and ends we scavenged from the water.

Ginny was glancing around, and she looked sorely disappointed by the amount of people
wandering about the grounds. I knew for a fact she was thinking about our childhood summers at
the river and the pond, where I’d wandlessly start water fights and made bubbles of water float in
the air for her and my brothers’ amusement.

I smirked at her obvious longing. “No wandless with this many witnesses, dear sister.” I tutted.

A red brow rose. “Wouldn’t you like to be thought of as powerful, if you’re about to beat that
blonde ponce’s arse?”

“Keep your cards close to your chest, Ginny,” I said wryly, “because you’ll never know when
you’ll need them later.”

*Crimson eyes and pale skin and a smile that stretched too wide, long fingers stroking a black-
scaled snake lovingly-but-not. He did not know how to love — the chance passed long ago —*
crimson and indigo and black and silver and — “We are alike, you and I…” came the hiss, the promise.

Stop.

I knew when I would need them, later.

Ginny had that tense look that told me she knew I started Seeing. It was full of promise and protectiveness, her fingers twitching, like she was just stopping herself from bundling me up in blankets and hugging and hiding me away. My whole family got like that, and it was cute as hell. The fluffy warmth breathing into my chest was familiar, and no less beloved for it.

I gave her a reassuring grin. “Just a dizzy spell, Gin.”

She nodded slowly, still a little unsure. I didn’t blame her; after the Chamber last year, our first year, she and everyone else were cautious with me.

Luna cut in cheerfully, “You’ve added a new member to your swarm!”

I blinked at Luna’s non-sequitur, frowning. “What?”

“The shadow on the wall.” Luna explained, rather unhelpfully.

My frown deepened. Who did I know who… Oh. “You mean Wilkes? Oh, Luna, he’s… on probation. I haven’t been able to arrange when he’ll be apologizing, but if my swarm doesn’t accept him, it’s not growing.”

Luna smiled knowingly. “Wrackspurts are making your brain go fuzzy.”

I sighed. “Damn, and I’ve been trying so hard to keep them away and everything.”

My silvery friend laughed. “The more you try to keep them from you, Guinevere, the more they’ll flock! It’s natural, you know. Dark or Light or anything in between, bees are drawn to the brightest flowers.” She skipped in the water towards me, and gently tugged on a lock of my coppery-red hair. “And you are very, very bright.”

I blinked, giving Luna a helpless smile. “You’re going to make me blush, you know.”

Luna beamed. “Red and red and red again. It suits you, Guinevere.”

Red pouring out of Bill’s ravaged throat — faded blue eyes — sobbing silvery-blue, pale hair, manicured hands clutching into blood-crusted robes — “Mon adoré, mon adoré, ne me quitte pas…” she cried out.

Red pouring out of George’s face, blackening skin, thrashing limbs, pain — “Is he going to be okay? Is he going to be okay?” — wand pointed, flick, jab, slash through the air, snarling voice — “Sectumsempra!”

Red pouring out of Fred’s veins, arms covered in it, crushed heart, squished lungs, shattered ribs like shrapnel — “You’re joking, Perce!” — delighted blue eyes, grinning mouth, angled towards the broken sky filled with smoke and magic and — “FRED! NO!”

Stop.

Hands were wrapped around my wrist. I blinked in surprise.
“Ginny?”

That hard, tense look. Worry in her eyes. Fear. Pity. Sympathy. Those things. Oh, and love, too. Always that. Even when she was angry, there was always that, pulsing in her colors. “Have you been meditating?” she asked.

I gave a faint smile. “I’ve been trying. It’s been a chaotic few days.”

Luna nudged my shoulder with hers, and there were ripples in the water as she did. “It’s the number twelve, you know. That’s a powerful number.”

True. Very true. Ginny and I turned twelve only a few weeks ago, and until I was mind-fucked by dementors, I’d been Occluding and meditating often, since Sollertia Augurium required a lot of mental fortitude. (Translation, for fuck’s sake, I can’t believe I was afraid of it.) Then school was a thing, and I had to cut back down to my first-year meditation schedule, which was a half-hour before bed and nothing more.

I think I figured it out. “Mm, I have to adjust. I’ll have to tell Alby.”

The shaking in my hands was gone. I hadn’t even realized it was there, steadied by the warm fingers of my twin. She very slowly started to guide us to shore, Luna linking her arm with mine and Ginny’s hand still delicately wrapped around my wrist. She could probably feel my heartbeat, echoing through that artery.

On shore, our feet were coated with sand and I had to tap my wand on all of our toes to smooth and dry them. My indigo was gentle as I waved my wand and murmured spells, as if it was trying to make up for my distress.

God, how I loved The Magick of Man-Hunters. One of the first things I learned how to do was limit my Mage Sight extremely, drawing a boundary around me; I couldn’t hear the golden song of Hogwarts, which while lovely, was extremely distracting. Now, all I felt was myself, Luna, and Ginny.

(I owed that cambion quite a bit. The blood and memories were entirely worth it.)

...  

Our favorite abandoned classroom was just a bit away from Snape’s favorite dungeons, for many reasons. The first was that Snape, being the good Slytherin Head of House that he was, didn’t care about what we did as long as we didn’t get caught and it wasn’t too morally apprehensible. The second was, based on the first, that meant if we had any questions or whatever, we could go to him; which we’d done, last year, though I normally liked sending Harper or Lu just because they annoyed Snape the most and they loved that he never punished them because he seemed oddly soft on me, and he was well aware that they belonged to me.

There was also the fact that I warded the shit out of that classroom, making it rather safe, and we actually treated it like our own personal common room. Some of the empty cupboards were filled with the boys’ things: snacks for Harper and Lu, Jay’s drawing paper and charcoal, Dietrich’s favorite books and some of the knick-knacks we gave him for his birthday and Christmas last year, my journals filled with profiles and notes and such...
Anyways, it was ours, since we didn’t have a safe place in the common room with our being on the outs with the current parvus potesta, so the abandoned classroom was where we just… went. When the common room was filled with people who were on orders to make life hard for us, or at least a little uncomfortable, it was where we hid away. (Not that hiding too much was advisable; we had to project ourselves as threats, so we did go to the commons and the Great Hall and such, often.)

I knew my boys were there already, and as I’d been leaving Potions, I saw Wilkes slip away. Likely we’d all talk about our next move, I’d get them all caught up and such, right now. So I followed quietly, giving Ginny’s hand a squeeze — she was perceptive, my sister, knowing that something was up when most of my year-mates disappeared and I looked a bit more grim-faced that usual — to reassure her.

Only, as I turned the corner to follow after Wilkes, there was someone else waiting for me.

I narrowed my eyes at the sight.

“Zabini.” I greeted cautiously.

The dark-haired boy nodded imperiously. “Weasley.” He took in my squared shoulders, my hand twitching towards my wand, hidden under my skirt. “It’s not a trap. I asked Wilkes if he knew a time I might speak with you; only speak.”

Well, then. Nice of Wilkes to let me know, and make sure I didn’t think he was backstabbing me.

Then again, Zabini — Blaise, that is — had been pretty neutral lately, no doubt because of Josephine, so I supposed I shouldn’t have reacted as strongly? Ah, it isn’t as if Blaise Zabini would be offended that I thought of him as a threat. That was a rather nice compliment, honestly. Dismissiveness was much more insulting in Slytherin; probably life in general, too.

I relaxed just a little. “What, then? I have things to do.”

Zabini looked over his shoulder, at the shut door that was separating us and my boys, plus Wilkes. It was an open secret, that my camp made often occupied this particular room. Just as it was an open secret that I was an amateur Warder, and my brother was a Cursebreaker.

(No one bothered our shit, not after I actually kicked Parkinson’s arse for stealing a diary.)

“I felt it would be in our best interests to clarify something,” replied Zabini.

“Draco isn’t… Weasley, do meet expectation and not capitalize on this cruelly, won’t you?”

Capitalize on this cruelly, for fuck’s sake. Zabini got more polished this summer, it seems. A bit more stuffy, too.

I nodded, not wanting to piss off a hopefully neutral entity. “There are lines in my world, Zabini. As long as you don’t cross mine, I’m not the type to cross yours. Please make sure that Malfoy and Parkinson know that, won’t you?”

“Draco understands that, Weasley. He’s a pureblood heir, not an idiot.”

“But Parkinson.”
Zabini sighed again, dropping that dash of defensiveness I’d drawn out with Malfoy’s name. They really were good friends, those two, weren’t they? “Pansy is... learning. She’s not an heir; she’s not even a firstborn.”

“Spoiled, then.” I muttered, annoyed. I hadn’t known Parkinson had siblings, but that explained a little more about her naively superior mindset. For a moment, I felt a little bad for Malfoy, being (probably) betrothed to that idiotic bitch.

“Spoiled. But that isn’t the issue at hand,” said Zabini, “I’d just like you to know that Draco hasn’t forgotten what you did for him last year. He simply... has been persuaded not to do anything about it, along with actually not knowing what to do about it. It’s not quite a Life Debt, but he does understand he owes you something.”

I smiled very, very sweetly. Emulating Jay. “Do tell dear, dear Draco that I appreciate his efforts to show me his gratitude.”

Zabini’s slight twitch of the lips betrayed his underlying amusement. He shook his head. “He will be kinder, you know. He’s already trying not to provoke you as much this year, and it will only be better if you would back down, stop trying to challenge him.”

“But my family is fair game?” I asked, thinking of how Malfoy was teasing my brother, and Harry.

“You can’t expect him to drop everything to curry your favor, Weasley.”

I twitched. But I nodded. “Yes, I know that. I’m just... irritated. Irrationally, really, because I know what sort of person Malfoy is. Ignore me.” I sighed. I looked up at Zabini. “Listen. You’re... always trying to patch things up for Malfoy, aren’t you? Trying to explain him to me so I don’t cross those lines, right? Oh, don’t look at me like that- Playing on the emotions and morality of a Gryffindor-raised kid, that’s a sound tactic. I get it.”

“You’re giving the game away, Weasley.” Zabini said, smiling lightly but looking tense.

I shrugged. “I don’t really care. Learning about my... competitors, in any way, can only help. I have my boys to temper out my Gryffindor impulses. But anyways, Zabini, I understand that you’re trying to stop me from challenging him, yeah? Well, I can’t.”

“He can lessen the pressure on you.”

“The sixths will still hate me. The fifths will join in on whatever prank is up next. The firsts will grow up learning from them. And our potesta will still suffer, because Malfoy doesn’t know how to lead, and you haven’t yet convinced your cousin to teach him — and you probably never will, if it’s been this long and it’s gotten this bad.”

Zabini’s eyes glinted. “You’re challenging him.”

“Eventually,” I lied casually, “But I know he went through a hell of a lot of training over the summer, just as Dietrich did. I’m not moving until I know I can win, Zabini.”

He relaxed minutely at that, and really... that meant whatever Wilkes told him, Zabini didn’t know he was a traitor. He probably hadn’t seen Wilkes enter my domain, which was...

A very, very good sign. Props to Wilkes, the sneaky bastard.

“You understand I’ll have to warn Draco about that.”
I snorted. “Whatever, Zabini. I’d do the same. Dietrich would do the same. I’m not a bloody moron, you know.”

He smiled a little, taking a step or two away. “I’ve always thought it was a shame Draco made an enemy of you so quickly. If you had taken him under your wing the way you took your second-years? You and I, being a Second pairing?”

Haha. The ‘what if I’d been born into a Death Eater family instead’ gimmick, huh? That’s… honestly a scary thought. I was already quite a ruthless little fucker, for being a twelve-year-old girl born into a Light family. If whatever crazy protective instincts I had latched onto a Death Eater family and not mine?

Yeah… Can you imagine me evil? I asked Harry, once.

If I was, like… Crabbe’s little sister. And I kept dreaming about his death via Fiendfyre. Or something like that, and then I got really crazy and Dark and… Fuuuuuuck. That was a horrible thought. Nope.

“I can’t imagine Malfoy would ever have not provoked the Slytherin Weasley.” I said, instead of betraying my musings on the whimsicality of reincarnation.

Zabini chuckled. “See you around, Weasley. It’s refreshing, that you listen before dismissing ideas out of hand.”

“Careful, Zabini. Your bitterness is bleeding through.”

He waved me off and then turned the corner, disappearing.

One hurdle down, another one behind closed doors to go. I wondered how they were all doing, with Wilkes released in their midst… I might be entering our favorite classroom to a bloodbath. Or a fight, in the middle of becoming a bloodbath. There was a lot of bitterness and coldness that came out, when Wilkes was mentioned — which he wasn’t, not often. Better not to think about the boy who somehow managed to psychologically bully all of them at one point or another, some more than others and some without any idea until they were brought into an actual, supportive group of friends by a nosy redhead with a bleeding heart.

My wards recognized me, I could feel a slight warmth tingle at my fingers when I touched the doorknob. It was as good as a ‘Welcome home!’ from wards as weak as these, really, when the magic wasn’t sentient enough to be considered as such. I opened the door hesitantly, wondering when on earth dramatic encounter after dramatic encounter wasn’t going to be my everyday anymore.

(Probably when I was dead. Again. Tends to happen when one is a plaything of Fate or Destiny or whatever fucking power decided to reincarnate me.)

…

I could’ve cut the tension with a Diffindo, honestly.

They were Slytherins, so obviously I’d never walk into a heated argument without them noticing. They heard the door and immediately shut their mouths, thought I was obvious by the way Wilkes
was smirking to hide a nervous edge in his bearing and all eyes on him were narrowed angrily that they were not getting along while I was having a wonderful conversation with Zabini.

This would be a much less wonderful conversation. I could tell.

“Nice of you to join the party, Weasley.” Wilkes started.

I had a strange feeling that if that opening comment had been even a smidge insulting, Dietrich would’ve punched him in the face. Which was telling, because Dietrich did not punch things. Which was also telling, because when I first met Dietrich, he was punching things because of Wilkes. In this classroom, in fact.

Nostalgic.

“Were you waiting for me, Wilkes?” I asked pointedly.

*You don’t need a minder to apologize, do you?*

Wilkes twitched a little. He smiled, about to open his mouth to reply something sassy-


He stiffened. It was as I suspected, really: he was using my lack of being there to poke and prod at my boys, and expecting I wouldn’t do much about it. I’d say testing the waters, but this was more like him upturning the boat just because it was his knee-jerk reaction. That was the thing with the Dark, wasn’t it? Our first instinct was to destroy.

Wilkes turned to the others, jaw clenched. But he bowed shallowly, at the waist, towards all of them. They looked shocked at the gesture, Dietrich hiding it more than most; it was Dietrich who Wilkes looked at when he spoke.

“I apologize,” he said quietly, managing to keep most of the stiffness from his voice, “Last year, I did… cruel things. To all of you, in different ways. I apologize for the inconveniences you all suffered because of it. I am here, now, in an effort to make up for such stupid decisions, on my part.”

Well.

That was… very polite. And it was clear he wasn’t sorry, not really, but that he was an ally now.

But that’s what I asked for. If Wilkes lied to them about being sorry he had enjoyed their torment, about being sorry for hurting their feelings or whatever, they never would’ve believed it. It’d be *insulting*. And that’s not what the goal here was. I wanted Wilkes’ pride to be hurt, but not enough that he’d retract his offer of alliance; I wanted my boys to see that hurt pride, to see the difference between then and now, to be avenged in this tiny way; and I wanted them to know that this was an offer of alliance on his part, and that the apology was always going to happen even if they objected to the other.

If Dietrich demanded Wilkes go, that’s what would happen.

“*You’re only sorry you got caught, Wilkes.*” said Jay quietly, “*That our Lyssie became bigger than you could ever be, and she demanded this of you.*”

Wilkes smiled sardonically. “*Why, Rookwood. I am* a Slytherin, you know. *Why would I be sorry*
for anything else?"

“Maybe you should be sorry for being a horrible git that treated us all like pawns,” Lu hissed.

“Only the very stupid ones were pawns, Vaisey. Rookwood and Bastion were pushed aside instead.”

I stepped forward, making them all freeze at my angry expression. “Enough.” I looked to my boys. “You’ve all figured it out, I hope? That potential ally I mentioned this morning, it’s Wilkes. He’d offering us an easier way to take the parvus potesta seat, if he gets a position in our camp.”

“But we can say no.” Jay said, flickering his green eyes at Wilkes hesitantly.

“Yes,” I said, nodding, “And I won’t take anything but a unanimous yes, to go through with it. I was never a direct victim of his, so I leave it to you all.”

Dietrich glanced at me. “What is your vote?”

Wilkes was quiet, awaiting judgement. Cool-headed, it seemed, but I saw the anxious fidgeting of his fingers, behind his back. Made me remember he was just a kid, this one, even if he seemed like so much more when he was just a non-entity.

“I would use him,” I said, “But you know how I am. Gryffindor-raised. Impulsive. Emotional. You know it all. If I say yes, I need you all behind me to balance that out, because we know I’m prone to manipulation without you all.”

Not damning information, of course. That was known. Dietrich met my gaze, though, and I was sure memories of the diary passed between us. It was luck, I think we both knew, that I hadn’t been drained of life and magic last year. That I had been just the type of person a half-crazed Dark Lord in the making would have liked enough to not kill right away.

Luck.

“Yes.”

We all looked up, startled. The voice had been… Harper’s. His blue eyes were trained on Wilkes firmly, mouth set into a thoughtful frown. When he noticed us all looking at him, he gazed straight at me, quirking his lips a little.

“I vote yes, Lyssie.” Harper said, smiling wider when I blinked at him in confusion, “If you never gave Lu a second chance, we wouldn’t have him, now, would we? And if Wilkes pisses us all off enough, I know you’ll protect us first.”

I smiled a little. That was… a lot of trust. A lot of trust, from the boy who had also been a second-chancer, really.

There was a frustrated groan. Lu. He glared at all of us. “Dammit. You bloody know I can’t vote no after Harper’s said that!” He turned to me, looking defiant. “You took a chance on me, too, so I suppose I’d be a git if I stopped you from it, even if it was for a little bastard like Wilkes.”

Wilkes made an affronted sound, but none of my boys glanced at him.

Jay sighed. “I think we know my vote. I trust Lyssie, and…” He glanced at Wilkes, eyes hardening and adopting that little gleam of his that meant nothing good. “Step out of line, Wilkes. Step out of line, hurt my friends, and you’ll find I don’t tremble, not when I’m casting curses.”
A past remark was referenced there, not that I understood.

This left Dietrich, who we all glanced at. He was the deciding factor.

He was the one who almost dropped out of Hogwarts, just to get away from the cruelties Wilkes devised. Lu might’ve been the physical bully, Harper might’ve been the hanger-on, Jay might’ve been the enabler, and Rosier and Flint might’ve been the extra muscle… But it was Wilkes who made sure Dietrich was questioning his worth, back then. Who would’ve ruined him, if Dietrich hadn’t found a sanctuary in me.

He didn’t take his eyes off of Wilkes the entire time, watching, fingers twirling his wand in his handsthreateningly.

“I do not like it.” said Dietrich.

“Then-” I started.

“But I will accept it.”

We all did a double-take at that. I saw Wilkes’ jaw drop, for a moment, before he recovered his smug look.

“Dietrich?” Jay asked.

Dietrich looked at Jay, glaring without much heat. “You are level-headed, Julius.” He looked at Harper. “You are sharp when it comes to people, Harper.” Then Lu. “And you are usually much more vengeful, Lucas.” He returned his gaze to Wilkes. “If you all agree to allow this petit baiseur into our camp temporarily, I cannot be the one to disagree.”

Wilkes’ lips were curling into a very triumphant-looking smirk. But Dietrich stepped forward, wand in hand. The other three boys took a step back, looking at the near trembling anger in their Second’s frame.


Damn him, and damn Harper, and damn Wilkes, too, apparently. Maybe Jay, since he seemed to pick up more of that than Lu and I did. Why did everyone speak bloody French? The only thing I got was that it was a threat, and I wished I knew what it meant.

Wilkes, of course, only smiled. “Assez effrayant, n'est-ce pas? Understood, Second.” He looked at me, tilting his head just enough to look careless despite the metaphorical wands at his throat. “That’s done with, then, Weasley. So? Shall we plan the downfall of an undeserving king?”
Here's our weekly chapter, friends! XD It's a bit of a long one, and the reason for that is: I've been editing and adding and generally tearing the third arc apart. So if it reads choppy, that's why; I've had to dissect future chapters, put bits into earlier ones, write entirely new scenes... It's been a bit hectic. :D

So, with that in mind, do bear with me. :) Also, celebrating, as of right this second, 422 kudos and 179 bookmarks! And man, there's a lot of comments, which I realize if half me just replying to you all. :) But yes! Thank you, dear readers, for your support! Hope you enjoy! :D

“You look exhausted.” Jay said worriedly.

I tied his braid in place, then started brushing my fingers through my own short locks. Jay’s, Dietrich’s, and Lu’s room was neat and orderly, which was more than I expected for 12-year-old boys. Harper had intruded (didn’t hang around much in his own room since he wasn’t on good terms with Flint or Rosier), of course, sitting on Dietrich’s bed while our fake French friend was trying to teach him — patiently — how to tie a proper tie. Lu was glaring at the other occupant of the room as fiercely as he could manage.

Wilkes was also here, as it was also his room (he was the Harper of the room, never present when the others were, or so I was told), and we were preparing to… well, basically, to fight it out with Malfoy. Though his apology and admittance into our personal space was accepted… well, everyone but Harper and I treated him with a distant disdain, aware of their grudges. He was sitting neatly, reading a very Dark text — looked longingly at my *Sollertia Augurium*, but hell would freeze over before I trusted an enemy with a book I’d literally paid blood for — and grinning unnervingly at a twitchy Lu every now and then.

“I’m fine,” I replied to Jay, “Had a bit of a late night, but fine.”

Lu looked over, hazel-blue eyes narrowed. He was nervous, I could tell with the way he ran his fingers through his caramel hair. “Do you think he’ll duel you? Or have his duel one of ours? I hate this quiet bollocks.”

Harper laughed. “I want to duel one of the minions!”

But Nathaniel Wilkes’ voice cut through our warming atmosphere. “It is likely it will be another duel in the end, but first he’ll try to overpower you through words and wit.” We all turned to look...
at Wilkes, paying close attention. He closed his book softly. “His father’s influence is strong, but
the quality of your camp and your actions last year counterbalance that advantage. Slytherins will
be watching, and as long as your prove yourself more mentally capable and more magically
powerful, even after his summer of heirship training, then the parvus potesta is yours.”

Dietrich scowled at Wilkes reflexively, then spoke out, “We have the Head Girl’s alliance.”

“Because she desires the potestas to return to what they were. The magnus being seventh, sixth,
fifth, and fourth; the fourths still follow the parvus and it degrades her ability to lead.” Wilkes
reasoned, shrugging elegantly.

“Breaking the potestas was stupid anyway,” I said bluntly, “The fourth-year’s grades are suffering.
Everyone in the parvus was suffering under him. Except for us, but we don’t count, and haven’t
since Parkinson tried to duel me.”

Wilkes grinned. “A wonderful duel, Weasley.”

“Thanks.” I said flatly, not trusting that suspicious-as-fuck smirk of his.

Lu scowled, hard. “You’re one creepy prat, aren’t you, Wilkes?”

Wilkes simply smiled wider. “And you’re rather stupid, for being Sorted into Slytherin. Tell me,
Vaisey, does it grate you, when you hear the whispers about how idiotic you were last year? You
were the leader of us, and now you follow the whims of a bloodtraitor.”

Lu whipped out his wand, fury in his eyes. Wilkes’ wand was already in his hands. Lu was
directing an angry glower at Wilkes anyway, hand pale with how he clutched his wand. He bit out,
“Don’t talk about shit you don’t know, Wilkes.”

“I know perfectly well how stupid you are, Vaisey.” Wilkes replied, smirking.

Lu’s eyes flashed.

It was Jay’s voice, however, that said decisively, “Your jealousy is showing, Wilkes.”

Wilkes’ impassive brown eyes turned on Jay. “And what do you have, Rookwood, that I don’t?”

“My friends.” Jay answered, his gaze cool.

Dietrich was next. “Something you appear to lack,” he said vehemently, “Why else would you do
this, betray Malfoy and his, like so? You mocked me once for being alone, Wilkes. Do you not
find it amusing that our roles are reversed?”

I saw it. Behind Dietrich’s steel-blue strength, Jay’s determined moss-green, Harper’s fretting teal,
and Lu’s orange-red fury, there was a flicker of deep scarlet. It flinched, thrummed with a flash of
hurt, and when pain reached down into the core, that’s when I knew this was enough.

“Shut the hell up, all of you,” I said coldly, silencing the room and watching all of the colors go a
little bit still with surprise. I turned to Lu, though I addressed all my firsties. “You agreed to his
alliance. Stop provoking him when we’re about to face Malfoy.” Then I looked to Wilkes, who still
had a cruel smile resting lightly on his lips. “And you. You know better than to irritate a room full
of allies. I made it clear, before: We do not need you. But we accepted you anyways, and I expect a
certain level of decorum.”

My firsties inclined their heads, bowing to me. I was their leader, even if I preferred to act like their
friend first, and they would respect my wishes. Wilkes, on the other hand, met my eyes challengingly, studying whatever was in them. Then he nodded stiffly.

“Sorry,” he muttered.

Times like these, when I had to bare my teeth at our errant, newest member and he backed down, I remembered he was just a twelve-year-old. He made it really, really easy to forget that sometimes. They all did, and I’m sure my own (questionable) maturity skewed my senses even more. Well, nothing for it.

I glanced at my boys, sans Harper. They copied his stiff motion and similarly gave grudging apologies.

With a sigh, I stood up from Jay’s bed and started to straighten myself up. My uniform was neat, sleeves rolled up and pinned up at my elbows so my forearms were bare, socks pulled up to my thighs (black, with a pattern of grapes, because Luna) and charmed so they wouldn’t slip. My hair was still short and rugged, but I could see past the bangs, my face set. And then my wand, my elder-and-dragon wand, thrumming in my grip, slipped into one of my socks so only the handle was exposed (which was exactly why I switched from leggings to socks).

The boys were watching me, similarly standing and neatening themselves, getting ready. I couldn’t really blame them for their argument; all of them were tense. We were confident in our ability to beat Malfoy last year but the opportunity never presented itself, and he was a Malfoy, so he’d probably trained his arse off this summer, especially after the Chamber incident. That, and having a hostile in the room — many of them remembering what Wilkes had said or done, still — and it just was inevitable that it almost came to blows.

I myself was a extremely untrusting of the kid. But I kept in mind that after Parkinson’s duel, he seemed to back off from my boys, and that my camp had all agreed that he could be put on probation. He’d done no lasting harm. Nothing I hadn’t fixed, anyways. Or smoothed over, a little.

“It’s time.” I said drawing my Mage Sight to myself, tightening my boundary and cutting out the magics’ song to barely a whisper, white noise, “Just as we planned, alright?”

“Take the parvus potesta seat immediately,” Dietrich confirmed, nodding and stepping into my right flank. Where the Second belonged.

“It’s the afternoon, and everyone will be gathered. Malfoy will walk in to either see you take your seat, or just barely after.” Wilkes confirmed, taking the left flank.

(That spot belonged to Harper, in truth, but we’d discussed it. It was a big blow to Malfoy’s powerbase to blatantly show Wilkes as being one of my camp, and the higher, the better. Harper acquiesced easily, though his blue eyes sharply watched Wilkes; my curly-headed friend was very aware of our odd-man-out, though he — carefully — never confronted him. Even if he wanted to, which I’m sure he did; Harper’s sweet disposition was balanced out with his exposure to the petty and aggressive Lu, I think.)

Jay would position himself by Dietrich, wand in his hand. He was our best duelist, even if he was a gentle-hearted pacifist, so Jay would be on the outside. “I’ll remain standing,” he confirmed, nodding to all of us, jade-colored eyes blazing with determination.

Harper and Lu would shadow Wilkes. To show that we didn’t quite trust him, though he was certainly ours.
“Ready, Lys,” said Lu, who was obviously avoiding looking at Wilkes.

“We’ve got your back, Lys. This’ll be really stylish.” Harper said, laughing a little.

I rolled my eyes. “Slytherin is all about posturing and dramatics, and this is a statement. It’s a bloody pain, but we are trying to show we are better than anyone under fifteen. Snobby masks on, then? Let’s go.”

Harper laughed again, and we strode out to take Slytherin with a bang.

…

My smile was all teeth. Dietrich’s expression was coldly haughty, as usual when he put up his pureblood mask guard. Harper was grinning, seemingly unaware of the tension; playing the idiot that so many little fucks mocked him as. Lu had a condescending look about his eyes, which sharply scanned the common room. Jay was gently smiling, though the depths of his eyes were cold. Wilkes was smiling, too, and it’s just as empty as it normally was.

(They made a terrifying picture, my boys… I couldn’t wait to see what sort of powerhouses they’d become when we grew up.)

I had my legs crossed, a book in my lap, but I was chatting about Herbology and Care of Magical Creatures with Harper, who was sitting on the coffee table corner, twisted around to talk to me. Dietrich was lounging against the arm of the sofa at my right, reading Magical Drafts and Potions, conversing quietly with Jay who was standing near him, wand in his hands. Wilkes was to my left, wand flicking at a ball floating in the air lazily, Lu watching and attempting to copy the movement; they played friendly pretty well, it seemed, which was telling because those two were the ones who butt heads the most — a side effect of being pseudo-leader and pseudo-Second and then parting on unfriendly terms, I suppose.

But. They were all playing nice. And the rest of the House was watching, hiding in their favorite corners and sitting at other couches, speaking to each other and chattering but with their eyes following our movements.

Head Girl Zabini was in the magnus and her smile had gone particularly feral when I sat down in the parvus spot. We had exchanged a look and a nod when I’d gotten settled, and her black eyes had been shining with excitement. I really did like her; more so because she supported me.

(I wouldn’t forget the helpful hints she’d dropped over the months I’d known her. I wouldn’t forget how, sometimes, sevenths and sixths would mysteriously apologize to me when they’d pulled something and I was particularly stressed about it.)

The first years and third years didn’t dare come up to us for homework help, like the fifths and sixths and sevenths did for Zabini. That was the role of the potesta leaders, not that Malfoy performed his role well. They kept track of everyone in their potesta and made sure to direct students to where they needed help, or tutored them personally. They also were usually the liaisons between students and professors, mediators between arguments, referees of duels, and generally someone you could look up to for advice, help, or protection from other Houses.

They were more than prefects, though. Prefects were loyal to the school. The prefects turned to their potesta leaders when they needed to not be. I was sure that other Houses operated differently,
but because Slytherin didn’t follow Hogwarts rules and kept to their own, Slytherins needed a different set of administrators to turn to.

Snape — and probably all of his predecessors — simply left the students to govern themselves this way, as practice for the real world. Professors were the ultimate last resort. Potesta leaders were who you should turn to.

God, it would be a shit ton of work, but I could do it. I had my camp, which I could delegate roles to more efficiently than most potesta leaders because I legitimately trusted them. Dietrich was my Second, my most trusted. Harper would manage inter-House relations and my portrait network. Lu had connections to many purebloods and sportier kids. Jay was an expert duelist, and wonderful with the lower-years. Wilkes would keep tabs on others, on enemies if he could, though he was a probationary member of my camp.

I could do this. This was simple. And with a position like this in Slytherin… I could help the incoming war so much. Be a public figure of Dark anti-Voldemort, which seemed to only be Snape in my memories. A haven for the Grey and neutrals. A spy for the Order, if they needed it.

That, of course, was in the future.

Now? Well, now… Malfoy walked into the common room, a pale little intruder in the dark commons to my peripheral vision.

“He looks confused.” Dietrich muttered, face unchanging.

I kept smiling, nodding as Harper chattered more loudly and inanely, quite purposefully. “Who is with him?”

“Crabbe and Goyle, right and left flanks,” Dietrich replied, tilting his head consideringly at Jay, faking conversation with the effeminate boy, “Parkinson, Davis, and Bulstrode trailing after him immediately.”

I lowered my eyes. “And?”

Wilkes answered, “Edwin Rosier and Sebastian Flint joined him, along with Lily Moon, Basilia Carrow, and Godfrey Rowle. Ah, some third-years as well. Antonius Bates, Olivier Carwright. He is livid, now.”

Despite myself, I grinned. “Poor baby.”

Harper snorted and Lu snickered into his hands. Not much for subtlety, those two.


“I noticed Zabini isn’t there.” I said lightly.

“His cousin wouldn’t let him suffer a loss like so,” Dietrich said, “The Greengrasses and Nott are watching us.”

I smiled. “They’re all watching us. Let’s give them a show.”

My head rose and I smiled calmly when Malfoy stomped over, little better than a brat on the verge of a tantrum. The common room went silent as Malfoy looked us over, face sneering and eyes darting between Wilkes and me. There was a hint of panic in his faint, dark teal colors, which were still sickly darkening at the edges but looking much better than the glimpse I’d managed last year.
A hint of panic, and a lot of anger.

“What do you think you’re doing?” he snarled.

(We timed this purposefully. Right before Malfoy made his bid, just as Wilkes said, so that he would be more thrown off and easy to defeat.)

Softly, I closed my book and looked at Malfoy with a pleasant smile. “Sitting, Malfoy. What else would we be doing?”

His jaw seemed to tighten. I was actually a little impressed, with how quickly he stilled his obviously building anger. No doubt some sort of Occlumency exercises were introduced to him over the summer. (Possibly because of nightmares, which I wouldn’t read into too much, because I was supposed to be this boy’s enemy, not sympathizer…)

He sneered. “I might have to thank you for warming my seat for me, then. Go away, Weasley.”

I tilted my head to the side. “I think I rather like this seat, actually.”

Dietrich turned cold eyes on Malfoy. “If you could leave, Malfoy.” Dietrich said dismissively — doubly insulting, because Dietrich was only a Second, not a contender — with a wave of his hand, “I have rather irritating memories of your folly.”

Malfoy paled, and I inwardly cringed. A low blow, but it was Dietrich’s right to make it. He had also been dragged into the Chamber, after all. He hadn’t told me exactly what happened, or about how he felt on it — besides pissed off, when I avoided him a little at the end and during the summer, there — but I knew it was probably somewhat traumatizing.

He did recover admirably quickly, though. Malfoy, that is. “You seem to have forgotten your place, Bastion. You are an outsider here. A Second has no place speaking above their leader, just as a halfbreed has no place speaking to their betters.”

“Speaking of places,” Lu drawled out, leaning back on the table lazily, “Yours is under our command.”

“Parvus potesta, and all, you know?” Harper chimed in.

Ah. I really had to work on those two’s subtlety. As much as I liked getting to the point, Slytherin didn’t, and we needed Slytherin to like us. Well, c’est la vie, I couldn’t do anything about it now. We’d made our claim as boldly and obviously as possible, now.

Malfoy narrowed his eyes. “You think you can usurp me?”

Jay chuckled, and when I glanced over, I had to Occlude a sharp pang of fear/smugness/surprise/pride/amusement at his sweet, menacing smile, out from showing on my face. “I think,” he said, voice willowy as always, “that we already have.”

“You can barely control your own camp from speaking out,” Malfoy sneered derisively, “What makes you think you can control half of Slytherin? You’re a bloodtraitor girl. You think you know the first thing about pureblood leaders? I know all you do is hide in corners with your second-year friends. You wouldn’t last a minute, Weasley. One last chance. Leave.”

I leaned back, visibly settling in. “It’s sort of comfortable here, actually. I don’t think I will.”

Parkinson was seething. “You don’t deserve it! You don’t deserve to lead us! You’re no better than
I heard more than one gasp, though to Slytherins, it was simply a sharper intake of breath. Sitting across from me, Harper and Lu looked like they were straining themselves to keep seated and not attack. (Because, honestly, they were very loyal and emotional, those two.) And beside Dietrich, Jay had gone very, very still. Even Wilkes raised a brow, glancing over at me and probably expecting some sort of temperamental explosion; redheads were famed for them, weren’t they?

Too bad (for Parkinson) it didn’t faze me.

_I was a Muggle once upon a time, girl_, I thought to myself, looking at Parkinson with an expression of mixed pity and annoyance. “You truly are a poor excuse of a pureblood witch, aren’t you?” I said calmly (and I had to hold back a snort when I saw Lu, Harper, and Jay’s shoulders relax at my nonchalant tone). “Does it embarrass you, Malfoy?”

“I’d be far more embarrassed if you were my _parvus potesta_ leader.”

“I hope you’re used to humiliation, then, Malfoy, because if you want this seat, you’ll have to earn it back with far more than your father’s money and inept followers.” I replied easily, smiling faintly at him with the infuriating expression I’d copied a bit from Wilkes and Josephine both.

Malfoy’s scowl deepened, became a bit colder. “And what are your followers, Weasley? A halfbreed without any feelings, a boy who trips over both his words and his hair, a traitor that doesn’t belong anywhere, an idiot who needs to be babied, and a failed leader without any remarkable qualities at all.”

My grip was tight on my wand and leaned forward, very close to losing my temper. Not my firsties. I don’t give three fucks that I provoked him first or whatever, but Malfoy wasn’t going to hurt my boys.

(Hypocritical, I know. I goaded him first, after all. But then… did I really care?)

“Let’s make this bloody simple, then,” I snapped, “Dueling Corridor, midnight tonight-”

Malfoy interrupted, “_Duabus ex tribus_, since you’re so bloody proud of the rubbish you surround yourself with.”

Three Way Duel. Customary to have it held seven days after the challenge was issued, under a moon of midnight. Not that the Dueling Corridor had windows for the moonlight, but the idea would be the same. Hm. Not a bad outcome, to be perfectly honest, as it was entirely within our Wilkes-aided expectations.

I nodded. “Choose your champions carefully, Malfoy.”

He stepped back, starting to leave, no doubt to prepare. “Leave the seat, Weasley.”

“For tonight, then,” I replied, standing and nodding for mine to do the same.

Malfoy was heading to the dormitories. I would take me and mine to the normal abandoned classroom. We passed each other, our camps gathered closely behind us. Parkinson and Crabbe were snarling, Goyle and Davis seemed ignorant, and the other eight saved a bit of face and were simply walking away. Malfoy himself sneered, and then I looked away with a little smirk.

Oh, fun, fun, fun. Slytherin politics were just so annoying. _Duabus ex tribus_ was especially a bit more of a pain in the ass, since it was three duels at once. One more bloody week. I suppose I
could make due with that.


The Fat Lady’s portrait was… Well, I never realized just how very odd she was, last year (what with the horrible realization that I’d screwed one of mine and a somewhat innocent over so badly, crying my bloody eyes out in grief and such). She was a lot more fabulous in real life, her gown and jewelry and hair huge and poofy and all over the place. Her portrait frame was a lot more intricate, too, more baroque (Ravenclaw-esque, maybe it was a tower-dormitory-thing) than the Celtic decorations I was used to with my own mirror dungeon entrance.

(Slytherin’s entrance was a mirror. Like. That is HILARIOUS. It’s dusty and looks ancient as hell, of course, just to blend in with the rest of the shitty dungeon levels, but… It’s a mirror. No wonder we were all vain as hell.)

“And you’re certain you can’t just let me in?” I said, more amused than irritated.

She sniffed. “Of course not! Do you look like a Gryffindor, girl?”

I glanced pointedly up, at my hair. “Yes.”

“You’re wearing silver and green, foolish child!”

“But I’m also a Weasley, so by default, one has to assume that I’m a Gryffindor or risk a 90% chance of failing to guess the correct house…” I reasoned, hiding a smile. “Besides, what if the tie is a prank?”

“You don’t know the password!”

“Which is why I’m asking you.”

“AUGH! This is why I wanted to be the Gryffindor portal! Slytherins!”

“Well, that’s rude-”

“Lyssie?”

I whirled around, and brightened. “Perce! Perce, let me into the tower, won’t you?”

My brother came striding up, and gave me a very odd look for my efforts. He looked like he’d just come back from class, which he might’ve, even if classes had been let out for a few hours already. There was just this overworked look about him, in his irregularly ruffled hair and baggy, blue eyes. Poor Perce, he was probably adjusting to being Head Boy, and obviously not as seamlessly as Josephine Zabini, his counterpart.

Well, nothing for it, then. I trotted up to him and threw my arms around him, and he absentmindedly wrapped his arms around me, too. He was warm and it was a comfortable, familiar feeling. Hugs were always nice.

“Hullo, Perce!” I chirped.

“What’re you doing arguing with our front door, Lys?” he asked wryly.
“Looking for you and Ron and anyone else who I haven’t seen in a bit.”


*Overprotective Percy,* I thought fondly, shaking my head and walking with him now. “Why is that your first thought? No, no, I’m fine. Readjusting to school and Slytherin again, but it’s alright. How’s Head Boyship, Percy?”

Percy said the password — *Thank for that, Perce, I can now enter and leave as I please,* then... — and then entered as the Fat Lady scowled at me, to which I replied with a grin as I hung onto my brother. We entered and he rambled about how being a Head Boy was different from being a prefect, citing some differences and looking very frazzledly proud. He did like to lecture, and I did my best to listen and interject questions to steer the subject into more interesting ones. At one point, he began to ask after me, though this was on those cozy Gryffindor couches already, and he’d set out his homework though he wasn’t really doing it with me hanging about, even if I drifted into my own work just so we were both doing something while we chatted.

“Are you alright in Slytherin alone, Lys?” he asked at one point.

I blinked, a bit too focused on *Sollertia Augurium;* translating the magicky words was a pain in the arse. “Hm?”

Percy looked a little fretful, even as he wrote out his own homework. “Are you alright in Slytherin alone?”

I had to smile. “I’m not alone, Percy.”

He fidgeted with his quill. “I know you have your friends there, but- ah- erm… I heard… Well, my fellow Head student, Josephine Zabini… We were meeting about when to set prefect inspections and patrol routes and she told me that I was lucky to have you. Which, of course, I already knew, Mother and Father didn’t expect your birth at all alongside Ginny’s, and-”

Huh. I think I know who I got my rambling-when-nervous-habit from.

“Breathe, Perce,” I said with a grin, “How’d we get from Zabini to me having no siblings in Slytherin, then?”

Percy went a little pink. “Ah. Well. Zabini was telling me that you’re doing very well for yourself in Slytherin, and that you… well, you wouldn’t have done as well in Gryffindor. Not that I believed her, you would have been an excellent Gryffindor, Lyssie. Maybe you could get Ron and the demon twins to study for once…”

I snickered to myself at the thought. “Studying? Them? Anything to do with academics just bores them, you know.”

“It’s ridiculous! This is their future, the three of them.” Percy mumbled, starting to get fired up at the thought of academics and such, because *closet Ravenclaw,* “It’s not like we have a lot of influence, our family. We have to make up for it by out-performing those — ah, excuse me, Lyssie… — ambitious snakes. None of them are interested in Curse Breaking or Dragon Keeping like Bill or Charlie, so it’s likely they’ll be going into the Ministry, just like Father, therefore their O.W.L. and N.E.W.T. scores will be more important than ever-”

I smiled to myself, listening to Percy. It was funny, because even now, when I loved them all more than ever and knew all their stupid, hidden, little quirks, my family amazed me with how *real* they were. The books described Percy as boring and long-winded and erudite, but they forgot to mention
his beautiful handwriting and the fact that, underneath his lectures, he really cared. Maybe I changed something for the better, right, but I like to think that, in the books/movies/non-reality, Percy’s fervent desire to care for his family was somehow just… lost in translation? Forgotten about and then faded, when he left them?

Seriously. He wanted Ron and Fred and George to be better students because he thought that none of them were adventurous like Bill or crazy like Charlie, so they’d probably take after Dad and do something interesting in one of the many departments of the Ministry. He wanted them to study harder so they could get there, and not some pureblood with connections.

My big brother was goddamn adorable, and if he wasn’t happy in this future, I’d do whatever the fuck I wanted — Fate and Destiny be damned — to make sure of it. All my damn brothers were adorable, honestly.

(Bill’s letters were always stories and anecdotes and clips of things he’d found. He used to read to me, teach me about the world, when I was a toddler. He still did, from far away.)

(Charlie had the most atrocious handwriting I’d ever had the misfortune to come across in my lives. But every letter was written with so much enthusiasm, smelling faintly of dragon musk and ashes.)

Therapeutic, that was the word. When I was stressed with Slytherin madness — good Merlin, practicing for a Duabus ex tribus was a pain in the ass; I was playing with the idea of using this ritual-esque ward scheme, though it did take a bit to cast — or Seer visions or translating a scary fucking woman’s magnum opus (she was scary… anyone who inspired a half-demon to call her The Mind Eater was scary), it was my family I went to.

To destress, to be entertained, to calm down, etc.

To remember who I was doing this for, that maybe Fate put me here for its own purposes, but I had my own reasons to fight, long before I understood Fate’s plans.

“Lys? What’re you doing in our common room?”

I leaned back on my chair and looked up to see Ron frowning at me, looking as if he were about to go to his dorm with Harry and Hermione in tow (both of whom gave me bemused waves). Seems they entered while Percy and I were babbling at each other.

“Our esteemed Head Boy let me in, obviously.” I said lazily.

“Huh. Well done, Perce, you’re finally breaking rules.”

“This doesn’t count, Ronald. Lys is family, and Professor McGonagall herself allowed Lys inside last year.” Percy said hurriedly. Probably came up with that on the spot, a bit of a half-lie stretched out into something Percy-acceptable.

Ron obviously thought the same. “Now I know why everyone says I’m pants at lying.” He turned to Harry and Hermione. “Do my ears get all red like that, too?”

Hermione snorted, and Harry gave a guilty sort of nod.

Ron looked offended. “This is why you always win at poker? Harry, you git!”

(It was a chaotic day, this past summer, when Fred and George demanded all us Weasley siblings play poker. They wanted to avenge themselves after Oliver Wood trounced them at the end-of-year
feast.

Obviously their competitiveness was knocked into Ron, too, because after the demon twins destroyed the rest of us, Ron was determined to get better at it. I think he and Percy played everyday for at least two weeks. Ginny was always playing with me, though, with Luna watching on the sidelines. We’d only gotten marginally better.

Harry looked away. “Sorry, mate.”

Hermione rolled her eyes. “I wondered why you two were suddenly playing with cards every day.” She looked at me oddly. “You know, Lys, you’re the only one — of your siblings, I mean — that doesn’t get red ears when you start lying.”

I grinned. “What kind of snake would I be if I didn’t lie?”

(I’d like to point out that I just truly sucked at poker, which was why I kept getting destroyed when anyone wanted to play. Seriously.)

“Stop smiling like that! You’re freaking me out!” Ron demanded.

Percy blinked at me. “Did you learn that from Head Girl Zabini?”

“Oh, I wish she would teach me that smile.” I muttered.

My eldest Hogwarts-bound brother swallowed visibly. “I think I’ll have to have a word with Zabini.”

“Is the Head Girl related to the boy in our year? Slytherin.” Hermione asked, seating herself with us. (Ron and Harry followed, Ron collapsing into the sofa next to me with Harry on his other side.)

“Josephine Zabini is Blaise Zabini’s cousin,” I informed Hermione. Then I looked up thoughtfully. “They’re both very good Slytherins.”

“What’s that mean?” Ron asked curiously.

I shrugged. “Well, you’ve got your textbook Slytherins, which are those little gits that just flock to the biggest bully in the schoolyard. Keep their heads down, you know, but strike when they think they can get a kill in.”

“Rather morbid analogy.” Harry muttered.

“Then you’ve got bad Slytherins,” I continued (Percy seemed to have also passed on a penchant for lecturing, didn’t he? Not surprising, he was my favorite, after all; his colors were so blended with my indigo, it was almost odd to see.), “Like Parkinson, Crabbe, and Goyle. Utterly brainless, quick to fight, and above all, unbelievably obedient. No instinct to survive at all.”

Percy and Hermione looked at me disapprovingly. I wasn’t fazed.

Ron was snickerling, even as the responsible ones started up a conversation about schoolwork.

“Sounds like them, yeah.” Ron mused, “Dunno why Crabbe and Goyle aren’t Hufflepuffs, sticking so close to Malfoy like that.” He blinked. Then he turned to my accusingly, nudging my shoulder with his elbow. “You changed the subject. What’re you doing in here? Haven’t you got… I dunno, people to duel?”

“That’s exactly why I’m here,” I groaned, reminded again of the horrible damn studying for the
triple-person melee I’d agreed to, “I’m a good Slytherin, Ron, but it’s tiring. I’ve got so much to study and prepare for, and I just let Wilkes into my camp, and erghhhhh.”

“Wilkes? That creepy bloke that’s made every first-year cry?” Harry asked.

I raised my brows. “Every first-year? He left that detail out…”

Ron looked incensed. “Why’re you hanging around a kid like that? Don’t you recognize the name? That’s a Death Eater name!”

Rolling my eyes, I replied, “So is Rookwood and Vaisey, but you haven’t objected to them.”

“Not the point! No wonder you’re stressed, Lyssie, if you’re dealing with gits like Wilkes.” Ron said, narrowing his eyes at me suspiciously. “Mum said not to let yourself get too stressed; your asthma acts up.”

“Maybe you should take a break, Lys,” Harry chimed in, “Since, you know, I’d have to do something drastic to get into the Hospital Wing with you.”

I grinned at him, even as Ron looked between us in confusion. “If you ever need to, just tell Harper to practice some spells on you. Every spell or potion that comes from his wand or hands can be weaponized.”


“Keep your hair on, Ron, I’ve got Dietrich and the rest covering my back.” I snorted. Then I brightened. “And you’ll benefit from this, too! I’m currently challenging Malfoy, and once I win, it’ll get him off your back.”

Harry grinned, wide and bright, at that declaration. “You’re dueling Malfoy?”

Because, of course, I told Harry about Slytherin politics and the fact that — as purebloods — our snakes really liked dueling to settle matters. It was an excellent way to practice not getting caught when doing things of dubious legality, too, of course; hiding from professors, hiding from Aurors, what was the difference, right?

“Duabus ex tribus,” I replied, somewhat smugly.

Ron moaned into his hands. “A three-way duel? Really, Lyssie? Who’re you with and against?”

“Malfoy’s probably going to ask Parkinson — to redeem herself — and… well, it’s a tossup between Blaise Zabini, who might go neutral, and Sebastian Flint, who’s our age, Wilkes thinks. I’m still deciding.”

“If Mum knew that you’re dueling at all, she’d kill you.” Ron said dryly.

“If Mum knew anything I did in Slytherin, she’d kill me,” I replied matter-of-factly.

Percy chimed in, “If Mother knew of half the things you did at home, she’d be upset, as well.”

Harry grinned at me across Ron’s smirk. “Not to mention, if she knew how you react to dementors.”


I threw up my hands. “What is this, Bully Lys Day? You’re all prats! Except Hermione.”
Hermione smirked slyly. “I heard from Lavender that you and your friends were involved in the disappearance of one of the school brooms.”

“That wasn’t even my fault! You all suck!”

They laughed at my expense, the jerks, but it was warm and I had to hide my own grin. Slytherin was sleek and sharp and challenging, but Gryffindor was warm and comfortable and safe, and even wearing silver and green, I loved it for housing and protecting the people I loved the most.

This was… good. To clear my head. To remember.

... 

“Hi, Madam Pomfrey.”

The Hospital Wing matron glared at me. “What is it this time, Miss Weasley?”

I smiled sheepishly. “Ran out of iron supplement potion. Professor Snape’s got a class right now, otherwise I would’ve gone to him.”

(Eh. Kind of a lie? My duel was in two bloody days, which meant that I wanted to stock up. I had a good amount of nutrient supplement and shit, but iron? I was worried I might be a bit… faint, after the duel. And that’d be bad. Hence the need for spare potions.)

(Ugh. My duel was in two days. I hadn’t even chosen my two partners, yet!)

Madam Pomfrey sniffed. “Well, then. At least you aren’t bleeding all over the place. Come along, Miss Weasley. I ought to perform a check up for you anyways. Merlin knows you aren’t taking care of yourself properly, what with your apparent desire to outdo Mr. Potter with number of stays in my Wing!”

I snorted a little, knowing that talking back to the Healer would just backfire spectacularly. (‘Do not provoke the Healer of the Hospital Wing. You will die, and we will not save you.’ was written on the commons board in the Head Girl’s hand.) She led me to my bed (“Hey! My spot!”) and sat me down, then went to go fetch a few instruments to help her update my medical files.

Well. Madam Pomfrey would be back in a bit, so I took this time to lay down, head cushioned by familiar white pillows, and closed my eyes. I’d been neglecting my Occlumency and meditation with how much I had to practice for the duel coming up, keep an eye on Nathaniel, and still keep up with classes. If I got any more ragged, I was sure Snape would step in; he was particularly watching Dietrich and I lately, and we had almost been afraid he’d have stopped us from challenging Malfoy.

(Because, obviously, Snape knows everything that goes on in his House.)

(Because, obviously, Snape was ridiculously protective of his snakes. It was cute, honestly.)

(Oh god, ‘Snape’ and ‘cute’ didn’t belong together. I had to mentally apologize to him. And bleach my mind. I respected Snape too much to think like this.)

Magical meditation was what calmed my colors down, smoothed out the creases that seemed to
crop up when my Clairvoyance shuddered and bucked underneath my control. My Mage Sight was entirely Sovereign at this point, though I used spells as a crutch (one day, I would carve runes into my body to bind these spells to my core, to make it truly Sovereign, as The Magick of Man-Hunters mentioned and my own research detailed). But the Clairvoyance was finicky and ornery, and its need to be Seen was building, and if I didn’t soothe it, I’d be trapped in visions and its violent reaction to diving too deep would crush my organs and shatter my bones with my own blood.

In short: I needed to fucking meditate.

The black space of magical meditation wasn’t the same as simply looking at your closed eyelids. It was deeper, and it felt like you were nothing. It felt like your physical senses were gone, and all there was, was floating in eternity. To most, it was difficult to find and navigate, because human instinct demanded that one is not floating in a fucking abyss with their senses ripped away from them; but I was very, very familiar with the sensation.

To most, resisting returning to that feeling, that ultimate physical helplessness and mental simplicity, was natural.

But I had been trapped in an infant body. I hadn’t even realized I was alive until my newborn sight started to develop. All I had in those days were the Clairvoyance and Mage Sight, both of which were much much sharper back then than now. I remembered being metaphysical, reaching out with my colors to touch at the world. Meditation was similar enough that I had a good start, and now I could slip into my head and core as easily as I cast wandless Notice-Me-Not’s.

Occlumency helped here. My mental shields were ragged and worn as I prodded at them, probably doing their best to keep the headaches and visions at bay as I focused on other things. I had to carefully touch up on my memories. Then I had to swivel over to the area I’d cleared for the purpose of Clairvoyance, and sink into the magic.

I wouldn’t be able to describe it, moving through my own magic and head. It wasn’t real, I couldn’t see anything. It was all instinct and touch and flashes of images that were simply my psyche trying to represent what was going on properly, with the aid of my magic. One day, when I was better at Occlumency, I would develop a true mindscape, and Occluding would be so easy.

But for now, it was time to prod the visions out of their spiteful rest, empty what was storing up.

Dark red hair, the color of roses, swept up into a hairband, twisting, flowing down her back — hands and covered wrists, sweeping blue cloth with golden embroidery, pale fingers on a branch-like wand — black eyes, cool and composed and a matching smile on her face. She was beautiful, in a deadly way. Stop. Harper huddled against the door, blue eyes nervous. His bronze hands were running through his dark curls, he bit his lip — the door was slightly ajar, he listened — dark red hair, pale skin and blue eyes commanding the others. She was a leader; he knew this.

French accent, grey eyes like chips of slate, pale blonde hair and a stoic face — friend — “Why are we suddenly taking so many breaks, Guinevere? Adhering to a schedule when there was none before.” — flying on the pitch, broom under his hands, flitting about in the air. It was nice, he remembered, and it gave them all a break, but… — “You don’t like flying?” — amused voice, sly — “I do!” — caramel hair, hazel-blue eyes wide with excitement as he tossed a Quaffle over. Harper liked to play with Lu, he did — “I do not complain. I am just wondering, Guinevere.”
“Suplicitigatio.” — cruel voice, light chuckles, sickly white light enveloping the figure on the ground. He was chained and gagged — wrists rubbed raw — blue eyes, tears — a guttural scream, wounds exploding over his stretched skin. She delighted in it, grinning.

“Vedi come ti proteggo, caro bambino?”

Stop.

Harry Potter standing in a graveyard, leg bleeding and heart pounding. “What…?” — flickering images, red roses, black robes and hoods trailing along the ground — white masks, the moonlight reflected off of them — “Together, brother?” — Harry Potter standing in a graveyard, green eyes blinking and hand gripped around his wand.

“This isn’t part of the Task,” — a soft murmur — trophy on the ground, dull light against the gloom of the — yellow accents and black cloth, grey eyes warm but confused — empty? — dead? — Josephine Zabini grinning at the first-year, stumbling steps — empty? — dead? — afraid? — dueling with three people, flashes of light and sound and — “STUPEFY!” — Harry Potter, standing in a graveyard.

Stop.

You’re afraid of me.

It’s common sense to be afraid of the half-demon in your head.

And yet you approached my shop anyways. How foolish.

You’re helping me, aren’t you? Providing me with services advertised, and whatnot.

Few are worthy, reveler. Very, very few.

Stop.

“It’s called ADHD in the Muggle world, at least.” — “What is that?” — “It makes you distractible. It’s not your fault, it just is. Distractible, sometimes hyper, sometimes daydreaming—” — Harper gripped his robes, his heart sinking. They knew — they knew they knew they knew no no no he didn’t want — “Oh.”

They knew they knew they — “Well, whatever. I like it.” Lu said — Harper blinked. He almost stepped inside, but he stopped.

“Just don’t mention it to him, will you? It’s not like it changes anything.” — Nodding, Dietrich looked away, bored. Bored, because this didn’t matter. “It’s just Harper.”

“He’s getting very good at Charms, isn’t he?” Jay said cheerfully — smiling jade eyes, rosewood braid, sketching hands and-

They didn’t care?

They didn’t want to baby him? Treat him like he was retarded, cover him in fleece and lock him away — Mother, Father, pitying looks, hurting heart — chest hurts, I don’t want to be pitied, I want to be normal, aren’t I normal? — “Some Muggle affliction, I think.” — “No! No, no, no!” — she shrugged, inspecting her wand. “He’s just Harper. Does it matter?”
Hey. Hey, are you there?

You shouldn’t keep doing this to yourself, Guinevere.

Ha. Did you know that you and Luna are the only ones who call me that, really? Even though—

Only Luna. I’m dead, don’t you remember?

My heart hurts, my chest aches, I — “This is a dream, isn’t it?” — fading, cracking, he’s turning into ash and dust and breaking apart, even as she did was she couldn’t do in real life and reaches towards him-

Ridiculous girl. I’m dead. Stop tearing yourself apart because of it.

“I’ve never lost one of mine. And you—”

STOP.

My eyes snapped open and I sat up immediately. Was I crying? No? Good. Good, that was good. Fucking-

No. I wasn’t going to think about those stupid, stupid nightmares. I Occluded the shit out of those, made them go away. Guilt was- Guilt was something I wasn’t really used to feeling, not really, and I didn’t like that- well… Whatever. I wasn’t going to think about how I watched him die, and I wasn’t going to think about how sometimes I’d write snarky comments in my notes and expect them to snark back, and I wasn’t going to think about how no one I knew would- would get it.

(Why would you feel guilt for betraying a bad guy, Lyssie? He tried to kill Dietrich! Why would you miss him? He was going to Imperio you! Why would you feel sad that he was dead? He stole some of your colors! He’s a thief! A murderer!)

(Brother-killer. Monster.)

Yup, nope. Not thinking about it! Not on the practical eve of my fucking duel, and not while my goddamn Occlumency barriers were weak already!

“Miss Weasley?”

I was startled by the interruption, but I recovered and smiled. “Hullo, Madam Pomfrey. Is it time for me to be checked upon?”

The matron huffed, hands on her hips. “Already done, while you were meditating. You’re very low on iron and you’re not sleeping properly, are you?”

I grimaced. Don’t do it, Madam Pomfrey, don’t do it…

“I’ve half a mind to keep you for the night and have you on supplements and nutrient potions!”

“Oh, Merlin, please don’t.”

“Hm. You’re not going to rest up if I tell you so, and you seem much better after a bit of restful meditation. I think I will be keeping you, Miss Weasley.”

I groaned. “I knew I shouldn’t have come to you. I’m going to Professor Snape next time.”
Madam Pomfrey looked unimpressed. “Miss Weasley, I do hope you understand that your Head of House is even more worried about your health than I am. Professor Snape has always been very protective of his snakes.”

“Yes, but he’d just say something sarcastic rather than lock me away from my studies.”


“I’m already in bed, Madam Pomfrey!” I whined.

She narrowed her eyes. “Sleep.”

Madam Pomfrey turned on her heel and left me to my devices. I sighed. The visions were okay for now, manageable, but I wouldn’t be able to take much more. I really had to start strengthening my body, if only so I could dive a bit deeper into the visions.

(The ones I wanted to look into, of course. Not Tom. I didn’t want to see that, not right now at least, and how about maybe never? That sounded good-)

Oh! I was presented a choice, I believe. Something to do with next year, the graveyard fight. Somehow? I didn’t understand. It wasn’t as clear-cut as my choice with Ron and the river, meaning it was further off or I was already in the process of making the choice. I changed something, or was currently changing something. Fucking Clairvoyance.

Ah… And Harper. So he saw that, did he? I didn’t want to bring attention to his ADHD, not really. I can imagine the stigma being amplified in the magical community, since the magical community was full of stupid fucks. And it was part of him. He was hyper and he liked to learn even if he got distracted easily. It was just my friend, my Third (though such a term doesn’t traditionally exist, but Harper was quite proud of being one of the first to turn to my leadership).

Well, then. That was… productive, I guess. And that put me in a better mood, even being locked up in the Hospital Wing again.

One night would be… good. I could repair my Occlumency shields, since I haven’t had the time. And then I’d have to beat the hell out of Malfoy. I was really tired of how me and mine had to sneak around him.
Chapter 24

Here it is, boys. Chapter 24... And how I'm officially nervous, because I'm still editing Chapter 27 and I've been in a very Skyrim and Fire Emblem mood lately, so instead of editing, I play games. Whoops...

Anyways. In my opinion the duel is a little... lackluster? Compared to the hype that's been going on. But I figure that's realistic, because they ARE still kiddies, so it's not like they'll be casting Fiendfyre and shit around. XD Oh! And thank you all for reading and commenting, as always. This fic's getting quite popular, when I never really imagined it would. :D

Enjoy!

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*Duabus ex tribus*. One of the many duel forms that (usually) only traditional purebloods still performed. Them, or professional duelists. It was honestly surprising to be lectured by Dietrich and Jay on all the different forms of dueling, which were derivatives of the formal one-on-one, lethal-casting, honor-duels which were definitely not sport.

The form I agreed to duel Malfoy with was a three-on-three melee. One side only won if the other took out the leader, the catalysts of the duel. In my case, myself or Malfoy. The other two were meant to assist in defeating the leader, or protecting their own. It made dueling very *very* tricky, and involved a lot of trust in your teammates.

(I believe Flitwick — famously known as a Dueling Champion in the Hogwarts gossip circles, of which all good Slytherins were firmly a part of — only participated in the *Duabus ex tribus* Circuit once. He was a solo sort of duelist.)

Only two. I could only take two of mine into the duel (which wasn’t really a duel, but whatever).

And they all wanted to go.

“Lys, if you do not take your Second, it would weaken our position.” Dietrich said coolly, “It would appear as if you do not trust your Second. I am a competent duelist, as well. Malfoy was not the only one trained by his father because of last year.”

Good points, yes.

Wilkes smiled dangerously. “But it would be a blow to his adequacy as parvus leader if I were to duel.”

“We’ve already established he’s a rubbish leader since you took my spot.” Harper said mulishly.
Hm. Looks like he held a bigger grudge than I thought.

“Out of everyone here, I’m the best dueler.” Jay reminded us all gently.

“Yeah, but you’re a pacifist, aren’t you? Don’t tell me you actually want to go curse Parkinson out?” Lu snorted. He turned to me with a grin. “I’ve got power, you said so yourself. And I’m better at physical, I can catch ‘em by surprise with better movement.”

“Quidditch nut.” Dietrich muttered.

“Don’t be a prat, Dietrich, you’ve already had an adventure with Lyssie! Let one of us help this time!” Harper complained.

“Don’t be a child, Harper,” Dietrich replied irritatedly, “We require the best duelists for this. We cannot allow Malfoy to win. It is our misfortune that every move we make is scrutinized more so than others. Our victories are far-reaching and long-lasting, but our defeat would mean the end.”

I sighed. “Sorry about that. Bloodtraitor, here.”

Dietrich snorted imperiously. “As if we care about something so inconsequential.”

I smiled a little, and stretched out on Jay’s bed. He was sitting on the edge, sketchbook in his hands forgotten as he, too, argued about who was going to duel beside me. Lu was sitting in his bed lazily, Harper splayed out next to him on his stomach — not a sight you’d show to anyone outside of your friends, here in Slytherin, since dignity and pride were very important. Wilkes was hanging around Dietrich (probably just to annoy him, Wilkes liked doing that) even though he had a perfectly serviceable bed near Jay’s.

We had all been training. I’d put off the decision of who I wanted with me until we knew for sure who Malfoy would be bringing. With my and Harper’s portrait spy network, my and Dietrich’s good relationship with the House Elves (we still ate in the kitchens occasionally, just the two of us, for old times’ sake), and Wilkes questionable but very accurate resources… we knew for sure.

Parkinson, of course. Malfoy’s loyalest follower, who needed to redeem herself for her embarrassing loss against me last year. And, the portraits whispered and House Elves squeaked and Wilkes muttered: Blaise Zabini.

Which was a problem, because Blaise Zabini was an actual threat. Malfoy was already questionably proficient in dueling and spellwork, Parkinson was a joke but a very ready shield, but Zabini? Malfoy must owe him a huge favor for this, because if we won, Zabini would be in a bad position, but with Zabini’s help, there was as much chance we’d lose.

Shite. None of us figured he’d pull out of his neutral position, but he and Malfoy were old friends…

I closed my eyes and let their calm arguments wash over me. They were bickering and boasting, sure, but it was light-hearted, really. All of them were hyperaware that the final decision rested on me. Wilkes was questionable, still, but I adored my firsties for how much they trusted in me and my judgements.

Dietrich would be a smart choice. My Second, my right-hand, my best mate. Very intelligent, pretty good magical power, very in-tune with me. Possibly — probably — trained thoroughly by his parents, a few French or German tricks up his sleeve. However, his appointment would be predictable. He also was extremely cautious and not quick to act; Dietrich took his time contemplating problems and situations.
Jay would also be a good choice, because no one besides us — and Wilkes now, I suppose — knew how prodigious at dueling he was. He would be extremely unexpected. However, Jay really didn’t like dueling, and we weren’t as good of a team because of the discrepancy in skill level. He was so hesitant to hurt others, so I didn’t want to force that on him, even if he was saying he wanted to duel.

“Wilkes,” I called.

The entire room quieted, and turned their eyes on me. (It was a bit thrilling, to be honest, that they all respected and/or liked me enough to follow my cues like that.)

“Go over the duelists again.” I said boredly, pulling out my personal journal — where all the spells and magic I saw was, all my Warding techniques, notes on Healing, anything I could use — and flipping to a new page.

Wilkes complied. “Parkinson is the weakest. Traditional pureblood that believes witches are supposed to be home-making socialites. I do not believe she has improved much from the last duel, Weasley.”

“Guinevere for you, Wilkes,” I said absently, drawing up a profile for Parksinson (as I’d done for Malfoy and Josephine Zabini last year), “More united that way, I think. If you’re going to betray us at any point later, you can go back to Weasley.”

I could feel the glare Dietrich was giving me. He didn’t trust Wilkes enough for that, but I knew he also understood the necessity of it. Harper and Lu were probably going to sulk for a few days because of this, though.

“Hm… Then Nathaniel is alright,” Wilkes replied, “Does this mean I can join your little flying outings?”

“Like hell,” Lu snarled.

I looked up with a glare. “Play nice, all of you. Wilkes- Er, Nathaniel, continue.”

A pause. Then, “Malfoy is much better than last year. We prepared for him, however. Do you need me to go over him again?”

I flipped back to his updated page, which Wilk- Nathaniel had helped me make previously.

“General stuff, for the boys.”

“Hm. Well, he is much faster, and has a greater arsenal of spells. His father, I believe, trained him intensively as a response to his kidnapping last year. He is very cautious, however, and will always choose to retreat if he can. His defensive spells are weak, he has no Healing to speak of, and it is likely he will allow Zabini and Parkinson to do the work and strike when it suits him.”

“Textbook Slytherin,” Dietrich said lazily.

“Slytherins are still dangerous,” Wilkes- ergh, Nathaniel retorted, “That is why we are the most feared House.”

“We know that, Wilkes.” Lu snarled.

“It’s Nathaniel, Lucas.”
“You little git-” 

I looked up again with narrowed eyes. “Play. NICE.” I growled out.

Wilk- Nathaniel had his hands up in surrender, but there was a smirk on his face that opposed Lu’s irritated scowl. I had to sigh. If there was one benefit to having Wilk- to having Nathaniel, then it was that he tested all of their patience. He tended not to provoke me, since I was the “boss”, but everyone else was getting lots of practice in holding their tongues and cooling their heads.

(I think I ruined them for that last year, since I was such a Slythindor, and I did like bluntness and honesty between our small friend group. They’d all forgotten how to be sly and fake and generally Slytherin-impassive, but I’m sure with Wilke- Nathaniel to practice with, we’d be ready by the time we were the parvus potesta reignning.)

“Moving on,” Nathaniel said smoothly, “Zabini. Almost guaranteed to be the main attacker, which is rather dangerous. Very powerful, quick-witted, and hard to pick apart. Quintessential Slytherin, excellent duelist, good friend to Malfoy. However, he seems to disdain everyone else of Malfoy’s camp, and has always been better alone. Again, it is likely he is dueling as a favor to Malfoy, having been neutral for quite a while, and so will not be as desperate as the other two.”

“I should be dueling. To balance him,” Jay muttered, “His aunt was a champion in the Circuit.”

“The Head Girl’s mother?” I asked.

Jay shook his head, fiddling with his quill. “No, another aunt. From the main family, Lavinia Zabini. Josephine Zabini is only a Zabini by her father. Zabini is traditionally a matriarchal family.”

I hummed. “So that’s why Blaise Zabini took his mother’s name. I wondered.”

“Only very old families boast matriarchal succession,” Wi- Nathaniel explained, “And many of the magical purebloods of Asia minor, southeast Asia, all that. The Zabinis aren’t too well-off, however. They call Nicolosia Zabini the Crimson Widow, for amassing fortune through marrying rich men and inheriting their properties when they die.”

“Is she the matriarch?”

“Fortunately not,” Nathaniel chuckled, “If Blaise Zabini were of the main branch, he would be much, much more dangerous. The older the family, the stronger their magicks. Nicolosia Zabini, therefore her son, are rather looked down upon by the rest of the family.”

“What are the chances of Josephine Zabini helping us?” Dietrich asked.

Another pause. “Likely, actually,” Nathaniel said thoughtfully, as if he were surprised. “It would be to her benefit if you won.”

“And didn’t she try to keep her cousin neutral?” Jay asked. “She might be upset that he went against her orders. She has seniority in the family, and she’s a female.”

“Ah, the English offshoot of the Zabinis is patriarchal, so not really,” Nathaniel said, “But I always thought she belonged to the Italian branch, if not the main branch. She’s too vicious to become some quiet, pureblood wife.”

I grinned. “She’ll help, I think. She picked me up last year, you know? Called me her favorite firstie and that she’d keep the evil snakes away from concussing me.”
Harper laughed. “I like Head Girl Zabini. I think we should ask.”

I nodded, noting it down. “Only a few days ’til the duel.”

“Yes, so pick your right and left hands, Guinevere.” Nathaniel sang.

I sighed. This was the issue, wasn’t it? My damned feuding, little firsties. I was putting it off, but it wasn’t a question of, ‘Who’s feelings do I not want to hurt?’ None of me and mine were that petty, to be truly offended, as long as I explained my reasoning and created a good balance. But still, I was hesitant.

“Lu.” I said.

The boy in question sat up straight and had an eager look in his eyes. I smiled inwardly at how much like an excitable child he looked. (It was weird, to be planning all this political shite with children. But, then again, Slytherin. Magic. Purebloods. Ergh.)

“You have the magical power, and you match Parkinson well,” I said, watching as a smile grew on his face, “I want you to destroy her as quickly as possible, and then you’re going to annoy the shit out of Zabini and scare Malfoy.”

Lu nodded seriously. “We’re not losing because of me.”

“Jay, Harper, I can’t bring either of you. You’re both very attack-oriented, and with me and Lu, we’ll need someone more defensive. Hope it’s alright?”

Jay nodded in understanding, and there was a quiver of relief in his moss-green core. Harper pouted and looked away moodily.

“Harper, I swear, the next person who challenges us for the parvus will be all yours.” I said apologetically.

His lips twitched. (He couldn’t hold a grudge, the dear child.) “Promise?”

I smiled. “Of course. We’ll work to get our experimental spells and potions and shite all squared out, and then you’ll use those to take whoever you want down. It’ll be fun.”

“Well, that’s probably better anyways. If you say so, Lyssie.”

I nodded to him. Then I looked at the remaining two, who were glaring at each other. Children.

“I’m torn between you two, actually.” I said, “I need a defensive duelist. I have my wards, but those take time, so I need someone to cover me and Lu from both Malfoy and Zabini while I get a ward up and Lu takes out Parkinson.”

Dietrich scowled to himself. Probably calculating how much he would have to do to hold off two good opponents for as long as Lu took to get rid of Parkinson.

Nathaniel turned to Lu. “How long will it take you?” he asked.

“What?”

“Parkinson. How fast can you Stun her or whatever?”

Lu frowned. “Depends on if she hides behind Zabini. Probably thirty seconds, especially if I run at her or something. She won’t expect that, but Malfoy might defend her.”
“You would have to anger her,” Nathaniel suggested, “Draw her away from Malfoy and the others.”

“I’ll help you with that, Lu,” Harper said cheerfully, “It’s easy to annoy people.”

“Right.” Lu said, nodding decisively, “Thirty seconds, then.”

Dietrich sighed. “I could duel one, but Malfoy and Zabini together will be dangerous.”

Wil- fucking, goddammit, Nathaniel capitalized immediately, the Slytherin he was. “I could do it.”

I raised a brow. “Oh?”

Nathaniel grinned. “Dietrich here wouldn’t be able to fight off two semi-skilled duelists because, as wonderful as our lovely Second is, he is easily overwhelmed in high-speed situations. I, on the other hand, thrive on chaos.”

Dietrich was lucky he had such a good hold on his emotions, because I think he was about to have an aneurism out of pure anger. He and Nathaniel weren’t all hostile because of the bullying, though; Dietrich admitted that he already felt avenged because Nathaniel had to betray Malfoy and Dietrich was in a much higher position than him. But the two just fucking fought all the time. It was like they were destined to be sniping at each other.

My best mate finally growled out, “Fine. But if you cost us this, Wilkes…”

Nathaniel grinned. “What would you be able to do, Dietrich?”

“I would be able to spell your bloody eyes blind, if anything.” Lu commented lightly.

“Now, Lucas, I thought we were friends?”

I groaned into my hands. “Nathaniel, for the love of Merlin, stop pissing off my firsties. I know you’re doing it on purpose, you prat.”

He chuckled, dismissing my exasperation. “You’re all really so fluffy. It’s almost unnatural. But I won’t jeopardize this duel, Guinevere. No one would take in a turncoat. In two days, we will be Slytherin kings.”

“Hm. If you don’t irritate us all to death first.”

“You three should go to Zabini,” Dietrich muttered.

Jay nodded empathetically. “You’ll need her to teach you how to counter her cousin. We’ll work on homework and things until we can join you.”

Because they all knew how to copy each other’s handwriting with spells. I learned that late summer, so I’d have Percy’s handwriting as a font forever. It wasn’t as if the professors would check for that sort of thing in second-years, it was at least an O.W.L. level charm.

“Right, then. Lu, Nathaniel, let’s go.”

I stood, and Lu took my right flank as Nathaniel took the left. Lu wasn’t quite able to hide the giddiness; must’ve been interesting, to be in Dietrich’s usual position.

“We’ll probably have to promise the fourth-years to her.” Nathaniel said mildly.
“A simple bargaining chip. The rest of you, we’ll meet in the usual classroom. Any of you need sleep for something in particular?”

A round of “No.”s and shaking of heads.

“Good. Meet back here after classes, yes? Oh, but Dietrich, stop by the Kitchens and pick up what I asked Tilly for.”

Lu gave me an odd look. Never did understand why Dietrich and I loved the Kitchens so much. (Might be because it was his actions, back then, that drove us to seek sanctuary in there. Neither Dietrich nor I had the heart to explain that to him.) “What did you ask the Kitchens for?”

I smiled grimly. “Coffee. The magical kind that’s spiked with Alertness Potion.”

…

They actually kicked me out.

“You gits.” I muttered under my breath.

The duel was in less than twenty-four hours and they locked me out of the abandoned classroom! I mean… I could probably do something really mean with the wards, they were mine after all, but it’s not like… I mean, they’d been yelling at me to take a break for maybe two hours already, so I suppose it wasn’t fair for me to be mean just because they were worried.

“Go take a walk, Lys.” said Jay’s muffled voice through the door.

“Don’t encourage her to stay! Get away from the door, Jay!” I heard the faint voice of Lu yell.

He was being dueled by Harper, who was encouraged to act as Parkinson-like as possible. It meant a lot of shrieking and slapping and Harper firing spells even he had already mastered like an amateur. It was really cheering, too; if any of us were flagging, we’d go wake ourselves up by watching Harper and Lu flail around.

Anyways.

I sighed, refraining from knocking my forehead against the door in frustration. “But what if I run into a basilisk?” I inquired innocently.


He was probably on the verge of breaking it and following me, actually. But Wilkes goaded him and accused him of not trusting me, and then Jay said that I needed some time off to think for a bit since I was a bit more distracted than usual. I rolled my eyes at the muffled argument that sprouted up from Dietrich’s terse words, and then rapped my knuckles against the door to shut them up.

“I’m going, I’m going. Happy, then? I’ll be back in a quarter of an hour. Try and get me back if it’s longer, yeah? I might fall asleep.”

“As if you’ll be able to, with how laced this coffee is.” I heard Wilkes scoff.
“Isn’t coffee bad for kids?” Harper asked.

I shook my head, smiling, as I turned on my heel and walked away. A little Notice-Me-Not and a bit of a range-expansion on my Mage Sight, and I’d be good to go; as long as I kept to the routes where the friendlier portraits were and kept an eye out for Filch or his cat, I’d probably be fine. None of the patrolling Slytherins would ping me, seeing as I had a bloody duel tomorrow, and Josephine said she’d keep the rest away.

(“Kick the little ponce’s arse for me, yeah, Guinevere?” she’d asked with a wink.

I smirked in reply. “As long as you help us out a little, of course. That, and the fourths are yours.”

“I look forward to it, little queen.” Josephine laughed.)

(It had… been a bit shocking, to hear my dad’s pet name for me from her. But I’d recovered and grinned, even if I felt a little pang of longing for home. Mum and Dad would kill me if they knew I was dueling already; I think Dad sorta knew what went on in Slytherin, but Mum… Well, she’d be furious and I’d be dead.)

But I suppose my boys had a point, especially Jay. I had been a little distracted, hadn’t I?

The… Occlumency, it was bothering me. I’d done some repairs, but they were more akin to slapping bandaids around rather than actually stemming the blood and suturing the wound closed, you know? My barriers were shot to hell with the fucking dementors all over the place — walks with Luna were often cut short because neither of us felt safe with them possibly around corners and shit — and my magical upsurge from my birthday and all the stress piling up…

Well, my Clairvoyance would have a field day if I didn’t let it loose for a baby bit every night. And thinking about all this got me to thinking about my last bout of meditation, which got me to thinking about Tom bloody fucking Riddle and how I still missed that little bastard even when I really-

“Oh, for god’s sake, this is embarrassing. What am I, a teenager?” I mumbled.

I could really use-

Huh.

Those were very familiar colors. The deep blues and bright lines of turquoise and gold, hints of green and indigo and black; fiery orange and red and gold, streaked with cream and pale pre-dawn lavenders and blues; deep, restful green and easter yellows, threaded with delicate rose-pinks that deepened into deep, flowery magentas. Very, very familiar colors.

What was the Golden Trio doing around these parts?

And then suddenly their color-trails — which can only be freshly present for about a half-minute, for me, which nixes any thought of me being some great magical tracker — were absolutely gone. Vanished.

What the actual fuck-?

“Psst! Lyssie!”

I jolted, flinching away from the voice with my wand in my hand immediately.
Then the space just in front of me folded and distorted, and Harry, Hermione, and my brother were there. I eyed the thing in Harry’s hands, though. The Invisibility Cloak evidently erased their magical auras, and my ability to briefly follow their tracks. Very useful, I suppose. Made sense, too.

“Ron? What’re you doing in the dungeons?” I asked. Then I scowled. “You gave me a bloody heart-attack, git!”

Ron shrugged, though the two brunettes smiled sheepishly, at least.

I raised a brow. “What’re you doing here? Snape’ll kill you if he sees you around his dungeons, you know.”

“You’re wandering about just fine.” Ron retorted.

I rolled my eyes. “I’m a Slytherin, about to duel Malfoy for his position. He knows me and my boys are all up, getting ready. Everyone does. Josephine was even nice enough to make sure the dungeons were as clear as can be for me.

Harry frowned. “Wait, is that why it was such a pain in the arse to get around the prefect patrols near the towers tonight?”

“The Head Girl can do that?” Hermione asked, puzzled.

I gave her a small smile. “Hermione, I don’t think you quite understand what I mean when I say: We’re Slytherins. We can do anything.”

“House bias!” Ron accused.

I scowled at him. “You’re the last person to be talking to me about that, Ronniekins!”

Harry snorted.

“Don’t call me that, Lyssie!”

“Ronniekins?” Hermione asked, looking both embarrassed for Ron’s sake and amused because of it.

Hermione was at the receiving end of one of my pale imitations of Josephine Zabini’s grin. She didn’t look nearly as unnerved as she should, given what I’d seen the Head Girl do before. “Childhood nickname, of course. Used to love it when he was younger.”

“Lies!” hissed my brother.

“Slytherins do lie.” Harry hummed.

I pouted at the bespectacled boy. “I thought we were Hospital Wing mates?”

He shrugged, giving me a little grin. “I’ve got my House pride, too, you know.”

I chuckled. “Alright, I’ll bite. What’re three Gryffindors doing, prowling around the snake dungeon, hm?”

Hermione crossed her arms, looking a bit embarrassed and exasperated. But she shot a genuine smile my way, which had me frowning a little with how many conflicting emotions she always seemed to sport. “You’re going to duel Malfoy tomorrow, aren’t you?” she asked.
There was a clear, -even though I really don’t think you ought to, because we shouldn’t be dueling, 
and really, what do you people do in Slytherin anyways, that you have to be issuing duels to each 
other so often?

I know, because I often found myself sinking into that logical mindset; then I remember I’m a 
damn Gryffindor-raised-Slytherin who is a Seer twice over and a reincarnation to boot, so I really 
have to throw out that logical passiveness out or I’d go mad.

“I’m dueling the ponce, yeah…” I trailed off. “Did… Did you all want to watch or something?”

“Yes!” went the boys.

“No!” Hermione said in surprise.

The three glanced at each other.

“It’d be educational, right, Hermione? Watching a real duel?” Ron hedged.

Hermione narrowed her eyes. “Don’t use that against me, Ronald.”

I winced at the impending debate on whether the educational experience of watching or 
participating in a duel outweighed the obvious breech in Hogwarts rules, then cut in hastily, “Well 
you’re not allowed to, anyways. It’s a Slytherin matter, I can’t have three Gryffindors bearing 
witness. Besides, you’re really not supposed to know about the duel anyways.”

Harry nodded. “We don’t really want to watch, Lys-” “Speak for yourself, mate.” (Harry and I both 
rolled our eyes at Ron’s words.) “-but we did want to wish you luck and, er… Well, Hermione-”

Hermione snapped out of her and Ron’s conversation — I think she was reprimanding him on 
trying to appeal to her love for academics when it was entirely uncalled for — and then sighed 
again. But she looked amused, and out of her robes came out a small bundle of…

Flowers.

All pale pastel shapes, neat as origami, but they were alive. My Mage Sight flickered in just to let 
me know how seeped in magic they were, an odd mixture of Hermione’s and Harry’s and all my 
Hogwarts-bound siblings’ to be exact; they were Conjured or Transfigured, I didn’t have the skill 
to tell the two branches of magic apart yet like this, but they were very… cute. I took them into my 
hands and held them to my chest, beaming at the fond memories I had of flowers and luck.

“These two absolutely refused to be the ones handing you the flowers, which is why they dragged 
be out of bed.” Hermione said, chuckling a little as I smirked at Ron’s reddening ears and Harry’s 
distinct lack of eye contact.

“Never took you two for being shy of handing me gifts, with how often you shove unedited 
homework at me when I come up to your tower.” I said, raising a brow at them.

“They’re flowers!” Ron protested, “I don’t- do- flowers. Girl gifts.”

I snorted. “Ronniekins. You’re related to me, flower-giving really can’t be misconstrued as 
anything vaguely romantic, with us being proper, non-incestuous bloodtraitors.”

“Ergh! Horrible imagery, Lys! Merlin’s sake!” Ron protested, covering up his ears childishly.

I was torn between grimacing and grinning, but for the sake of messing with my big brother, I let
the grinning win out. “Imagery? Merlin me, Ron, you’re really getting into the hang of this puberty business, aren’t you?”

“Lys. Stop.”

I snickered at his horrified face, and glanced out of the corner of my eye that Harry and Hermione were similarly amused. With a dash of vague sickness, just on the principle of the matter, of course. God, I was tired. My social skills were all over the place, and I had to remember I wasn’t bantering with my boys, who were much more used to pureblood jokes like that. Because, you know, when people can’t stop sneering at my bloodtraitor thing, I like to reply that at least I’m not proud of the pureblood inbreeding thing.

Yeah, I was tired.

But I was still very, very pleased by the flowers in my hand. Not the ritual that I used to do, of course, but the thought behind it was what counted. Seemed all of mine from Gryffindor collaborated for this, though only the Trio presented it. Probably because Ginny had a History of Magic essay due tomorrow that she’d put off, and Percy knew about it; she was likely locked away in the tower with him sternly guarding her from sneaking off to wish me well, too.

“Thanks, though,” I said quietly, looking at my flowers with my Mage Sight, picking out the colors of my family out and feeling a knot in my stomach ease at the familiar sight, “Even if I’m not allowed to tell you much about it, thanks for supporting me.”

Ron huffed, and swung an arm around my shoulders casually. “S’what family’s for, Lys.” mumbled my brother, looking at a very faded tapestry with a little too much interest, “Just be careful, right? Duabus ex tribus is tiring, I reckon, so don’t stress your lungs.”

“I’m stationary, don’t worry. My partners will be the ones moving.”

“Harper, then?” Harry asked.

I shook my head. “Too attack-oriented and inconsistent, him. I’m taking Lu.”

“Vaisey. Trying out for Quidditch, soon, isn’t he?” Ron asked.

“Yeah. Won’t shut up about it, either.” I chuckled. Then I wriggled out of Ron’s very loose hug and beamed at them all. “I’m glad you all took the time, though you three were really lucky I was walking around when you came.”

“Demon twins said you’d be around here.” Ron said.

“They were really insistent,” Hermione added, nodding bemusedly, “Practically pushing us out the tower because it ‘might been our only chance’. How did they know?”

I smiled to myself inwardly. Marauder’s Map, I bet you anything.

But I shrugged. “They’re the demon twins, you know? Nothing they do makes sense.” I motioned to the Invisibility Cloak still in Harry’s hands. “Should go back soon, though. I’ve got to work a bit more, practice with my boys, but there’s no need for you three to lose any more sleep. Let Fred and George and Perce and Ginny know that I appreciate this, okay?”

Harry nodded his confirmation, Hermione smiled, and Ron reached out to ruffle my hair before they and their magical auras disappeared underneath Death’s cloak once again. I wagged my fingers where I thought they’d disappeared, and then sighed at the silent corridor. No footsteps, not
anymore, so they were gone.

I glanced at my flowers. “Well, Lyssie. Get your head back in the game. It’ll be embarrassing if you lose the duel after this, too.”

My Mage Sight roved over Ron’s gold and Harry’s green and Hermione’s rose, past Fred’s burgundy and George’s plum and Percy’s sky blue. Ginny’s gentle maroon and carmine caught my attention; she’d poured a lot of her magic into the Transfiguration or whatever it was, probably wishing she could be one of my tribus partners. It’d be like her.

Her carmine was neon compared to the deep, deep sienna red of my own colors.

“After the duel,” I promised quietly, “I’ll address this.”

*I make a lot of promises.*

I pressed my flowers to my chest, then I pivoted on my heel and made my way back to my boys. I wasn’t even really that hungry anyways. *He* once told me that if you keep yourself busy, you forget to be afraid. I think that would work for guilt too.

…

Major de ja vu. Slytherins lined the generously wide Dueling Corridor, gravitating towards one side or the other. Many of the older ones were a bit nearer to me, probably Josephine Zabini’s — or, as she asked me to call her, just Josephine’s — influence. The younger ones were a bit less sure about it, as they didn’t really know any other leader but Malfoy and didn’t know that they should be succeeded much more.

(In Malfoy’s first year, Josephine had closed the magnus potesta to him and his entirely. The older and younger years never interacted unless they were related because of this. No tutoring, no advising sessions, nothing. Fucking Malfoy really screwed his control over by pissing Josephine off that much.)

Lu was on my right, admirably looking confident and pleased. His red colors were roiling with nervousness and tension. Nathaniel was on my left, and was much more poised than Lu, though his deep scarlet and plums were bubbling with apprehension. Understandable; he staked everything he had on me, and now we were going to prove if that was the right choice.

Josephine was waiting in the middle of the corridor, vampire smile on her face.

“Know your opponents.” she said, nodding.

Malfoy had Zabini on his right and Parkinson on his left. It was perfect, with Lu facing her and Wilkes- goddammit, Nathaniel (it was so damn hard to get this kid’s name straight, since we were all still leery of him and his closeness with us was almost completely political) leering at a blank-faced Blaise Zabini. Malfoy stepped forward as Josephine retreated backwards, and I did the same.

We shook hands.

“Sure you can trust a traitor like Wilkes, Weasley?” Malfoy sneered.
“More than I trust you to lead the *parvus*, Malfoy.” I replied.

“And the heartless wonder isn’t here. Finally figured out that your Second’s useless? About time. Though why you’d replace the halfbreed with a fool whose only interests are on children’s games is beyond me.”

“More proof that you’re a rubbish leader. You don’t even know your control, do you?”

His grip on my hand tightened. “I know you’re just a useless chit, waiting for someone to recognize you and pick you out of your oversized litter. No money, no pride, and barely a name to yourself. You will bow under my leadership.”

*Pale skin and cruel grin and crimson eyes, brighter than her hair but darker than the blood dripping down his arm — Tom Riddle Sr. and his grave, sitting above the other mounds of stone just as he was above all others in life — “Cecelia, darling, let’s go,” he laughed, spurring the reigns — Green light flashed, three adults cowered away screaming.*

“*Bow to death, Harry…” the hiss went — two spells meeting, red and green, erupting into one flash of phoenix song and gold. Heart rising, three hearts rising, blood all over his arm, trickling into the grave dirt—*

Stop.

My eyes went icy. “I bow to no one. Least of all spoiled daddy’s boys.”

Malfoy smirked. “That will change, Weasley. It’s time you remembered just how far below me you are.”

Our hands unclasped, smarting with strong-fingered grips and anger, and we stepped back as our respective hands bowed shallowly to each other. Parkinson didn’t bother, but Zabini was polite. Lu looked irritated, and Nathaniel just seemed eternally, coldly amused.

Josephine directed us through the niceties. I would also have to learn all these traditional things, when I was the reigning snake of the *parvus potesta*. It was traditionally the leaders that oversaw duels, their Seconds or other trusted lieutenants.

(She told me, while she was going over techniques to go against Zabini, that I was lucky. Most Slytherins only had two or three close friends, and kept an eye on everyone else. That I had four — almost five — loyal to me, plus my brothers… Josephine said I would be terrifying, one day, if this was what I could accomplish after a mere year in Slytherin, following a lifetime as a bloodtraitor.)

At the end of it all, we stood several paces from each other. The older years, though mostly Josephine, had erected barriers with old wardstones that were always found near the Slytherin fireplaces, in the eyes of the snake decorations. The crowd would be safe as Malfoy and I pitted our magic and lieutenants against each other.

“Begin,” Josephine said, stepping behind the magic-repelling wards.

Lu and Nathaniel dashed forward beside me, and I grinned.

...
Adrenaline did not slow down time, or your perception of it. I’d almost claim the opposite, because I barely knew what was going on beyond my sluggishly bleeding hand and the wards I was building with its magic.

Just a little cut. Just a drop or two of blood was needed for these wards to flare to life, discoloring the air and making it impossible for anything less powerful than a *Sectumsempra* to get through. I had to mutter in old Celtic, just like when I did the damn flower ritual.

At the same time, I heard Parkinson shriek and Lu laugh, him charging towards her. It was a very un-dignified thing to do, charging into a duel like a Muggle, but Lu always liked pissing others off like that. I’m sure he adored that I didn’t give a fuck about pureblood customs, and picked up a lot of his new cusses from me. (He had a problem with his brother, Edward, I think?)

And there were furious spells and hexes being thrown on Nathaniel’s side, and his cackling which normally sent chills up my spine, but now just comforted me. That meant he was doing well, and my wards were almost done.

“*STUPEFY!*”

A thud on the ground, gasps from the audience. Lu got Parkinson, then. Good.

“Dodge this, Malfoy-”

“Zabini!”

“*PROTEGO!*”

My voice was quiet, but I knew the audience heard me. “-caomhnaigh mo sampla fola agus-“

A glance up showed Lu and Nathaniel pushing at Malfoy and Zabini, and a figure collapsed on the floor. I almost wanted to sneer; Parkinson was so damn weak, why would she even be considered for this duel? Malfoy was doing rather well, shooting jinxes and curses when one of mine was about to close in on Zabini, who looked very pressured now.

My magic sunk into the shield positions I’d chosen. The indigo was shimmering, just about to form the shields I needed.

“*Faoi mo draíocht, faoi mo neart, mise iarr bhur cliabhán do sciath mise!*” I finished.

I looked up just in time to see Lu get a hex to the arm and cry out as boils sprouted all along his skin. He was almost Stunned if not for Nathaniel bodily grabbing him and shoving him behind one of my shields. Malfoy managed to catch Lu with some purple spell of some sort, something that had him clawing at his eyes and screaming.

I saw red.

“Expelliarmus Protego Contego Infernal!” I snarled, forcing Zabini and Malfoy to conjure shields and jump out of the way respectively.

Nathaniel was breathing hard, and his sleeves were a bit shredded. He smiled, though. “One full minute, Guinevere?”

“I was busy. Lu, stop touching at your eyes-”

“Stun him, he’ll be in pain until we can treat it.” Nathaniel said.
I nodded. “Lu-”

“Ah, shite, bollocks, just do it! Better win, this hurts, ergh-!”

“Stupefy.” Nathaniel intoned as a few hexes exploded on my shield and jarred at my magic.

I winced. “This one’s going down, I can feel it.”

Nathaniel nodded. “Two on two, now, Guinevere. This is easy.”

“Zabini’ll come after me, cover me, I’m going to get Malfoy after I levitate Lu out of the way.”

This shield was about to go down. Nothing went through them, yes, but that was because things were absorbed into them. It could only take so much before it dissolved and dispersed, and because of the blood magic I did — not enough that anyone would really object, because this was quite a well-known Light ward that wasn’t technically illegal — it would hurt me when it went. Nathaniel jumped out from behind the invisible bit, which he only knew because we practiced this fucking formation of wards extensively, and I cast a *Wingardium Leviosa* on Lu so he’d be safe on the side.

Then I backed away, to the second shield, and muffled a cry as the first broke on Zabini’s *Depulso*.

Nathaniel did some disgustingly powerful thing with mist that seemed to scald the two boys — I was sure there was some Darker variant of that, probably found in some foul book or other — and I stepped out from behind the shield. Quick steps, barely a sound on the stone, and then my wand was flashing with red and blue and violet, *Stupefy* and *Protego* and *Arresto Momentum*.

Zabini met my spells with shields and bodily pulled Malfoy out of the way. I heard Nathaniel snarl in frustration.

“*Flipendo!*” Malfoy sent at me.

I cast a *Protego* and started hurling Stunners and Disarming Charms and Tripping Jinxes his way, starting off small with how my magic was drained from the wards that Nathaniel and I were ducking behind. The best part was that Malfoy and Zabini had no idea where they were, and we were disorienting them enough that they’d be hard-pressed to figure it out. Nathaniel was firing things that were Grey and Dark-Grey without abandon, grinning as he did, the incantations mere mutters from his lips. Very skilled, this one, but more than that, very creative and quick to pull back if he thought they might attack at all.

“*Bombarda!*” Zabini intoned.

It was sucked into the second barrier. I smirked. “Getting violent, are we?”

“*Fumos,!*” Nathaniel responded, making the smoke-mist thing again.

I held my breath out of habit. Harper’s potion experiments tended to be violent and looked a lot like this smoke. Glancing at Nate, I jerked my head at the general direction where random shots of light were coming from.

He grinned. “*Anemos,*” he whispered, but his wand movement was jerky — he had gotten hit somewhere on his wand arm, shit — and suddenly the smoke was blasted towards our opponents.

I pointed my wand at Malfoy. “*Fulgari!*”

“*Incarcerous!*” Nathaniel followed as soon as he’d gotten his magic back under control.
Ropes shot out of his wand and latched onto Zabini, tightening as the boy yelped and struggled. Cords did the same to Malfoy’s arms, and he was surprised enough that his wand fell from his hands. Nathaniel stalked towards Zabini with a predatory grin, and I cast a Leg-Locking Jinx on Malfoy and watched him fall dispassionately.

Then my wand began to break down my barriers — they would crumble slowly upon my order — and I stood above Malfoy with a grin. He was still struggling, but an *Accio* had his wand in my other hand. Nathaniel had spelled blisters onto Zabini’s hands so his own wand would fall, and he did the same. He was in a right state, but he’d distracted them enough so I could protect from spellfire and keep myself secure.

“Yield, Malfoy.” I said with a very smug smile.

His cool, grey eyes were widened with outrage, sharp face contorted into anger. He was still struggling.

I wanted to roll my eyes. I glanced at Nathaniel. “Stun Zabini.”

“Gladly. *Stupefy.*”

Zabini went limp in his bindings, Stunned by his own wand. Quite insulting, actually. And it left Malfoy with no allies in the *Duabus ex tribus*, and me with one. Lu and Parkinson could technically be Rennervated and up to fight again, but Malfoy didn’t have his wand and I wanted to check on Lu’s eyes later, before he started scratching at them.

“Your choice, Malfoy. You could dislocate your shoulders and try to get your wand from me, wait for the Leg-Locking to wear off. I didn’t cast it very powerfully. Or you yield, both to my victory and my reign, and I won’t have to shatter your wrists.”

*Thrymmatizus.* Greek spell, crafted for the purpose of shattering bones inside the body, but making sure they didn’t pierce anything. Just to make them unable to heal correctly (naturally) afterwards. A precursor to the Inside-Out Curse.

I’m sure we looked imposing. Nathaniel was one of the Darkest kids in Slytherin, with a very villainous smile and dark, empty eyes. Standing to my left, he smiled at Malfoy with that entirely creepy grin on his face. And then I had Malfoy’s wand in my left hand, and my right hand pointing my own elder-and-dragon at him, threatening to break his wrists with cold eyes and an amused tilt to my mouth. Yes, we were some fucked up children.

But if this was what I had to do to protect me and mine, now and in the future, that was alright.

(Fate demanded something of me, but I didn’t give a flying fuck. These people, my people, were worth the world to me.)

I saw the moment the fight left him. His struggles stopped. He didn’t bow his head, but it was close.

“I yield, *regina potestae parvae.*”

Queen of the lesser control. That had a lovely ring to it.

“My win, *rex sine corona.*” I said, sealing the tradition of succession through might.

King without a crown.
Okay guys, so the updates are gonna be in the afternoons/evenings of Tuesday for sure, since I'm back to school and work. D': And I'm still editing Chapter 27 and it's getting close, so I honestly might have to skip that week and furiously try to catch up. :P

But! Here's some Lyssie stressing about her position -- it's not all fun and games, after all! -- and some other shit. And I promise, as parvus potesta reigning, it's not all chores. But she's transitioning, so she has a lot of shit to do before she really feels the benefits.

Anyways. Thanks for reading and commenting! XD I love getting comments, I really do. If I don't reply, it's because I honestly don't know how to, not that I'm ignoring you in particular or something. :D

That Nathaniel was the only one that managed to stay awake in History of Magic apparently made him offended.

"Honestly, you should all be celebrating. You can't look so out of place after you've finally gotten your parvus potesta." he said chidingly, walking on my left — Harper was too sleepy to give a damn — as we all went to lunch.

I gave him a look. "Nathaniel. We've been kings for a week and I've slept twenty hours total."

"Excuses, excuses, Guinevere." Nathaniel replied singingly.

"Twenty hours. That's less than three hours a night, Nathaniel, you realize this?"

Dietrich was suddenly there. "Twenty hours? Lys, you promised you'd get eight yesterday!"

I twitched. "Yes, but then I had to meet with Josephine and start up the upper-lower tutoring and draw up schedules again, and then she scolded me for not knowing all the first-years by name, and then I had to go memorize those and try to profile them inconspicuously. Also, we had to work out how to keep her fourths under her because they were a little loyal to Malfoy."

"I thought you took care of the fourths with yesterday's duel?" Lu asked, yawning.

(His eyes had been cleared by Josephine, by the way. An old Zabini trick, apparently. We'd been warned about it, but Josephine thought it wasn't likely her cousin would use it. Her mistake, but it wasn't that bad. Lu just had some cuts around his eyes for a while; the scabs were already peeling away.)
“That was just Eades, and he was an idiot.” Harper piped up cheerfully, “Even worse than Haigh.” Harper turned doleful eyes on me. “You should’ve let me duel Eades, Lyssie. There are bags under your eyes.”

“If Madam Pomfrey saw you, she’d probably lock you away, and then where would we be without our queen?” Jay said, smiling a little.

“I trust you all to break me out.” I muttered.

“And risk Madam Pomfrey? Sorry, Lys, not even for you. There’s a reason Josephine Zabini wrote that no one would save you if anyone decided to piss off the dragon-lady.” Lu said, grinning.

Dietrich make a frustrated sound. “Lys! You are forgetting the point! This is not healthy! Where are your nutrient supplements and iron supplements?” He started at me, opening my bag and rooting around inside.

I yelped and swatted his hands away. “Oi, none of that, now! You’re lucky I didn’t ward my bag today!”

“You can’t do things like that in public, Dietrich,” Nathaniel remarked with a smirk, “Wait until the privacy of your rooms, if you please.”

He narrowed his eyes at Nathaniel, and pulled out two small vials, one a moss green like Jay’s colors and the other a red like my hair, and scowled. “Salaud dégoûtante. I do not even know why you are still here. You will be treated well, but you have no business staying with our circle.”

Nathaniel put on an innocent, wide-eyed look that didn’t look remotely sincere. “Why are you so mean to me Dietrich? I just want to help.”

“You yourself, maybe.” Lu muttered.

“Lys is going to scold you if you start again.” Jay reprimanded them all casually.

The rest of the conversation between those four was lost as Dietrich started to try to forcefully pour potions down my throat. I squirmed and swatted him away, snarling at him, “Stop being such a mum, I’m fine! I’ll catch up on sleep and whatnot when our potesta is taken care of!”

“Our potesta will collapse without you,” Dietrich retorted, still reaching for my face with one hand and my iron supplement in the other, “I am your Second. I am there to make sure you do not collapse at all.”

“Drowning Lyssie isn’t going to help, Dietrich.” Lu said with a roll of his eyes, breaking from the small spat between Jay and Nathaniel (not that Jay was an arguing-type, but still — Nathaniel liked to rile up the calm types).

“If we could refrain from killing me before before I set our House to rights, I would appreciate it.” I added on dryly.

“I’m curious, Guinevere-”

I jumped. “For fuck’s sake, Nate, don’t sneak up on people! Especially sleep-deprived Dark witches!”

Harper gasped. “You swore, Lyssie!”
Lu was gaping. “Why is *his* nickname better than mine??”

“Lyssie, the fact that you’re admitting you’re sleep-deprived isn’t going to calm Dietrich down.” Jay sighed.

“Stop! No nicknames! Wilkes is temporary!” Dietrich protested.

“Oh? You admit you’re Dark?” Nathaniel asked, a bit excited.

Ergh, I hated it when they all spoke at once, about different things. “Yes, I swear, Harper. We’ve been over this. The nickname was whim, how do you expect me to say ‘Nathaniel’ over and over, honestly? Why do you think I shorten everything to single and double syllables? And of course I’ll say I’m Dark, it’s not like I keep it a secret.”

“You never answered me, you know. Does your family know you’re Dark?” he asked.

I glanced at him. We were just entering the Great Hall for lunch, and I saw a gaggle of red-heads at the Gryffindor table that could only be my brothers. I glanced at them consideringly, then I turned to Nathaniel.

“They probably know.” I said with a shrug. “It’s not like I hide the fact that I’m a damn good Slytherin from them. Say what you will about the faults of stereotypes, but ambition is simply desire for power. That normally indicates a certain will to dominate, which means Dark.”

We were at our table, our favorite spot nestled in the middle. It would be useful now, since I had to constantly hold court and allow my *potesta* to approach me for whatever they needed. I’d had so many fuckers come up to me, voicing complaints they didn’t dare bring up to Malfoy and everything was a bloody mess. Malfoy fucked his *potesta* up so badly that Josephine was barely holding her own *potesta* together — “Sheer fucking will, Guinevere,” she told me, shaking her head somberly — and I had to fix it.

I didn’t want this damn seat, I had so many other things to do, but I’d do it. I take responsibility for what’s mine. My *potesta* wasn’t even nearly in the range of me and mine, but they were looking to me to fix what Malfoy broke, so I’d do it. And if I happened to draw young wizards and witches away from Malfoy and the bigger Death Eater names, that was a bonus that I would capitalize on when the war came.

Lu and Harper were digging into lunch with gusto. Dietrich and Jay were a bit more elegant about it. They were- *We* were all tired. They didn’t get as little sleep and rest as I did, but they had to cover for me.

Dietrich had to forge my handwriting on assignments as I lectured about them while I drew up plans and profiles for my *potesta*. Lu and Harper often took on the duels that were issued to challenge me, since I was still just establishing my rule. Jay was doing a bit of both, and still keeping an eye on Nathaniel, who I didn’t trust to do anything but information gathering and support for now.

We were flagging, and it pissed me off, but if we could pull through… just a few months of this, of establishing a true *potesta* and finding someone to groom into my position so I could safely take the *magnus* if I needed to. Which I hoped I didn’t, but if Malfoy made a mess of it and left his control hanging like this one, I would feel the responsibility to.

“Why the fuck did I take the *parvus* in the first place?” I asked myself.

“Because you have the self preservation of a lemming.” Dietrich said flatly, eyeing the iron
supplement in his hands that he hadn’t gotten me to take yet.

“Because you want us to succeed?” Harper said questioningly.

“‘Cos you think Malfoy’s a git — which he is — and wanted to take him out.” Lu added.

“And you were tired of all of us being snubbed for following you, as a bloodtraitor.” Jay said.

“Plus,” Nathaniel contributed, “you enjoy winning. And having a bloodtraitor sit on the parvus throne when there’s a Malfoy in the control is a very nice win, indeed.”

I groaned.

“Head’s up,” Lu said suddenly, “we’ve got Weasleys.”

“Which ones?” I muttered, cheek resting on the table and Harper and Jay patting my back gently and with much concern.

“Twins.” Nathaniel laughed.

“Oh dear god, they know already, don’t they?” I sighed.

Fred came gallivanting up, skip in his step and smirk on his face. “Lyssie! Dear sister-”

George was only a step behind. “-why didn’t you tell us?”

“You’re the parvus potesta leader!”

“Congratulations!”

“Brava!”

“We pay homage to the queen of snakes.” they said together.

Then Fred winked. “One of them, at least.”

Lu looked stupefied. “How do they do it? At the same time, the same tone…”

Harper grinned excitedly. “Can you teach us?”

Oh god. Harper and Lu running around like the demon twins… Lu with his craze for Quidditch and Harper with his legendary ability to fuck up spells so hard that they hurt… Oh god, no, I wouldn’t be able to take it.

“Nate, luv, be a dear and intimidate them away.”

Nathaniel chuckled. “My dear Guinevere, there are some people in this world who simply are too pure or too insane for my usual tricks. Harper is in the former, and Lovegood and your twin brothers in the latter.”

I wondered where I was in that scale, since the kid never bothered with trying to get under my skin. Probably the latter. The fact that I thought taking a leadership role after the idiocy of Malfoy was proof enough of my insanity. Goddamn Dark Arts were driving me Mad early.

“So, mini-queen-” Fred started.

“How is it, being the parvus reigning?” George finished with a grin and a bow.
“Do you not see her?” Dietrich asked, brow raised. “Lys has not been sleeping or eating properly. I have not been able to force-feed her the nutrient and iron supplement she received from Professor Snape.”

“I’m busy!” I snapped, “That stuff makes you groggy, I don’t have time for that!”

“Hm, hm, hm. Looks like our littlest sister is being moody.” George sighed.

“Just like Gin.” Fred added.

“Well, then, Your Highness, we shall grovel at your feet another time—”

“-when you don’t look like you’re about to Bat-Bogey someone—”

“-just like a certain Gryffindor we know.”

“You’re just like her—”

“-even look alike and everything!”

“You might be twins!” they chorused.

I snorted, rolling my eyes. How Mum managed to be legitimately angry at the twins so often was beyond me. “Alright, alright, you cheered me up, you stupid big brothers. Get back to your table, I’ll catch up with you later, yeah? I’ve got to repair Slytherin after Malfoy bollocks’ed it up, but it shouldn’t take more than two months.”

Fred and George glanced at each other. Then George stepped forward, giving me a serious look. “Little sister, take care of yourself. Mum would go mad if she saw you now. Perce and Ron were tempted to Stun you as soon as you walked in.”

“We talked them out of it.” Fred threw in.

I smiled, amused. “Thanks for that. Alright, if even you two are telling me to take it easy.”

“Why, Lyssie—”

“-we always care about your health!”

“Oh, shove off.” I said playfully.

They grinned and bowed in unison again, proclaiming their loyalty to the queen of snakes, and then skipped away back to Gryffindor. I felt much calmer after they popped over, which I was sure they did on purpose, and I sighed. I held my hand out to Dietrich.

“Supplements.” I said.

“Enfin! Here.” he sighed, giving me the vials.

“Get me the Headache Relief, too? It’s blue… and I’m going to need it.” I grumbled.

Looks like my September and October would be repairing Malfoy’s two years of damage. If I didn’t already dislike the little fuck, I swear.
“Here’s your Pepperup, dear.” Madam Pomfrey said with a small smile.

“Thanks,” I muttered, grimacing as I took the disgusting thing like a shot. (Goddamn, I missed alcohol. Goddamn, I missed it.) I valiantly held back the need to shudder, too.

“Wait here for a bit, Miss Weasley. I have your supply of iron supplement.”

I nodded, and laid back on my bed, closing my eyes and picturing all the fucking work I still had to do. When three firsties burst into the Wing in hysterics, one of them sprouting wings from all sorts of odd places, I sighed. Hufflepuffs. Madam Pomfrey would be busy with them for a while.

My boys knew to start our homework without me. Harper especially needed help with Transfiguration, which was a strong point of Nathaniel’s. They’d push Charms to the end so I could help there, hopefully get Defense and Astronomy out of the way since I was good on those subjects— Oh, and the other Hufflepuffs started hiccuping fire, lovely— but my boys would probably take the Quidditch break, too.

(It was in the schedule. Harper needed a break, and Lu did too. Plus, Jay and Dietrich and Nate got all pissy when they didn’t take breaks now, because I’d inadvertently trained us all to be on a very break-dispersed schedule.)

Well. In any case: not a problem. I had my damn paper work with me. Thank Merlin for Featherlight Charms.

There were many tittering voices and Madam Pomfrey vainly trying to help them and soothe them all at once. I snorted when one of them started swearing with language even I was a little amazed at, screaming about things growing from places he didn’t even know were there. But most of my attention was on my notes, where I was trying to wrangle up an agreement between Josephine and my third-years that they could agree upon for tutoring hours, since the fourth-years had been in charge of that but now they were gone, whisked away to be taken care of my Josephine’s people. Fucking power vacuums all over the place, and I was relatively sure one of the third-years — the most vocal one — was making a scene on orders of their father, who was under Malfoy Sr.’s influence…

“Merlin, Lys, you look knackered.”

I glanced up in surprise. “Harry? What’re you doing here?”

He was standing between my bed and his, looking at me curiously with those unreal green eyes of his. He grinned a little, shrugging. “Quidditch practice got a little rough, I suppose. Fred — or George? — clipped me with a Bludger, Wood started fretting, so here I am. Madam Pomfrey looks a bit busy, though.”

We both eyed the corner of the Wing where that one Hufflepuff was still cussing up a storm, the other seemed just feathers and hysterical laughing/screaming, and the last was starting to sneeze fire along with the hiccuping. Madam Pomfrey was having a hell of a time trying to keep them quiet and fix them up, but they were making it difficult. We turned back to each other, snickering at the — frankly — stupid scene.

I twisted around and pulled my knees up on the bed, patting the spot next to me. Harry sat down, with a smile, and we had to hold back our snorts when Madam Pomfrey started shoving kids into
beds and roaring at them, complete with Stinging Hexes and everything.

He nudged my shoulder as Madam Pomfrey started lecturing and ranting.

“What, Potter?” I said, grinning.

“What’re you in for this time, Lys?” he asked, similarly smiling.

I rolled my eyes. “Pepperup. And my iron supplements. She’s probably going to push nutrient supplements and Headache Relief and whatever else onto me, too.” I eyed him critically. “You might also want some. Nutrient supplements, anyways.”

Harry tensed, just barely. “What d’you mean?”

I looked away, taking attention away from him, shrugging.

(I could say something about how Ron desperately learned how to cook this summer, with me alongside him so he wouldn’t laze around or slack off — by his request, because Ron needed to send food to Harry. I could say something about how Fred and George’s faces always grimaced when their ‘rescue’ of Harry was brought up last summer, when I talked about Harry’s relatives, when I wondered aloud why there were bars on his window and locks on his door in my visions. I could even say something about how Harry was small and skinny for his age, about how he ate frantically but never a lot, about lots of signs like that.)

(I could say a lot of things.)

_Flinching backwards, green eyes filled with hurt — “I hate living here!” — wards, crimson and rippling, mother’s protection — “He must be taken willingly, if hesitantly. It will be a hard life, but-” — shadows crawling up the walls, smiling, chance ?? — away from his home and his protection, letters in the claws of owls with dark feathers and magic pulsing in the paper like a heartbeat — “The Boy Who Lived is vulnerable now!”_

_Stop._

_Accusing — “I can deal with it, Lys!” — hurt, flinching away, not right — “You’re one of-” “You don’t have the right, Lys. You don’t have the right.” — gentle smile, hand on her head, fingers tangled in dark crimson locks — ??? — can’t help him this way, what do I do?” “Aren’t you helping now?”_

_Stop._

_Ron burst into her room, she looked up in surprise. “Lyssie! You make that Harper bloke concentrate on school, yeah?” — Harper grinning, wand pointed at a successfully levitated — “Yeah, why?” “Mum’s teaching me how to cook, get down here!” “Haaah? Why should I?” — ??? — don’t push too hard, that’s how a Gryffindor would do it. Gentle, you know, that’s better._

_Stop._

“What do you want to come and live with me?” — ??? — rat’s tail disappearing behind the covers, orange cat pouncing and hissing — “SCABBERS!” — moon, full and round in the sky, warm wind for Scotland and dewy grass making her feet slip-

_Stop._

He would despise me for bringing his background to light. And that would just make me push
harder — I know how I am. I could push and manipulate and push, probably abusing the shit out of my Sight to do it, hurting myself, and then Harry would be taken from his blood wards and put in danger. And if I wasn’t mistaken, I’d just been warned that… that what I, and Ron, was doing… it was enough, somehow.

Because, really, I just wanted to protect me and mine. Make sure they were happy. Harry would be happier with our quiet support than with a flashy move like taking him away from the Dursleys right now. That vision, though… Maybe… Maybe Sirius Black could do something, at the end of all this. But it was his right, not mine.

(A choice was presented. I was being warned of a choice I was making, even if I didn’t understand it. Stupid Clairvoyance, so cryptic and shitty.)

I swallowed my contemplation and grinned at Harry,

“Well, you’re a midget compared to the rest of your age group, so I figured you’d need something to catch you up to my beanpole of a brother, yeah?”

Harry looked extremely offended.

It had me laughing, that expression.

“What’re you looking at me like that for?” I laughed helplessly.

Harry scowled. “You’re one to talk, Lyssie. You’re tiny compared to Ginny.”

I smiled in response. A lifetime of short jokes taught me better than to get all riled up for something like this. “Mum and Dad like to say that I got all the recessive genes.”

Which was true. When I first popped up in this world, I noted that I sorta looked like a mix of Ginny and my previous incarnation; it how I justified how dark my hair was, my slightly darker skin, my shortness, the roundness of my face and the softness of my features. But my parents had a different explanation for me, involving my magic and Seers and ancestry. There hadn’t been a naturally Dark-cored Weasley or Prewett in ages before me, and none as powerful as me. The theory was that my magic was so deeply connected to my physical body — as evidenced by how it bloody punished me when I overused it — that I took on features that would normally be hiding in the DNA, features that echoed the ancestors whose magic was closest to mine: Dark-cored, powerful, perhaps Seers, etc.

So. Basically, my magic took after different ancestors, and that similarity bled into my physical features, too.

(I looked like Helvynya Prevett, funnily enough. Minus the black eyes. My eyes were all Dad’s, thank Merlin.)

Or, the story of how I was never going to reincarnate into a proper white person. Hah.

“Are you feeling better, Lys?”

I blinked at the sudden concern welling in my friend’s bright eyes. “Come again?”

Harry fidgeted a little. “Ah, well. You know. When Ron and Hermione and I, when we came to wish you luck on the duel… You looked sort of… lost? I guess is the word? Distracted. Thought you were nervous, or something, before the duel.”
“Well, I haven’t slept much,” I answered lightly, occluding sudden images of a crumbling bust of a friend, a last smile, and a painful throb of grief in my chest away, “Not only do I have to keep up with my school work and private projects—*Fuck you very much, Helvynya Prevett.*—I also have to adhere to a strict schedule to make time for Harper and Lu’s flying, keep an eye on Nate, tutor the boys, see my siblings, go over old paperwork from before and after Malfoy was parvus reigning, and then edit all that to suit mine and Josephine’s purposes.”

Throughout my impromptu rant, Harry kept his eyes trained on mine, listening and studying. He had a really intense stare, this one; I imagine that when he’s older, when the war kicks in and everything *really* begins, it’ll only get stronger, more piercing. Signs of a good leader, I’d like to think; or at least, one in the making. A good teacher, too.

(He’d be both, one day.)

(*Funny, I thought absently, this is the person I am going to follow to war. To be perfectly honest, I couldn’t see it yet.*)

(Yet.)

And then Harry had to prove me wrong immediately, by stating bluntly, “You’re trying to distract me by dangling all this information in front of me, aren’t you?” He smiled wryly at me. “This is why you’re always teaching me something, because you always make me ask questions.”

My knee-jerk reaction was, of course, to deny such a thing—

Harry chuckled. “Lys, you might not *mean* to do it, but you’re such a Slytherin, you manipulate people anyways. Which I guess is alright, since you’ve got that ‘Puff loyalty and Gryffindor nobility thing going for you, yeah?”

I rolled my eyes at his teasing. “Well, you know me, Potter. Slytherin queen and all. Malfoy’s had this horrible constipated look on his face since I won my duel, you know, because both *potesta* leaders are girls who really pissed on his parade. Misogynistic little git.”

Harry’s brows rose. “You’re doing it again. The distracting thing.” He sighed, leaning back on his arms, giving me a faintly exasperated look. “It’s alright if you don’t want to tell me about what’s troubling you, Lys. You snakes need your secrets.”

I smiled faintly in his direction.

(Secrets. Chamber. Tom Riddle. Color thief.)

It really… just wasn’t a good idea for me to be spouting off about how much I missed a dead villain. Tom Riddle hadn’t been a good person. A hurt one, yes, and a very confused one, yes, but the little git had intended to bloody *Imperio* me and have me kill Dietrich! He also got Harry stabbed and Hermione petrified and drained the magic out of Malfoy. And it had been an entire summer since then, I’d only gotten my head out of my arse and stopped worrying about Dietrich halfway through it.

I had *moved on*, dammit. Gotten *Sollertia Augurium*, took over the Slytherin parvus *potesta*, took time to very much avoid the dementors skulking around the school — being guilty and grieving because of Tom *fucking* Riddle was something I didn’t need or want right now.

*Because I was weak?*

*No, because I was.*
(Weak, he called it. Weak, for not having the will to kill me. Weak, for wanting someone by his side, when he despised people. Weak, for wanting a friend.)

Haha… this really wasn’t a good idea. But Harry had that look on his face, a leader’s look, and he was smiling a little and, really, if there was anyone who wouldn’t be quietly disgusted or completely lacking in understanding about it all…

“I made a friend out of a monster,” I said quietly, “But before I could decide whether that was a good thing or a bad thing, the monster died. So now I want to think the best of him, because I miss him, but I need to think the worst of him, because if he were here, there’s a very real chance I wouldn’t be.”

Harry went quiet and still. “You’re talking about Tom Riddle.”

I laughed bitterly. “What does one do, when someone who loves you dies?”

“Miss them.”

I…

“I meant for that to be rhetorical, Potter.” I said weakly.

Harry smiled. “You’re putting too much thought into it, you know. Take it from me, Lys… When someone you love dies, you just… miss them. You thank them, too, for making you happy while they were with you. And then… you go on. You’ll always miss them, though. That’s… That’s just how it is, I suppose.”

(So. This was what Harry thought of his parents, then. Not entirely organized or complete with closure, but for a thirteen-year-old… those were some wise words. Wise and just a little heartbreaking, really, because… because I don’t think he knew, really, how to put into words how it felt to love someone so fiercely only to know that they were beyond your reach. It wasn’t the same, really. Harry’s longing for his parents and my missing my friend, it wasn’t the same.)

(But it really… really, really sort of… was?)

My lips twitched. (I forced them to twitch.) “You are actually rubbish at this comforting people thing, aren’t you?” He sent a small and unheated glare my way. I barked out a little laugh, shaking my head. I huffed. “Who said I loved the Dark Git, anyway?”

Harry shrugged. “He was important to you, yeah? Made you happy.”

“That… is an odd way to describe the past Dark Lord.”

“Well, I don’t really think I’m talking about Voldemort, really. Tom Riddle was… different. You made him different, Lys.”

Well, isn’t that the thing, though? I don’t think I made him anything at all, I thought.

(It wasn’t me that made him human. He already was. I just… brought it out, a little.)

Harry went on, “He was your friend. Might’ve been a git… a monster, I suppose, but you don’t miss that. You miss how he made you happy, right? Nothing wrong with that, Lys. You overthink things, really.”

I felt a smile coming onto my face, one that wouldn’t be held back. “You’re the wisest thirteen-
year-old I’ve ever met. I don’t reckon I need to teach you anything at all at this point, Harry.” I grinned at his forming protests, silencing them with a, “Thanks.”

He beamed back at me. “Anytime, Lys.”

Anytime, even though it was my friend who poisoned him and petrified Hermione and went on to become the Dark Lord who murdered the people Harry had been missing his entire life. Anytime, even though he had all the reason in the world to hate Tom Riddle and so did I, really. Anytime, even though he was a thirteen-year-old with the world weighing on his shoulders and I was a twelve-year-old reincarnation that should’ve known better.

“He used to call me ridiculous. It was his way of rolling his eyes at me.” I said conversationally. 

You are ridiculous, Guinevere.

“You do pull off a lot of impossible or dangerous things, you know.” Harry said, rolling his eyes.

“Hello pot, my name is kettle.”

“Shut up, Lys.” Harry grinned a bit. “You said he taught you healing?”

I nodded. “That, and wards. For a sociopath, he was bloody brilliant. Taught me a lot of shortcuts for wards, especially the ritual-esque ones, and I know a few techniques for healing so I don’t have so hard of a time with my Dark core, and all.”

“And I suppose you had to trade something for that.” Because Slytherins, is what Harry meant. 

I grinned. “Of course! Did I tell you about the time he-”

And, really, wasn’t it sad that Harry was using my own technique against me? Asking questions that led to long-winded answers, distracting me but trying to help at the same time. I don’t know how he knew — maybe he didn’t know and was just going on instinct, which was far more likely now that I thought about it — but my thoughts were stifled with grief, backed up with negative emotions because I just had no outlet. Dementors everywhere perpetuated it all, my weakened Occlumency prevented a mental outlet, and no one I knew would want to talk me through my ridiculousness…

Alby, maybe, but the man was busy. The man had a thousand other things to do; that we managed to meet up so often when I was younger was a bloody miracle, really. And I suppose Harry, now, too.

I’d owe this boy a lot after this was done, wouldn’t I?

“-get this straight, he made fun of all your friends?”

“He was a git. Of course he did.”

“And you still liked him?”

“It’s not like he could do anything about it. And it’s not like I didn’t tease him, either! I bought a bunch of neon colored ink and dumped it in the diary, once, you know, and he definitely knew that it wasn’t an accident-”

“You poured glittery ink on the Heir of Slytherin?”

“Yes, and-“
I… told stories. I told stories about why I missed Tom Riddle so much, and _Harry listened_, and we laughed about it together. No mention of the Chamber, of the framing of Hagrid, of the basilisk; just… remembering the reasons I missed the guy, the reasons I made him one of mine despite everything else. It felt… nice.

“-bonded over our shared dislike of flying, actually-”

“You don’t like flying?”

“…You say this like I’ve committed perjury or stolen your firstborn or something.”

That distractedness, that tiredness that came with nightmares caused by weak Occlumency barriers… it felt like it was leaving. It felt like I didn’t need to be guilty about his death anymore, because someone — even just _one person_ — knew the Tom that I knew, understood _why_ he’d been important enough to me that I imprinted his colors in mine.

“Lys, this is even _worse_.”

“…This is why Tom and I made fun of Harper and Lu, you know. Especially Lu. Broomstick nuts, both of you.”

It felt like closure.

(When I drifted back down to Slytherin after showing Harry how to heal his own bruised ribs, my boys greeted me with grins and nods and smiles and we got back down to work after filing the papers I’d done. Jay and Dietrich had peered at me after a moment or two, but Dietrich snorted — there was a bit of smug relief in his eyes, and oh god, I could understand Dietrich well enough to tell _that_ through his poker face — and Jay beamed more brightly.

“What?” I asked.

“You look a _lot_ better.” said Jay, “Did Madam Pomfrey make you sleep?”

Dietrich nodded. “You look much more rested, Lys.”

I smiled a little. “Something like that.”)

…”

Of course, it’s two steps forward and one step back for me.

Born into a world of magic and a loving family? Well, get fucked kid, your family’s gonna die. Have the support of your Gryffindor family despite being in Slytherin? Sucks to suck, you’re going to be low-key bullied for a year before you have the strength to put them in their place. Save twin sister from the basilisk and get a pretty kick-ass Horcrux quasi-friend? Get fucked _again_, Malfoy and Dietrich are taken and your quasi-friend’s gotta go.

Oh, and let’s not forget: Take over Slytherin and get a session of impromptu grief-counseling from a cool thirteen-year-old? Fuck you, Lyssie, Gryffindor Tower gets ‘attacked’ and now there’s dementors _fucking_ everywhere.
“You’re being melodramatic.” scolded Dietrich.

I whirled on him, twitching. “Melodramatic? Melodramatic?? That fucking prick Sirius Black slashed up the Fat Lady on Halloween and now those bloody, cloaked abominations are on the fringes of my Mage Sight! Do you know what they look like, Dietrich? Do you know what they sound like?”

“Is this not why you studied The Magick of Man-Hunters, Lys? To control this more?”

“I haven’t even finished my paperwork! Stupid Lu and his stupid Quidditch, Flint’s snapped two brooms and I have to arrange for the blame to fall on the ‘Claw firsties because I owe Josephine a favor and-”

A hand laid on my shoulder. I blinked at it, following the arm, and saw Lu.

He gave me a serious and pitying look. “Lys, I think you’re going nutters.”

My other hand was snatched up by a cheerful Harper, who had made reserve Seeker just as Lu had made reserve Chaser. (I had mental notes made to have Warrington or Flint or Pucey have an accident so Lu could finally play his bloody game. Might do the same for Malfoy, but Harper didn’t care for Quidditch as much as Lu did.)

Harper smiled brightly. “It works!”

I frowned. “What works?”

“You have a tendency to calm down when Lovegood holds your hand.” Nate remarked from behind me. (We were walking to Herbology, and Nate liked to walk behind us at a more sedate pace, usually with Dietrich next to him to keep an eye out.)

“I do?”

“Don’t you feel calmer, Lyssie?” Harper asked innocently, wiggling our joined hands around.

I gave him a wry smile. “I think it’s more the person than the hand-holding.”

“Which means if I were to hold your hand, you wouldn’t be calmed?” Nate asked slyly.

“If you held her hand, I would Diffindo it off, Wilkes.” sneered Dietrich.

“As if your spell would make it to my wrist, Bastion. Guinevere doesn’t even trust you to duel, does she? The only ones who’ve dueled for our position so far are me, Harper, Vaisey, and our regina of course. Pathetic-”

“Do. not. make me come back there.” I hissed, the irritation goaded on by the sudden filth on the edges of my Mage Sight.

If I hadn’t met Baldwin of the Brotherhood of Mirrors already, it’d be surprising how disgusting dementors’ colors were. My Mage Sight’s stronger sense was the ocular, of course, so I Saw the dementors before I heard or felt them; they were shattered glass and broken bones, rotten something that melted and frayed and fluctuated colors, tinged with black and browns with textures like oil and skin so dry it was cracking. They were fucking ice, too, and I already felt cold as we descended the grounds towards the greenhouses.
My grip on Harper’s hand must’ve bordered on painful, I realized suddenly, and I yanked my fingers from his without thinking about it. “Sorry,” I murmured, gritting my teeth and wondering whether I should pull my Mage Sight back completely — I’d be able to feel them, with how cold it was, and it’d make me antsy if I couldn’t detect them properly, too — “They’re really, really close. It makes me want to start throwing Incendio’s around or something.”

“Do dementor cloaks burn, do you think?” Lu asked, carefully glancing where I was grimacing and twirling his wand in his fingers.

“Question!” Harper piped up.

“Answer.” Dietrich replied.

“If dementors are Dark, why wouldn’t they feel welcoming to Lyssie? And Nate and Jay?”

(Because we three were pure Dark, Dietrich was a rare Grey bastard, and Harper was Grey-Light. You could tell by the way the colors moved, the shades and the personality.)

“Those filthy creatures aren’t Dark,” answered Dietrich with a distasteful tilt to his mouth, “Labeled that way because your gouvernment britannique ridicule is so frightened and ignorant, they label everything that is not to their liking as Dark. Parfois je me demande pourquoi j’ai choisi de venir dans ce pays.”

“They’re not Dark creatures?” Harper asked.

“Answer,” I called this time, deciding to narrow my Mage Sight range (so at least I’d know if one of those billowy motherfuckers was coming), “They’re, as I said, abominations. They’re not natural, you know? Lethifolds are Dark creatures. Brightstalkers are Dark creatures.” I grimaced.

“Breed the two together, feed the surviving offspring on human souls, stick a ritual or two in there, and the rotted corpse’s maggots metamorphosed into the first dementors, which bred more of its kind with a bit of egging on by our then-Dark magical government.”

“Feudal age, yes?” Nate asked.

“Quasi-government, then.” I corrected, “The rituals have been wiped out of history, by the way. No one wants anyone making more dementors, since the Ministry regulates the other way. Bloody miracle they still have a vague sense of loyalty to their ‘creators’. That or a couple of slave rituals or something, which would only make them more terrifyingly hungry for human souls.”

Harper looked a bit pale. “That’s… horrifying.”

“I hate these damn things.” I murmured.

Harper fiddled with his fingers and sleeves, glanced about, and then darted out to take my hand again. I frowned in confusion, but he just smiled, with made me relax a little. Tch. I think they were right about the calming effects of hand-holding, though. How embarrassing.

But Luna looked quite pleased when we walked into the greenhouses — where, thank fucking fuck, I couldn’t feel the tinge of cold from the dementors, thank you Sprout! — and she and Harper had an odd, silent staring contest where their blue eyes would occasionally flicker down to look at my hands. I had the feeling that if this weren’t such a practical, hands-on class, I would’ve had my two most childish and Light friends sandwiching me with their fingers tangled with mine.

(Why is this my life? I mouthed to Dietrich as we were repotting the Feringulus Figs.)
He only raised a very amused brow. *It’s not like you’re unhappy with it.*

...**Very true.**

It was while I was gleefully setting fire to the magical parasite thingies — Ackerly Ticks, I think they were called — that loved attaching themselves to the Figs’ roots like cocooning caterpillars that Luna brushed her shoulder against mine in greeting. I gave her a quick smile and then turned and gave the Ticks a much more vicious one, grinning when my next *Incendio Tria* split into a bunch of little, wispy, blue flames and made the Ticks pop with heat.

They were no dementors, I suppose, but I felt satisfied killing them anyways.

“Annoyed at the monsters in the dark?” Luna asked lightly.

I frowned. “Those, and the Minister letting them come closer when it’s entirely probable that people with magical sensitivity— Like Snape and Harry. ‘-will be able to feel them. Bloody emotion-manipulators in a school full of teenagers and children, not to mention, they’re not even doing their job since that Sirius prick got into Gryffindor Tower anyways.”

Not that I gave a damn about that, since I knew Sirius wasn’t here to kill anyone but a damn rat who I’d been ready to kill for years, but whatever.

Luna sent me a sweet smile, though. “You’re a very, very kind queen, you know. Worrying about everyone even if they’re just shadows on the wall for you.”

Shadows on the wall was familiar, for some reason.

“What I worry about is the judgement of my nation’s leaders,” I muttered. “Being a leader has given me a new perspective. The perspective of: My god, Fudge actually seems to have proven Darwin wrong and becoming living proof that survival isn’t just for the fittest! How on earth that utter buffoon was elected into office escapes me.”

“Didn’t I say, Guinevere? Fudge keeps Heliopaths and all sorts of horrid monsters in his closet. The Umbugular Slashkilters are especially nasty. If he infects everyone else with Loser’s Lurgy, then he automatically looks the best, doesn’t he?”

“...This speaks volumes of how corrupt our Ministry is, which really pisses me off.”

“That’s why Stubby Boardman never had a trial, don’t you think?”

“Stubby-?”

Ah, fuck. Sirius Black, right. That’s who she thought Sirius was, for some reason; though, really, Luna spoke in riddles and codes only she fully understood, and it was the rare person that managed to break those codes and hear her true words. I was only about three-quarters of the way to true Luna-fluency, of course, which was saying something as I really had reason to believe I was Luna’s only friend, and wasn’t that a sad thought?

(“Don’t you get lonely, sometimes, Luna? I’m so sorry—”

A tinkling laugh. She smiled very, very softly. “I like the quiet, you know, Guinevere. I don’t like lots of people, all stomping and talking and spreading their nargles about. It’s not very beneficial. This is just fine, don’t you think? Fairiefiddles aren’t meant to be jostled together; they only touch hands when there’s something important to say, which is just as nice as when you’re nestled in your swarm to me. Don’t feel guilty about it, Guinevere! That’s the wrackspurts again.”
And, really, if that wasn’t Luna scolding me for apologizing for not being there for her the way I was for my boys, what was? It was a, ‘You do your thing and I’ll do mine, stop worrying about it,’ and I really had the feeling that it wouldn’t be the last one. Luna was just so easy to fret over.)

But back to Sirius Black and the rat.

I could… Hm. Well, this was the nice thing about having Luna completely aware of both my Sights, hm?

“I think I’m going to go See for a bit, if that’s alright with you.” I said lightly to her.

Luna was normally the unflappable sort, but I think there was a shine of eagerness in her eyes when she heard that; I had never asked Luna to cover for me like this, to help me with the Clairvoyance, not the way Ginny and my brothers had done over the years.

She nodded agreeably, giggling. “You’re very interested in burning the Ackerly Ticks, of course. Dark colors have a fascination for burning things.”

(Not a lie. Dark wizards and witches liked domination, you see, liked conquering, and what better way to signify your victory than to burn something to ashes?)

I concentrated on the rat and Sirius Black and the choice that I was making, reached into my tattered Occlumency barriers, and coaxed my Clairvoyance — so awfully neglected lately, the poor thing — out to play.

Knife glinting in moonlight — curtain drawn back, he remembered these, they hid behind them in their forms so often. Not the time for memories, he knew this, he shook his head — knife in his hand, small and barely sharp enough for a quill, let alone a — brown fur, greying, thin and sickly. Not there, gone, blood on the sheets and orange cat hairs were all over the place. A memory — moonlight and a drawn curtain — “AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAARRRRRRRRRRRGGGGGHHHHH! NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!”

Stop.

Choice? — “I’m sure.” — He was ready, he could face his demons, he flinched from black diaries and Nathaniel Wilkes enough — “…You’re honestly the worst Slytherin I’ve ever met.” he chuckled, smile a curve, warmth in his dark eyes, helplessness, too.

He wanted to make peace — two boys standing, one taller and thinner, the other suspicious — “I want to make peace, Bastion.” “Liar.” “Not this time.” “You always lie, Wilkes.” he sneered — Peace, he said.

Stop.

The dog ran through the school — panting, tired, bones felt through his shaggy, matted fur — tired — silvery eyes searching for somewhere to hide. They were everywhere, they were looking for him, surely they would find a lone hound in Hogwarts suspicious — the paper slipped to the floor — Neville Longbottom raised his hand, trembling — “Perce — Sirius Black! In our dormitory! With a knife! Woke me up!”

“We found this dog wandering about, but nothing else…” — Lupin narrowed his eyes, turning yellow, amber with aggression. Unnoticed, Severus Snape flinched away. He bore his teeth.

“Dog?” he asked — The secret was out — “I was not their Secret Keeper! Please! Let me kill the rat!”
Choice. — Harry Potter, fist clenched in his jeans, jaw tight with anger. “I want him dead.” —
“You’re one of mine, you know. I think.” “Not very confident, are you, Guinevere?” A snort. A roll
of her eyes.

Stop.

Her hands pet his ears gently. She snorted. “Mutt.” — the water was warm, there was a Muffliato
on the door — Choice.

“I need your help.” — She cried out, face in her hands. The moon was high. But she was
across from each other.

She looked up at her friend. “I need your help, Alby.” — smile, old and withered but genuine; he’d
missed her, lately, but — “He needs to-” — Choice.

Stop.

Aaaagh, headache. Well, then. Message received, Clairvoyance: Not yet.

Fucking dammit. Two steps forward, one step back.
Chapter 26

Chapter Summary

Wow. Guys. Guys, guys, guys. I'm past 500 kudos and 200 bookmarks. HOly shit guys! XD Thanks to all who kudos and bookmark and especially the commentors! :D I have very fun conversations in the comments. XD

So yeah. This chapter is a little late, I've had a bit of a rough day. :P But here it is! It's mostly filler and fluff, to be honest; this arc is going a little slow, which I apologize for, but I've found I had a tendency to make awesome shit happen in the even-numbered arcs and take it slow with the odd-numbered ones. So. :D

Anyways! Here it is, please enjoy! :)
finally being able to repair my damn Occlumency barriers, which would be really nice since I was in a much more peaceful frame of mind after my little talk with Harry.

(And would be really important, since the Halloween incident had the dementors even closer to the school than before. Damn things.)

Josephine laughed. “And where are your kiddies? I imagined that Harper kid would be cheering.”

I turned to grin at her. “I shooed them off to go celebrate early, so I could relish the moment myself. I imagine they’re bribing the House Elves and smuggling things into our classroom right about now.”

Josephine looked a bit pensive, her amused smile faltering just a bit. “You know, I don’t think I’ve heard of a potesta reign as close as yours, Guinevere. Close enough to have their own private common room like you do.” Her eyes softened, hands putting down a thin book she’d been pretending to page through when I sprinted up to the filing cabinet. “You’re luckier than you think. It’s rare, to be able to trust 80% of your camp.”

“90%. I’m on the way for Nathaniel.” I said jokingly.

I didn’t miss the fact that she looked a slight bit envious. And why shouldn’t she be? Josephine had her friends, but it was like if me and Malfoy were running the same circles; lots of snarls and insults and challenges, but too much pride to allow the structure of the potestas to fall to ruin because of their inability to multitask. Weaknesses were exploited as a rule of thumb in Slytherin, and Josephine was a prime example of a Slytherin.

Me, on the other hand… Well, I was a good Slytherin when I wanted to be, but if I could choose, I’d probably be a Gryff. And I acted like it, because every single person I’d tricked into my camp, every ally chosen to make me better, had become one of mine. Like a fucking gradient, Slytherin first, then the closer you got, the more Gryffindor I became. And somehow, that mentality of ‘us against the world’, of pride and power in a collective rather than your individual self… it bled into my firsties, my brothers, my friends, and now I had both loyal friends and position, which Slytherins normally counted as mutually exclusive.

In short: somehow I hacked the system. (And I didn’t even need my cheaty Seer abilities for it.)

Come to think of it, Josephine seemed to be involved in whatever choice I had coming up. Or in the works. My last bout of meditation, guarded by Luna in the greenhouses, had hinted at such. I’m sure it was a lot more subtle than the Clairvoyance implied, but then again…

Well. Josephine Zabini never existed, to my memory, so she really could be a curveball. Just like all my boys had been surprises. Who’d have thought, in this world where I was born just to protect my family, that I’d be lucky enough to find a bunch of weird Slytherin boys who I’d probably burn Europe down for? Whose to say that Josephine wasn’t that sort of surprisingly important existence, right?

“Do you want to come?”

We both blinked at each other. The words had popped right out of my mouth, without my say-so. Happened often, though, so I shouldn’t have been so surprised; I liked Josephine, after all. She still looked stunned, for her at least — a small widening of the eyes was all that gave her away. (In the end, I was a Slythindor; the Gryffindor impulsiveness made my mouth run, and the Slytherin cunning spun the recklessness in my favor.)
I grinned. “If you don’t mind hanging about a bunch of brats, that is.” I thought about them fondly, imagining their faces if I brought Josephine Zabini to hang around us. “Harper and Lu are like children; really, really terrible at subtlety and hiding their thoughts. Jay’s shy, but he’ll be nice to talk to for you. I’d say Dietrich and Nate would provide intelligent conversation, but those two are always at each other’s throats, so they’ll just be entertaining or slightly annoying instead.”

“And where will you be in all of this?”

I blinked up at Josephine. She normally had a confident smile on her face, eyes half-lidded and lazy; the smile would sharpened into a baring of her teeth in an instant, but it never softened.

Her expression now?

I mirrored her, lips curling at the edges and eyes warm. “Probably breaking up their fight by throwing something at them, which Harper and Lu will love, and then going back to braiding Jay’s hair and chatting with you.”

Josephine raised a brow. Then her smile widened, and she threw her head back, laughing. When she finally elected to calm down, she looked amused and I looked more than a little annoyed (embarrassed).

She grinned at me. “Sounds like fun.” But she shook her head. “Still, my reputation would be in ruins if I decided to make nice with your potesta, since you’re still a bunch of kids compared to me.”

First instinct was to get annoyed. The second was to argue on behalf of my boys. But one never goes with your first and second ideas, right? So I sighed, shrugged, and smiled in exasperation instead. “I guess it’s a bit of a stretch, expecting a seventeen-year-old to sit with a bunch of thirteen-year-olds.”

(When I was seventeen, you couldn’t pay me to do that. So, it’d be a bit stupid of me to have hard feelings if Josephine — a Slytherin queen — didn’t feel like sitting in the middle of a bunch of kids.)

Josephine flicked a lock of hair behind her shoulder, because Slytherins were — in the end — drama queens. Every single one of them. “Keep those boys close, Guinevere.” said the queen of the magnus.

I arched a brow. “I’m normally told the opposite.”

She started to open up her book again. “It’s rare to find that stubborn loyalty outside of the ‘Puffs, you know. You’re a Slytherin, aren’t you? Then you know how to see everything as either asset or obstacle. That kind of loyalty… it’s the biggest pain in the arse when it’s against you, and the greatest asset you’ll ever get when it’s for you.”

I crossed my arms. “I know that.”

The magnus potesta reigning gave her signature, vampiric smile. “Then what are you still doing here, little queen?”

“That kind of loyalty doesn’t pop up over night,” I said lightly, turning to the entrance to go find my boys; but I couldn’t resist throwing a smirk over my shoulder. “Got to cultivate it, no? Best to start with a chat or two.”

I left the common room with that, leaving behind some bewildered, eavesdropping Slytherins, a
laughing Josephine, and an oddly cocky declaration that, one day, I think she and I would have that sort of ridiculous loyalty between us. By the sound of her amusement, I don’t think she really minded.

... 

I could feel their glares on my back, but my fingers just kept braiding. “Harper. Lu. Stop looking at me like that.”

“You’re not even turned around!”

I twitched at their twin gasps, then smirked when I heard them yelp as someone smacked them.

Dietrich sighed. “It is to be expected.”

“Of Lys to ignore the Quidditch game and braid Jay’s hair?” Lu complained.

“No, of you two to annoy her for doing so even when you should be in the team reserve stands instead.”

“Well, it’s wet. And windy. We wanted to be where Lyssie drew up her wards.” Harper reasoned.

I finished off Jay’s braid ("Thanks, Lyssie.") and grinned up at them. “Like ‘em, then? I really had to shove a bunch of magic and blood into them.”

The Hufflepuff-Gryffindor game was stormy and depressing, and I sort of wanted to strangle Lu and Harper for dragging us out of our nice, warm classroom for this… but I’d improvised.

My wards that I’d used in the *Duabus ex tribus*? These were based on them, and some wards in the *Fortifications* book series. I’d modified them to absorb a certain amount of water and wind instead, and I had to only do certain because otherwise they’d probably dehydrate people who touched them or suffocate us. As it was, the excess water and wind was redirected somewhere else with another ward, and if it was hitting the Ravenclaw stands (where Luna assuredly wasn’t), well, it wasn’t my problem that so many of their kids were annoying fucks who hated me. Trade-off, it was a fuck-ton of magical power and I’d had to ask Nate and Jay to help supply — Dietrich’s reserves were a little small for these, unfortunately — and we couldn’t really move without fucking the ward system up.

However! The Slytherin stands were dry and peaceful and Warming Charms provided by the upperclassmen kept us cozy as we watched the Hufflepuffs and Gryffindors duke it out in the air. Added to the fact that Josephine smuggled in food, we were having a fine time up here. That both *potestas* were grateful to me and were impressed by my foresight was a plus, too. Slytherins were vain little bastards, we didn’t like getting wet or cold or ruffled if it wasn’t on our terms.

“Question!” Harper called.

“Answer.” replied, rather rarely, Nate.

“Isn’t blood magic illegal?” asked Harper, looking around at my wards. (A good question, because most of the wards that I used were based on blood — Tom Riddle was obsessed with the stuff, honestly — and I tried not to do it too conspicuously. Or, at least, where there were only Slytherins,
who ignored that sort of thing.)

“Blood magic wherein more than three ounce of blood is sacrificed is illegal,” Nate corrected with his usual suspicious smile, “Our Guinevere only used an ounce for both wards and supplied the rest of the power with Dietrich and I.”

“Ohhhhh, how’d you do that, Lyssie?”

*Hands writing, wrists and fingers smudged with ink — laughing in an empty room, smaller space and a single bed, she didn’t have any roommates. Parchment was strewn all around, drawn with runes and ward schemes of pentagons and heptagons and — “This time, I’ll substitute this with the rosemary branches, right?”*

*Is the energy equivalent?*

According to these calculations, but I’m not sure how to determine the freshness as a component.

*Ptolemy’s Equivalency Theory won’t work for organic material of that nature.*

WHAT? Dammit, Tom, my entire substitution matrix is rubbish now!

*Ridiculous girl, don’t you read what I give you?*

Stop.


“What? How do you have trade secrets??” Lu demanded, leaning forward on Dietrich’s chair and making the boy twitch.

I laughed as Harper frowned at the annoyed Dietrich, then poked at the unable-to-move-still Nate. Because, you know, we ward batteries weren’t allowed to move from the spots I’d set up the ward schemas on, right underneath the stand seats. Nate was also twitching as Harper grinned and poked at his head.

“Trade se-”

A whisper at my senses.

I stiffened, whipped my head around to the pitch. Red and yellow blurs shot by, forms further confused by the violent wind and rain and the mist that was starting to creep through the storm clouds. My hands tightened. It was suddenly a little cold, wasn’t it?

“Shit. No-”

I expanded my Mage Sight range, cranking it up-

“Lys? Lys, what’s wrong?”

It trembled. The magic of the wards started to fail, wavering, rain drops started to leak through the sightless roof and my Slytherins murmured in surprise and upset, breaths visible with how *cold* it was-

“Hufflepuff versus Gryffindor… rainy… third year…”

My breath was coming out in white wisps. The whispers grew louder, disjointed and scathing.
Broken glass and warped mist and rotting colors that clashed and faded and moved like creeping fingers stood at the edges of my Sight. That was bad, shit-

“What did she say?”

A figure fell from his broom, a streak of red against the dark background of the sky; the crowd screamed and pointed, but my boys were focused on my sudden tension. That was Harry, I knew it was, and he was falling and it was the Hufflepuff-Gryffindor Quidditch match and-

Lu’s hand on my shoulder. “Lys, are you alright?”

-ice cold, hands were numb and hairs rising on the back of my neck-

“Move.”

“What?” asked Jay urgently, sounding more worried than I’d ever heard him.

-black cloaks, billowing among the clouds like ants scrabbling in the light, taking over, ice spreading through my veins and shattered glass pushing into my eyes, whispers and croaks instead of music; the golden wards of Hogwarts were straining to protect its children from harm, but they were bucking against shattered glass and warped colors and whispers that sung broken harmonies that grated against my ears and eyes-

“EVERYONE MOVE!” I screamed, standing and shattering my wards, ignoring the twinge of pain it caused me.

The wind howled and the chill burst through, sudden rain drenching all of us. I whipped around, hands shaking so badly that I didn’t even bother getting out my wand; I’d just drop it and then it’d be lost and-

“GET INSIDE!” I roared, watching horrified but determined comprehension finally dawn in the magnus potesta, who were thankfully grabbing my parvus by the fistfuls and shoving them towards the stand’s stairs, “GET THE BLOODY HELL INSIDE!”

Hah. The Hufflepuff-Gryffindor Quidditch match, where Harry fell off his broom. Because of dementors, of course. The same dementors that, in close quarters, almost caused me to go crazy with the amount of despair and terror they could call from my memories. The same dementors, exposed to my fucking reign, my first-years and fellow second-years and quiet thirds?

Fuck. I’d be pissed if I weren’t about to get mind-fucked and terrorized by dementors.

I won’t lie. Most of the little events have slipped past me. And why wouldn’t they? I haven’t read/watched HP in years, years that were filled with me being busy with magic, research, political machinations, and trying not to go insane with Clairvoyance and Mage Sight. I knew the big things, the abstract things: the Philosopher’s Stone was saved from Quirrell, the Chamber of Secrets had a basilisk, Dementors and werewolves and Sirius Black were important, Triwizard, etc. Easy things.

But I’d forgotten the devil was in the details, and that came to bite me in the ass today.
Flicking wand movement, sharp L-shape turn, cruel smirk. “Do you know what it feels like, to be digested alive?” — stared at his hands with wide eyes, gag in his mouth- saliva and blood running down his chin. He shook his head, desperate and answering and — “You will.”

Stop.

His chest burned and ached and echoed with how empty it was — sitting in the corner of an empty room, waiting for nothing. He was so terribly lonely, and the sun was bright, but it felt like death inside here — “He’s sort of a freak, Lucas, isn’t he?” — “Why does he never stop? We’re knackered, and so is he, but he never stops flying!” — cold eyes, hazel-blue and dark hair, hand gripping a cane — wand slipped inside, hidden, thrumming with power, a quiet song — “A disappointment, Lucas. Again.”

Stop.

The birds were exploding into bone and blood all over the place — crimson wings and — she couldn’t stop seeing them, she tried to look away, but it was mesmerizing, the carnage. There was something utterly beautiful about how disgusting it was. They were — flying and dripping and the rain was red and — “I’m seeing things, right? I’m seeing things. I have to be.”

Stop.

“What’s going on? What’s wrong with her?”

“She doesn’t react well to dementors, Nate, piss off or help me!”

Scabby, dark hands with long fingers and ripped nails, creeping into the cracks of the doorway — there was nothing under their hoods, just — “What are you afraid of, o lovely one?” laughed the white mask with oozing teeth, reaching forward, tilted head innocent but not — dark dark dark and nothing else, nothing else in the world, the stars were all dead and all that remained were their black embers and infinite nothing.

Stop.

Red hair and moonlight — pale fingers and pale fingers? — “You’re one of mine.” — Josephine Zabini laughed? — the lake rippled, stones cutting across the water in steps and skips. She tried to copy, the older girl found her stones — “The plimpies would like this one.” “What are you talking about?” — Stepping stones and skipping stones and grey slate on mirror-like water. A vampire’s smile, but there was no bite to it?? — “You’re one of mine.”

A brown rat with greying fur, streaking across the grass. Wand whipped towards it, pointing, silvery branches spouted from the tip and then shattered as he broke through — “ACCIO RAT!” she screamed? And a smile, no heat to it, just a smile. — “You’re one of mine.” she said contentedly, nodding to herself?
“There’s a spell, there’s a spell to make them go away! I know, my Mum told me about it-”

“What’s the spell, Harper? Harper!”

“I don’t know, I’m sorry, I don’t know!”

Hands gripped hands, pale fingers and pale fingers?? Both stained with ink and magic — “Don’t worry.” — “I always worry, Lyssie.” — together, but he felt his heart clutch and there were bruises under his robes. She could only quietly hand him Bruise Paste and, god, he hurt and — “Are you weak, boy?” — “You’re one of mine.” ???

“Stop.”

“What the fu- She’s bleeding. Bastion, what the bloody hell is this, Guinevere’s bleeding!”

“Episkey!”

“That didn’t work, Dietrich!”

“I am trying my best!”

“Too many people are panicking, we can’t get her out. She’s barely safe here, Harper was trampled when he tried to go inside and check on our potesta-”

“Shove them out of the way! No, let me, I’ll bloody blast ‘em, Lyssie’s got blood gushing out of her nose and mouth and- Merlin’s BLOODY pants- how much can she bleed out with the anaemia thing? Just try to Vanish the blood, or she’ll choke!”

“Vanishing is hard!”

“Not YOU, Harper, you’ll probably slit her throat open or something!”

Throat opened with a letter opener, silver and crimson, gushing out and he can’t breathe, his hands are clawing the air and there are tears in his eyes — struggle, one two three, thrash and scream voicelessly — pain in his throat, his lungs burn, his blood is strangled.

Then his struggles ceased, there’s a pool of wine-red all around him, reflecting the candle light, and the white markings on the ground drink. Smaller, smaller, the pool lessens — the flesh ages, sinks, rots away, bones turn to dust, there’s nothing and yet — the magic screeches, laughingly and horribly, and-

“Stop.”

“Do you know what it feels like now? Ah. He can’t answer, can he? Dead. Just like all the others. Pity, really.” — unseeing eyes, sizzling flesh, a horrible smell and a terrible pain and a figure laughing in the face of it all hysterically.

“Stop.”


“Har… per…” I choked out.
There was very visible panic in his face when I spat out more blood. Thankfully didn’t get my gross germs all over his face, because that would’ve been a shame. There was some magic, a twitch in the colors, and then I sucked in a breath that hurt, that pressed against the pressure crushing the rest of my insides.

This was a reaction to overuse of magic. Meaning that not only did the dementor fucks bring up all the worst memories I’d ever Seen, they were bringing up the worst memories I hadn’t Seen yet. Meaning they were triggering a goddamn Clairvoyant episode and FUCK that was really bad and dangerous. Goddamn Legilimens and Legilimens-like creatures were the most dangerous things to Seers like me. (Gossip from the Golden Trio told me that Trelawney was crazy, but I honestly thought they might’ve been scared of the dementors because Seers and dementors did not mix, and anyone of a Seer bloodline would know this.)

(This also might be why Luna was more reserved than not this year, hanging around her Tower rather than the Forest, because I was 90% sure she was of some Seer-lineage, and the dementors could easily kill a kid in the Forest.)

“Alby… or… Snape…” I instructed, with difficulty.

And the next thing I know, Harper’s out of my way and all I can barely see — because of the fucking rain all over my eyes — is overcast sky and the occasional black figure flitting in and out of vision, and there’s Harper yelling, “Get a Nuntiam to Snape, Wilkes!”

“It’s BLOODY RAINING if you haven’t noticed, Harper!”

“That’s what IMPERVIUS is for, stupid!”

“Shut up, Harper!”

Silence and then creaking, the branches shifting under their weight, rope rubbing scars into their boughs so they’d remember the hanged forever — twisting around, spinning slowly, as slow as dancing, dancing in the air with their heads cocked and throats purple. The boy crawled out from the abandoned den — fox den, seat of cunning, hiding — and stared at his father.

Stop.


Warmth and my mind suddenly didn’t feel like it was going to explode, but it hurt and- Jostled. Arms around me. Shudder through my body, cold, a tap and a Warming Charm, then- Lifted from the ground like I was little again. Where was Dad? No? No, I was at Hogwarts, but I could imagine him, I could see him, it was warm just like back then, the first smile and the first awakening and-

“Come along, Weasley,” said a voice stiffly, “You are more troublesome than Potter.”

I tried to smile slightly, because that was exactly right. And I didn’t even make up for it with saving Philosopher’s Stones or boys from basilisks or godfathers from dementors.

(Maybe that was why I was a Slytherin, because I didn’t save anything but things that were me and mine.)
When I woke up and saw a white ceiling, I groaned. “God, I am here too often.”

“At least you’re aware of your deficiencies, Weasley.”

Oh. Well, that was unexpected. I sat up, shifting the Hospital Wing blankets and pillows, wincing at the soreness in my chest as I did. “Hullo, Professor Snape.”

You’d think that I’d be greeted by armfuls of firsties, maybe some well-wishers from Slytherin who liked the new direction I was taking it, Josephine, my brothers, Harry or Hermione or Luna, or hell, even Alby. It was odd to see Professor Snape sitting all regally and stiffly on one of the Hospital Wing chairs (which Alby usually Transfigured for comfort) and watching me with hawkish, black eyes. He had one of those faces that just sort of made you feel like a bug, you know, so I couldn’t even feel bad when I shrank back a little.

Slytherin parvus reigning or not, Professor Snape was my Head of House. We respected him.

“Weasley. I was not informed of your reaction to dementors.”

Straight to the point. Except he drawled it out and made me squirm a little inwardly at how irritated his voice sounded, even as his face remained passive.

I twitched my fingers a little, unwrapping an Occlumencic/magical film from my Mage Sight — my, my, it had built up, how long had I been asleep? — so I could reveal Snape’s colors. I felt a lot better when I could see hostile elements’ colors (which was why the damn cambion scared the shit out of me, even now). Deep blues and streaks of dark violet and green, the strings like silver and ivory. Roiling with irritation, just as I figured.

He raised a brow. “What did you do?”

I blinked. “You felt that?”

“A certain sensitivity to magic is required in the art of potion-making, Weasley.” Snape answered dully. “I am well-versed in the magic of many creatures and plants, Weasley. You could not afford the sensory organs of a Brightstalker.”

Brightstalkers were magical creatures that loved preying on magic. Magic ripped from the bodies of wizards and witches, of course. They were completely blind and deaf physically; their one sense was Mage Sight, which they used to hunt. It was in The Magick of Man-Hunters and that’s how I learned control over the Soothsayer part of me, through bastardizing their techniques with spells and meditation and blah blah blah.

Brightstalkers were also very, very, very Dark creatures. No one liked talking about them, since it was “an affront to magic” that they hunted down people through Mage Sight, and could drain a wizard of his magic enough to leave Squibs all over the place. Hunted to near-extinction, the elusive Brightstalker.

“They’re a magical creature with natural Mage Sight, and instinctive control of it.” I replied, “I studied them for my own purposes.”

Snape looked a bit suspicious, since hi, I was admitting that I was a bloodtraitor studying something bordering on the Dark Arts, but he didn’t care to inquire further. Which was why I
enjoyed Snape as a House Head.

Then he went back to the original subject.

(Undoubtedly, he’d be digging around for information later. Snape wouldn’t go tattling to Alby that I was interested in the Dark — hi, pot, this is kettle! — but my Head of House would probably watch me closely. Josephine told me that he ran interference if the Dark Arts delving that her potesta got into went too far, since the man knew so much about the Dark Arts.)

Snape said coolly, “Twenty of your ribs were fractured from the force of your magical backlash. Do you know how many ribs you have, Weasley?”

I winced at the anger creeping into his colors. “Twenty-four.” I answered.

“Twenty-four,” Snape repeated softly, “Twenty of your twenty-four ribs and internal bruising. And Mr. Bastion informed me that this was not your first time meeting the dementors. Tell me, Weasley, has your proximity to Potter somehow infected you with a fatal hero-complex?”

Harry’s surname was spat out like it was acid. Fucking Snape. But I withered a little at the force of his glare and the iciness of his tone. It was very hard for me to be my usually snappy, insulting self if the other party was someone I respected, and very concerned for me. As if I’d mistake that thrum in his colors, and the shakiness in his core song; that was very much worry/concern/protection.

(Weasley family taught me that soul pattern well.)

(Of course, this was on top of the eternally-present sadness/grief/bitterness Snape always had.)

“The reaction wasn’t this bad the first time around, Professor.” I said weakly.

“Evidently not.”

Another wince. Damn, he was pissed. “Are we… Is there a Silencing Ward up?”

Snape flicked his wand out faster than I could even register movement. “Muffliato,” he muttered, twisting his wand like so, the silvery strings of his magic flickering and branching around us in a circle, a web-like barrier — which was what perimeter spells often looked like, if I had my Mage Sight up — crackling up in a dome around us, then fading to an opaque whisper.

I remembered that spell, somehow. Muffliato… Muffle? A Muffling spell? Good enough. Lucky I was adept at memorizing wand movements and incantations, from my visions. Muffliato sounded useful as hell.

I took a breath. Then, “The first time, the dementor was a lot closer. They… Well, they bring up your worst memories, right? I have the memories of the world, past and present and future and unfuture, and… They bring those up. It’s… it’s a nightmare, being trapped in all the worst things the world has to offer.”

Snape was still. There was no flicker of emotion. But his magic seemed to soften and sigh, and if I looked closely enough, his eyes were just a little more understanding, though also unsurprised. Of course Snape knew that; he was Snape.

“This time was different. They did that, but they also… somehow, they triggered a vision. Or maybe it’s the power surge I had on my birthday, and I haven’t been able to meditate enough what with the potesta situations, so my magic was restless and my shields were weak. Whatever the
case, they dragged me into a vision and brought me new horrible things to see and I couldn’t get out.”

My Head of House was quiet. Contemplative. There was no sigh or pinched brow or anything; the man had a poker face Dietrich envied, but he also had the ability to break his pokerface, which Dietrich also envied. Snape closed his eyes, which was the only outward sign of frustration or whatever that he’d allow. His colors were calm and still, which was good.

“You are more troublesome than Potter.” he said flatly.

I smiled a little. “I have a vague recollection of you saying that before.”

Snape almost rolled his eyes. I could feel it. Silently, he dismissed the muffling barrier or ward or whatever. “You are a Slytherin, girl,” he almost sighed, “Only a fool or a Gryffindor hoards power but doesn’t ensure they can enjoy it.” He stood, making to leave. “You are so monumentally abhorrent at self-preservation, Weasley, I cannot even fathom why you were put into my House.”

“Ambition,” I replied good-naturedly, smirking now. “Wanting to live until my twenties with the demon twins in the same household is ambitious, right, Professor?”

(Wanting to live until my twenties, because I would gladly die for one of mine to live.)

(Wanting to live until my twenties, because I didn’t, last time around.)

Snape snorted derisively. “Foolish girl. That you wear green and silver, that you are parvus potesta, you would do well to avoid such circumstances as these from now on. You are a Slytherin, Weasley. Slipping into a coma for a week is unbecoming of your House and station. Do not let this happen again.”

A week. Fuck. I blanched, and Snape smirked as he left. The bastard.

I was annoyed enough to overlook the fact that, underneath all that drawling sarcasm and acidity, Snape had — in his Slytherin way — told me that he expected better of me and that he didn’t disbelieve for an instant that I wouldn’t find a way to do better from now own. Because, you know, fucking Slytherins and their wordy words and double meanings.

Ah, shit. All the paperwork I’d missed would be piled up. My firsties were probably going mad, trying to cover for me. Harper had probably cried. Jay had probably cried. Fuuuuuuuuck, my brothers and sister, though. And Percy and Ron, the overprotective little shits. Fuck my life.

I had the urge to bash my head against a wall. I’d follow through with it, too, if Madam Pomfrey weren’t so damn scary.

…”

“The Patronus Charm.”

I blinked. Normally, when my boys visited, they shoved sweets and my notebooks and sometimes my favorite books at me, to make me feel better and whatnot. But this time, all five of them stood with Harper at the front, giving me a single book: Shield of Light, by Arturo Montgomery. A compendium of offensive spells with Light allegiances.

Harper nodded. “I wrote my Mum while you were still in the… in the coma. She said it’s the best defense against a dementor, and sent me this book.”

“We’re all going to learn it.” Dietrich said softly.

“But only Harper’s Light-”

“Doesn’t mean we can’t cast it.” Jay interrupted uncharacteristically, “It’ll be harder, sure, but we’ll learn it. You’re probably going to be the first, since your Mage Sight is such a great help in spell casting and warding.”

“Because I have references,” I sighed, thinking of how I had my brothers or the magnus or Professors demonstrate spells for me while my Mage Sight was up, “And I match the patterns of magic to those references. We don’t know anyone who can cast a Patronus-”

“Albus Dumbledore.” Nate interrupted, this time.

I frowned. “You all despise him.”

“Not despise,” Lu protested, “Just… dislike intensely?”

“Because he doesn’t care much for his school, if an entire House is ostracized as much as us.” Harper said matter-of-factly, as if he were repeating it from someone else; which he probably was, the way Dietrich and Nate’s eyes gleamed vindictively.

I sighed. “I agree that Alby’s overworked, but if I had to choose between politics of the ICW and Ministry or a school filled with adolescents, I’d do the same.”

“No you wouldn’t.” all five chorused.

I gave them my flattest stare. “You all hate me.” I declared.

“You especially.” I retorted.

“Please just ask the Headmaster to demonstrate for you?” Jay pleaded, stepping forward to rest his hands on my blankets and green eyes dangerously watery, “Lys, this is the second time we’ve been frightened out of our wits because of dementors, and this time, your magic was so violent that it hurt you.”

“You went accidental,” Lu mumbled grudgingly, “And Dietrich said that at that level of your magic getting all… defensive-like, you probably would’ve hurt us.”

“We really should be preparing for the backlash of this,” Nate said absently, inspecting his fingers, “Malfoy caught wind of it. Fainting at dementors is bad enough, but he’ll likely target the fact that you went accidental.”

“You accidental magic, it hurt you.” said Dietrich, tossing a scathing look at Nate, “Meaning you pulled it back and hurt yourself even more so to protect us, you maudite, imprudente, incroyable fille! No more. We will learn to keep them away from us, so you will have to speak to your old mentor and begin the process.”

That…
…was not an accurate assessment, but it was a very, very good guess. They didn’t know about the Clairvoyance, so they wouldn’t know about the magical backlash — Soothsayers had a different sort of backlash, which came in the form of intense migraines and nausea and such rather than rib-breaking and shit; another reason they weren’t considered true Seers by the ICW — but… well, it sounded like something I’d do, redirecting accidental magic to myself, being aware of my proximity to mine. Of course they’d come to that conclusion; Dietrich especially, with how I threw myself into the lair of a basilisk for his sake last year…

I traced the title of the book with my fingertips. “You’re right. I don’t hate you all.”

There was a sigh of relief, all around. Not from those words, not really. I’m sure they all got the message: Fine. We’ll all learn the bloody Patronus Charm, if we can.

“It’s a high-level spell.” I mumbled.

“Everything we do is high-level.” Lu retorted.

“This is different, though. And it’s pure Light, which none of us are.”

“So?”

I rolled my eyes. “We’re not going to get this in one go. We’re probably not even going to get it in a few months, you realize.”

“At least we finished the paperwork recently.” Jay pointed out.

“If this takes away from Sollertia Augurium, I’m going to be very upset.” I warned.

“You haven’t made a dent in that book, Guinevere.”

“Thank you, Nate. Rictumsempra.”

“Protego. Temper, temper, Guinevere.”

“I’m a redhead. We have tempers. Which, if we’re all being honest, is probably why I ended up parvus potesta.”

“Perhaps we’ll duel Malfoy again?” Dietrich mused, “He is ignoring the fact that you impressively did not hurt anyone with your magic, focusing on the loss of control instead. Ce petit idiot exaspé rant. Your temper is suited to dueling.”

I resisted the urge to stick my tongue out at him. They always, always poked fun of my love for dueling. I called it stress relief; they called it sadism. Jerks.

Harper got himself comfortable, sitting all cross-legged on my bed, right up next to my legs. He grabbed Shield of Light and opened to the first page. (That Harper, our lovable, easily-distracted, hates-studying Harper, was the first to open the book… well, it made my heart all warm because that meant he really wanted to learn the Patronus Charm. For my sake.)

“Page 341! Patronus Charm. Ooh, pictures!” he said brightly.

Lu peeked over his shoulder. “Diagrams, Harper,” he said, rolling his eyes, “That’s the breakdown of the spell.”

Harper’s eyes glinted. “So readers can modify it, right?”
Dietrich swiped the book out of Harper’s hands immediately. “Absolutely not.”


Nate glanced at Dietrich, and it was one of those rare times they weren’t sniping at each other at all. There was a certain ‘We’re doomed’ look that everyone had, though only four of us really made use of regularly. “Are we certain we want Guinevere to guide us during this venture to learn a spell that’s uniquely suited to Harper?”

“It’s this, or Lys puts herself into a coma again.” said Jay lightly.

Dietrich shoved the book at me.
Chapter 27

Chapter Summary

Holy shit, is this what other authors feel when they don't backlog? This is nerve-wracking. I wrote this chapter in two days (the weekend), panicking the entire time because I'm so screwed when we hit the end of my first draft. DX

Anyways. I was gonna put a shoutout here but then it was a million people, so basically: everyone who comments is the best and I love you. :D Y'all always help me with my foreign language and tell me how my characters are doing, and I absolutely adore that people are shipping my OCs, bc that means I did them boys right. XD

So yeah! Thanks for reading and commenting and kudos-ing. I love you all, and I hope you enjoy! This is a chapter getting ready for some action, so it's a bit summary-ish, but I present it to you lovingly all the same. ;)

A month passing and our progression with the Patronus Charm was…

Well.

“Why is this so DIFFICULT? It’s just calling up a bunch of happy memories, isn’t it? I can’t even produce WISPS and Harper CAN?” Lu raged, for the hundredth time, making several Slytherins sitting in the common room roll their eyes again.

Jay’s brow was furrowed in concentration and annoyance. His wand was spluttering out little breaths of white, but nothing much more than that. He met Lu’s snarling gaze grimly. “It’s a little embarrassing, admittedly.”

“DAMN RIGHT IT’S EMBARRASSING!”

Harper pointed at Lu and laughed, as he’d been doing every Patronus session. “You’re such a bad sport, Lu!”

Lu twitched. “Shut up, Harper!”

Nate was laid out on a loveseat all by himself, reading my translated notes of *Sollertia Augurium* with interest. He hadn’t even attempted to cast his Patronus yet, knowing he was as Dark as Jay but not quite as prodigious in magic. I suspected, also, that Nate was the type that’d never lower his pride, and to be worse than Harper in anything would be too much for him. It was almost too much for Dietrich, who was only producing wisps because his core was Grey rather than Dark, and he was infuriatingly determined to be able to stop dementors from coming near us all.

(From me, they all silently agreed. *From me.*)
Harper was grinning manically, throwing wisps of white all over the place. They only flickered for a second or two before dispersing, but it was better than what the rest of us could get, though quite bad for a concentrated effort of a month. I kept an eye on their magical cores, listening and watching for the moment they verged on magical exhaustion — this much magic poured into a failed spell, over and over again, it always came on quick.

“Any luck, parvus?”

We all glanced up at Josephine, hands on her hips and a grin on her face. She’d been extremely amused the first day we’d walked into the common room to practice Patronuses. It was a calculated move, on our part; Malfoy was already harping on about how I was a questionable parvus potesta leader if I was hospitalized by the mere presence of dementors, never mind that not a single one of us Slytherins did well with them. My boys and I decided that, rather than scramble to cover our weakness, we’d make a show of correcting it and proving we could overcome whatever unexpected misfortune stood in our way.

Hence the common room, rather than our abandoned classroom.

“It’s slow-goings.” I answered for all of us.

Josephine nodded. “It would be. Pure Light, that spell. And no tutoring?”

“Perhaps when we’re really struggling, but this is just… training, I suppose.”

She beamed in recognition. “Ah! I knew it. You’re trying to impress it into your magic, aren’t you?”

“Cast a spell enough times, it becomes second-nature,” I said, shrugging, “And you get better. Most tedious way to go about this, especially at our core maturity, but it’s the simplest.”

Josephine chuckled. “Not very time-efficient, but it’s better for your core. You’re very caring towards your potesta, aren’t you, Guinevere?”

I grinned. “Nothing but the best for me and mine, Josephine.”

She laughed and walked away, leaving us to our suffering. Which is just how she liked it, honestly. My boys teased me about being a sadist for loving the duels I was challenged to on occasion (aka Slytherins generally making sure I was doing well with all my duties, it was a potesta thing, Josephine dueled at least once a week and saw it as part of the job), but it was Josephine who was the real sadist here. I think it was a product of her being a badass and having been a potesta leader since she was a first year. Even I hadn’t done that, but Josephine had taken Slytherin by the balls and would graduate with the underscore of seven years of leadership implied in her resume.

God, what an amazing girl. I was a reincarnation so I wasn’t half as amazing; this was just Josephine Zabini at her core. She definitely deserved to be a potesta leader, if she managed to control Slytherin for so long, even with Malfoy actively but unknowingly throwing everything into chaos.

(I… might have a crush. A little one.)

A month passing and our progression with the potestas, by the way, was going much better than the Patronus.

Heh.
Holding court in the Slytherin common rooms is a given. One needs to hold court to make oneself available to the people one rules, but also to make sure they don’t bother you for each and every little thing at random times of the day. The set up hierarchy was to prevent that, since we were all students; the potestas system was just an extracurricular activity of our House, marked down subtly in our records if such a thing was relevant to our future employers.

(Which it would be, in all likeliness. House secrets were House secrets, but every organization had a Slytherin in their upper management, and they would always keep an eye out for powerful pieces come from powerful potestas.)

“Weasley?”

I looked up from Sollertia Augurium, its introduction only barely translated and still being smoothed out. Nothing interesting but Helvynya Prevett’s childhood, in all honesty. Dietrich was sitting on my right, Harper on my left.

“Cornfoot,” I greeted amiably, smiling slightly, “What is it?”

He shuffled on his feet. Silvester Cornfoot was a third-year, neutral-to-Light family, pureblood of a branch house. Quite shy, this one, less outspoken than his Ravenclaw cousin of the main house, Lavina. I believe the girl was friends with Lily Moon of Slytherin. Silvester had flaxen hair worn a bit longer than normal, watery brown eyes, a weak chin but normally a sharp look about his face. Best as a listener and information-gatherer, him, with his surprising ability to blend into crowds despite the silver and green on his tie.

“My mentor…” the boy trailed off, not meeting my eyes.

I frowned. “Peregrine Derrick? What of him?”

Cornfoot swallowed visibly, then straightened and met my eyes determinedly. “Derrick hasn’t shown up to the mentor meetings for two weeks, regina. I have been supplementing my advising sessions and homework aid with my dorm mates’ advice and help, but I do not want to be inconvenienced like this when he has responsibility for me.”

The Slytherin common room went quiet. Dietrich’s eyes had narrowed, flickering to Jay and Nate — both of whom had key roles in the mentor-mentee situation between the potestas — who were scowling at the implication. Not that Cornfoot was slighting against their judgement, but that Derrick was slighting them for not fulfilling his duties and therefore making them look poor. The glint in Nate’s eyes foretold pranks and torment, courtesy of Harper and Lu and himself, in the future.

“Derrick will be… spoken to.” I said, smiling sharply and thinking of how pissed Josephine was going to be — this made her look bad, too, as he was of her potesta. “Anything else, Cornfoot? Your escort group is working?”

He nodded enthusiastically. “The Gryffs haven’t done anything to me in weeks.”

“Good,” I muttered, vindictive and smug.

It’s not an exaggeration, to say that Slytherins are the pariah of the school. But the other Houses’ way of showing it is similar to how the Slytherins initially treated me: subtle, unthinkingly petty, and only really hurtful if you take it personally. Which most Slytherins, within a year or two, do not; the way of the world is that Gryffindors are heroes, Ravenclaws are smart, Hufflepuffs are bubbly, and Slytherins are evil. But rather than outright bullying — for the most part, there’s
always the crueler-minded ones out there — it’s like being snubbed, over and over again.

And what’s the worst thing you can do to a Slytherin? Piss on their pride. Which is what snubbing is, especially if it’s school-wide, dismissed as normal by everyone.

The escort groups are to prevent this. Less chance of bullying if we’re in groups. Less chance of snubbing if a sharp-tongued magnus is there to call them out on it. Less chance of feeling hurt and alone if you’re not. It does require good parvus-magnus relations, though, which isn’t that common, but Josephine and I handle it well.

“Thank you for bringing this to my attention, Cornfoot,” I added kindly, “Do you want a new mentor picked out, or would you rather… well, piggyback on one of your dorm mates? We’ll compensate the magnus student for taking on two mentees, so don’t think of that.”

Cornfoot frowned. “Erm… I’m not sure. Could I… could I pair up with Lily Moon? Elena Chambers is good at Potions, which I’m horrid at, so maybe…?”

Jay smiled and spoke up, “She can be your temporary mentor, until we find a better match for you. If you do like Chambers enough, we’ll see what we can arrange then, alright, Cornfoot?”

“Oh. Alright, erm, thanks, Rookwood.”

Nate jumped in, chuckling a little. “It’s our duty as parvus reigning. Guinevere will take good care of you all.”

Cornfoot looked at me, successfully creeped out by Nate at this point — he made it a point to be the creepy one of our reign — and when I nodded, smiling and tipping my head to him, he grinned in relief, and maybe a bit of hope, too.

“I trust you, regina,” he murmured as he shuffled backwards, looking to go to his friends who were watching closely.

“I strive to life up to it, parvus.” I answered formally, reopening my book feeling better about this parvus thing.

(I fluctuated between ‘WHy the fuck did I do this, I’m drowning in paperwork and stress!’ and ‘This was a good thing I did, this is worth it, don’t worry about it!’ weekly. Being a leader was a right pain in the arse, it really was, but sometimes the payoff was better than the work put in, so I suppose I couldn’t really complain.)

A month passing, and our progression with the issue of Nate — to trust or not to trust, and how much, and why should we, Lyssie?? — was slowly growing in favor for him, though it was very, very slow.

But still.

“And you simply… followed?” Nate asked skeptically.

Dietrich sniffed, turning away pointedly and reading one of the many books we scavenged thanks to the House Elves last year. Jay was sitting patiently, waiting for me to be done with his braid, and similarly kept quiet. Harper and Lu were the only ones who managed to speak to Nate amiably and effortlessly, so far; they were both on his side at one point, some would say, but it was just their extrovert personalities and ease with people that came into play there.

Dietrich was Nate’s victim, once upon a time, and Jay had been terrified he’d be next if he didn’t
let it happen, which he did. There was bad blood all around, and it was only because I’d never seen first-hand the results of Nate’s torment — he had wisely backed off as soon as I showed interest in Dietrich, the clever Slytherin he is — that I wasn’t as awkward and mistrustful and hostile as they were towards the boy.

“Well… Lu had just joined us. It was political suicide, the way he did, you remember?” I answered, combing through Jay’s hair gently. (That shit was like silk. I don’t know what Jay did to take care of it, but he was blessed with good genes and silk hair.)

Nate snorted. “He was doing so poorly in classes and had so little backing… He needed your help and didn’t think it through enough to realize that to ask for your favor was to throw away Malfoy’s. Such an idiot…”

I casually reached down to my wand and flicked a low-power Stinging Hex at Nate, who was caught by surprise since the boy was reading through my Sollertia Augurium. (We had an odd bond over my ancestor’s book. I’d translate and read and he’d double-check and smooth the translations out; we were nearly a fourth into her childhood, which was… quite Dark and somewhat spoiled, but oddly flat, like she didn’t want to remember such a thing.)

Nate glared at me but didn’t retaliate, which was acknowledgement in itself that he shouldn’t have said that, at least in front of me. I took it, because the boy was like a cat — he did as he was unapologetic about his many, many whims.

“The first time we caught Lu sneaking off in the middle of the night, we honestly thought he might be meeting with you. Or Flint.” I said thoughtfully, frowning at a rare knot in Jay’s hair, “He pretended to be on Dietrich’s side once, just to betray him. We thought it might be the same, so we followed him, yeah.”

“‘To the Quidditch pitch.’ Jay added softly, “Where we watched him break into the storage shed and play by himself for hours.”

Dietrich grumbled to himself. We’d been high-strung and rigid, and one of our untrusted was just playing Quidditch for hours. Dietrich and I had been so annoyed the next day, with no sleep and no proof of betrayal to show for it.

I laughed. “And he kept sneaking off, every third night, just to play. Eventually, Jay and Harper stopped coming and I started fretting about how he didn’t eat a thing for all the physical activity he did.”

“Mother hen.” Dietrich murmured.

“You don’t get to say so, Glucke.” I replied tartly.

Nate snorted. “I think I see now. You made it a little tradition, didn’t you?”

I grinned. “What’s not to love about midnight picnics while Harper and Lu fly, hm?”

“The waking up part.” Jay sighed.

I laughed.

First time we caught Lu sneaking off to fly by himself, it was a year back and only Dietrich and Harper and Jay were with me. The boy had been a fresh addition, then. Untrusted, thought poorly of; both for being the then-leader of Dietrich’s bullies and for having had to bow down to us without much action on our part. Understandably, we’d all been extremely alert when he snuck off
in the middle of the night.

We watched him play for three hours, waiting for Nate or Sebastian Flint to show up. No one did, Lu returned the equipment and we rushed everyone back inside so as not to arouse his suspicions, if he noticed in his exhaustion that some of his dorm’s beds were empty. We watched the next time, too. And the time after that.

Eventually Jay and Harper didn’t get up at all, only Dietrich and I; just to watch him, ostensibly to monitor his trustworthiness…

But then just to watch him.

Eleventh time we caught Lu sneaking off to fly by himself, he landed for a break in between chucking quaffles all over the place, and nearly had a heart attack when Dietrich and I were waiting for him; a towel in my hands and a pitcher of water in Dietrich’s.

Twentieth time we caught Lu sneaking off to fly by himself, he landed for a break and didn’t have a heart attack at all, seeing us sitting on a blanket in the grass with some snacks, water, a towel, and extra clothes for him to change into. He grinned at us, in fact, and said, “Harper didn’t get up this time, huh?” and I replied, “He and Jay are on their way, of course. They’re dropping off things in the usual classroom.”

Now it was a year forward and Lu didn’t sneak anymore, and Nate came to accompany us and read by Lumos with the grounded of us. House Elf-provided tea and water and small snacks spread out with us, waiting for Lu and Harper to touch the ground and rush to re-energize so they could go back up. There’d be bags under our eyes in the morning, but I heard Lu and Harper shouting and laughing above us so I couldn’t really say a thing, and I wouldn’t.

Nate chuckled. “You are such a close group of friends, it’s almost nauseating.”

“Shut up, Wilkes.” Dietrich grumbled half-heartedly.

“Hope you’ve a strong stomach, then,” I replied slyly, “because you’re sort of part of us.”

Nate sighed dramatically. “That’s what Nausea Tonics are for, Guinevere.”

Jay smiled as I finished his braid, Dietrich mumbled French under his breath — likely annoyed at Nate but too tired to do anything about it at the moment — and Nate and I started talking about the headache that was Middle English, while the boys laughed in the air.

A month passing, and all was well.

I was walking back with Dietrich and Harper, from auditing a Care of Magical Creatures class in the snow. Harper wanted to take it, and Dietrich and I were peripherally interested, so we asked Professor Snape if we could sit out of History of Magic to observe a fourth-year Care class — Slytherins and Gryffindors, which made for an interesting show of the snakes hissing at the lions but not going too far because the leader of the parvus was watching. Snape was only too glad to let us get away with shit, because Snape was the sort of person who liked to show that the school’s coldness towards the Slytherins would be met as pettily as they instigated it, and we went.
(Interesting, Hagrid’s teaching methods. Strong-armed and clumsy, but if one watched and tried to
make conversation with Hagrid, bringing him out of his nervous teaching, it was quite
informative.)

“Dear bloody Merlin, I hate snow.” I mumbled, pulling my robes closer around me.

Harper laughed at me. “That’s the fourth time you’ve said that!”

I scowled. “Maybe if I hate it enough, the heat of my anger will melt it.” I muttered ridiculously.

“But then you’d be happy and not angry and it’d just snow more.” Harper piped up.

“Which means I have to be bloody angry forever.”

“Lys, you should not swear so much.” my Second scolded.

I raised a rather unimpressed brow. “Don’t think I can’t tell when you’re cursing in French,
Dietrich. You have a poker face to rival Snape’s, but your voice is very expressive. I know when
you’re swearing.”

Dietrich looked away and muttered, “Scheiße.”

“That’s German, and that’s still a curse-word. Idiot.”

“You know German, Lyssie?” Harper asked.

I smiled a little. “Just a bit. It’s a lovely language.” Dietrich preened a little, straightening. I
snorted, then looked casually grabbed Dietrich’s wrist to look at his watch. (He sighed in
resignation.) “It’s about time for the other three to meet us on the pitch.”

Harper’s gait immediately became more hurried, a bounce in his step. “Yes! I think I can block that
one twisty Quaffle thing Lu does, I’m going to surprise him!”

“And break his heart,” Dietrich said dryly, “Lucas is exceedingly proud of that move.”

“He’s be prouder if he could make it better, wouldn’t he?” Harper questioned, grinning, “And
we’ve got lots of time! We’re only Quidditch reserve players, we won’t become regulars until Flint
finally graduates.”

“You’re being treated like a regular lately, though,” I pointed out, “Even if Flint does yell at you a
lot, especially when you started cackling madly at the Ravenclaw-Hufflepuff game.”

Harper pouted. “That’s because I’m a reserve Seeker because of Malfoy. And why shouldn’t I
laugh? You could probably outfly the Hufflepuff Seeker, Lyssie, and you haven’t flown since the
first year lessons!”

“Lys could probably outfly Malfoy, since the idiot has not flown since his ‘injury’.” Dietrich added.

“He’s kind of stupid, getting slashed by a Hippogriff like that. They’re very nice, them.”

I frowned at Harper. “When’ve you met a Hippogriff? We don’t have Care.”

Harper smiled. “My Mum’s trading business in Egypt.”

“The transportation of Hippogriffs through third party merchants is illegal, Harper. They’re an A-
class protected species.” Dietrich rattled off suspiciously.
“Not to mention, your Mum’s the one that got me Shield of Light, right? It’s sort of a collector’s, you know. Very expensive, very rare, and this one is definitely a copy. A copy of a rare text that’s only documented as being part of museums or private collections.” I said.

Harper smiled innocently.

I squinted at him. “Is your Mum a smuggler?”

Harper grinned. “She’s an Egyptian merchant, Lyssie. She’s got a certificate and tattoo and everything.”

Dietrich and I glanced at each other, sharing a look.

“She’s a smuggler.” Dietrich deadpanned.

I nodded in agreement, ignoring Harper’s protests to the contrary. “This is why Harper blows things up all the time. He has pretty much unlimited access to volatile ingredients on a daily, and gets bored in class.”

“Do not!”

“You’re a filthy liar, Harper.”

“We’re all liars, we’re Slytherins!”

“Shut up, Harper.”

“Wow, no one’s said that in a long while- Isn’t that Granger’s cat?”

We all blinked at the orange streak that nearly ran over our toes, racing through the thin layers of snow and mud. I frowned at the sight, as I’d never seen the cat look anything less than impeccably groomed — unfortunate squashed face or not — and watched him dart straight for a certain nearby hill topped by a certain tree. The warning signs were all there, really, but I was distracted with Harper and my Soothsayer range was lengthened for the express purpose of avoiding the cloaked fucks, so when that odd-familiar conglomeration of colors and mismatched core song entered my senses, I jerked in response, whipping my head towards Crookshanks and the figure that joined him.

Dietrich’s wand was in his hand immediately, and though none of us were even close to producing vapor, let alone a full Patronus, I knew that was the spell that was sitting on his tongue. Harper was a bit slower, but my boys trusted my Second as much as I did, so he shut his mouth and looked around for dementors. They both saw my aborted glance towards the cat, and both shuffled a little closer to me.

(Their awareness of my Mage Sight led them to protectiveness regarding the dementors, and a greater trust in my people-judgement. Jay and Nate often asked me to help them with escort group schedules and mentor-mentee business, even though the magical signature wasn’t too indicative such things; I was a Soothsayer, not an Empath or an Assessor, dammit.)

Dietrich’s eyes narrowed, trained on Crookshanks and the dog with him. “Lys?” he prompted.

I swallowed, wishing Sirius bloody Black in dog form hadn’t decided to draw attention from the worst sort of people.

Slytherin parvus rulers, honestly. Naturally suspicious and observant, especially with the
Soothsayer that unwittingly gave him away as something suspicious that should be observed… The man had terrible luck.

“No, sorry… It’s just…” My mind whirled, trying not to give them reason to draw their attention on Sirius Black the dog, who was staring at us with Crookshanks, frozen and alert at the unexpected intruders. “That dog’s probably a familiar.”

(Dietrich researched, by himself, at age eleven, what Tom Riddle was. He found, from my little comments and from his own observations, that the black diary I’d been desperate to find was a soul stealer. By himself, a year ago. He might figure out the dog was a wizard, alert Snape or something, and everything would be shot to hell. I was rightly paranoid, okay?)

Harper frowned. “The one that looks like a Grim?”

I nodded. “Yeah. Their colors are a bit… odd. Human-ish but not. I know, ‘cos that’s how Percy’s rat looks and sounds, and I’m pretty sure that long-lived little git Scabbers is someone’s runaway familiar.”

Damn, I fucking saved that shit.

“Do the wards not keep such creatures out?” Dietrich added, frowning. Probably worrying about the dementors and me.

“Alby added a layer to keep the dementors out, though it can certainly be broken if they all chose to swarm it,” I explained, squinting at the wards, blinding myself a little, and then promptly looking away to save myself the headache, “Which is why, by the way, he’s back and forth with the Ministry, trying to get the dementor presence lessened. He does try to do his job, you know. He might be crazy and distractible, but that’s literally how our potesta describes me.”

“But you’re prettier.” Harper said brightly.

I spluttered in helpless laughter at the sheer innocence in Harper’s face when he said that. Dietrich looked torn between yelling at Harper for accidental impropriety and agreeing. I grinned at Harper, ruffling his hair fondly. Best ignore the dog-that-isn’t-Sirius-Black and Crookshanks, who seemed to slowly be relaxing, though I’m sure not-Sirius-Black was panicking a little inside and could definitely hear us.

“I damn well better be prettier than Alby,” I laughed.

“I said you were, didn’t I?”

I rolled my eyes, still grinning, then turned back to Dietrich. “Anyways, the wards won’t keep out an obviously friendly familiar. Especially if he came via the Forest, they’re purposefully a little weaker there so stray creatures aren’t zapped on sight and have the chance to go back into the depths. There’s a lot of weird ward shit in the Forest boundary, actually, most of which dates back to the Forest Treaty that the centaurs expect every Headmaster to uphold today.”

“Question!” Harper called.

“Answer,” I replied dryly.

“Everything. I don’t understand most of what you said.” he said.

I blinked. “We’ll tell Nate to put that in his History tutoring tomorrow.”
Harper nodded agreeably.

Dietrich frowned. “This still does not explain the familiar.”

I shrugged. “If my brother’s rat is any indication, they run away a lot. Let’s go inside now, yeah? I’m cold and I hate snow.”

“Fifth time!” Harper crowed, suitably distracted.

We did go inside, though, and I hoped that Sirius Black wouldn’t make a habit of running around in full view of students like that. It might’ve been luck, now that I think of it, for him to come across us. I, who knew exactly what he was and why he was here and waited for it, and two Slytherins who wouldn’t fuss if I didn’t; Slytherins who, as was our way, minded our own business unless something got in the way of our ambition. A stray familiar wasn’t likely to.

We walked away, and I felt eyes on my back. It was a bit foreboding, honestly.

...  

It was two days until Winter Hols. Unlike last year, I was going back home; Ginny and I had plans to go to Diagon Alley together for Christmas shopping, and I had plans to have Percy supervise me on solitary trips that I might make my way back to Knockturn Alley and see the cambion again. Bill and Charlie wouldn’t be able to make it home, though, to Mum’s disappointment. She and Dad had written us Weasley kids as a collective to finalize plans; both sets of twins and Percy were set on returning, though not our youngest brother — Ron, surprisingly enough, had decided to stay.

(Or maybe unsurprisingly. Harry was having a tough third year, I heard, so the company of his two best friends would be good for him.)

My boys tended to stick with me if I ventured outside of the Hogwarts building, reasoning that a collective shitty Patronus was better than nothing; Alby managed to lessen the dementors, but only by a little bit. The wards still wouldn’t be able to handle it if they all chose to ram against a single point at once, but the Minister figured that they’d only do that if they sensed their quarry. But inside of Hogwarts, I still got to walk about on my own, free from their brand of insanity.

It was when I was hovering between the Kitchens to translate my *Sollertia Augurium* that I’d had to pry out of Nate’s eager hands and the path to Ravenclaw tower to see Luna and snarl at the ‘Claws, despite it being so close to Winter Hols that I was waylaid by none other than Harry Potter.

“Lys!” he called, trotting towards me.

I blinked. Outside of the Hospital Wing, I didn’t see Harry alone much. “Harry,” I greeted, “You alright?”

Harry reached me, grinning crookedly. “I’ve been looking for you everywhere. Fred and George told me you’d be here.” He frowned, looking a bit puzzled. “I don’t know why they always know where you are, actually. You wouldn’t happen to have a Tracking Charm or something on you, would you?”

I snorted. “Not that I know of, no. Maybe it’s a twin thing.”
Harry looked unimpressed. “Everyone says that about Fred and George, but I really don’t think that excuses all the chaos they create.”

“Just go with it, Potter. No one will ever be able to understand those two.” I chuckled. Then I folded my arms, tilting my head to one side. “Did you need me for something, Harry? Probably could’ve grabbed any Slytherin and I would’ve found you first.”

Harry shrugged. “Thought you wouldn’t want your snakes to know your secrets, if you can help it,” he said, “See, you know how both of us are really, really horrid against dementors?”

I nodded, having a feeling as to where this was going.

Harry grinned. “Well, on the train, Lupin drove off the dementor that came to our compartment. I asked him if he’d teach me, and he said he would next term. I was… Well, er, I was wondering if you’d like to come along? Since you have a worse reaction than me, yeah?”

I literally almost melted. Why the fuck was Harry Potter this good of a person? How the fuck did he turn out as nice as he did, with the Dursleys?

But I was a goddamn queen of Slytherin, so there was no gushing over adorable Potters or planning Muggle torment today, no thank you.

“It’s called the Patronus,” I said in reply.

Harry raised his brows. “You know it already?”

I barked out a laugh. “Know it? Ha! It’s much too Light for me to learn by myself in a month. Nah, but Harper and Dietrich really lost their heads when my magic put me into that damn coma, so they researched like mad. We’re… we’re really not doing well, though, so… I suppose if the offer still stands…”

He nodded. “Of course it is. Maybe this is better. Reckon you’ll be able to help me out? With the, er, Mage Sight thing.”

"The Mage Sight thing does make it easier to break spells down into parts, yes," I answered with a nod, "Though I'm sure you'll be helping me as much as I'd be helping you."

Considering the fact that I was planning on, as much as possible, immersing myself in the presence of a half-demon within Knockturn Alley, the capital of the Dark Arts in this highly racist — both ends of the spectrum, anti-Muggle and anti-Slytherin both — magical society, I would need all the help I would get not to fall behind Harry.

Ah, well.

I grinned at Harry. “And didn’t I say last time, Potter? I can’t teach you anything, you’re too wise for me.”

“Does this mean I get to be parvus potesta?” he teased.

“You’ll have my Slytherins clawing their eyes out when you do my copious amounts of paperwork, so not quite yet.”

He scowled half-heartedly. “Why do you always pick on my handwriting?”

“Because it’s your only flaw.” I deadpanned.
Harry’s cheeks tinted pink, just a little. “I’m sure there’s more besides my handwriting.” Then he smiled, still embarrassed-looking. "Isn't Snape your Head of House? Fred and George say he's always going on about me being a dunderhead in their class, he's probably torn my stellar reputation to shreds in yours."

I smirked. “Now, now, Potter, let's not be so modest. You just invited me to your private tutoring sessions with the only competent Defense Against the Dark Arts professor we’ve ever had, because you want to make sure I was alright next time a dementor came over.”

“You’re my Hospital Wing mate,” Harry said, grinning past his modesty, “If I learned to ward them off and you didn’t, we wouldn’t be held hostage by Madam Pomfrey together anymore, you know?"

“I’ll take that excuse, but only because I’m polite.”

Harry chuckled, rubbing the back of his neck sheepishly. “Yeah, that’s all I was looking for you for, Lys. Might be interesting, having a class together, right? Though Ron says you tend to make things explode.”

“Anything about explosions is a lie. Or Harper’s fault.”

“…I think I’ll trust my best mate on this one, Lys, no offense.”

I sighed. “Ah, well, it was a long shot. I probably won’t see you ’til next term, I suppose, so take care of my big brother for me, won’t you?”

Harry nodded agreeably. “Have a nice holiday, Lys.”

“You too, Harry.”

My friend walked off after that, though I stared thoughtfully at his back. Wasn’t he supposed to learn about Sirius Black’s supposed betrayal soon? Or was that during the holiday themselves? I hoped he would be alright, with Ron and Hermione staying at Hogwarts to support him; there was something I think we both found calming, about being able to talk to someone outside of our immediate circles of acquaintance.

I nodded to myself, turning on my heel and intending to go down to the Kitchens for some toast and butter. Whatever the case, when I came back, I’d have myself put into the Hospital Wing immediately; Harry could talk to a third-party all he wanted, and I’d get him through it just like how he got me through my difficulties with Tom Riddle: not completely, but enough to be able to breathe.

That, and maybe if I helped him out with the Patronus — though, knowing my core, it might be the other way around — and Harry would have everything he needed for the rest of the year, right? Least I could do.

For now, though, I had to get some toast and pack for the train. At least my boys would be right pleased at this development; more Patronus help for me meant more Patronus help for them. I’d let them know as soon as I had my toast.

...
The train ride was uneventful, for the most part.

Ginny opted to spend as much time with her Gryffindor friends as possible, seeing as she’d be away from them for a while, and I did pretty much the same thing. Only, this time, I decided to drag Luna to sit with us — after giving a few nasty hexes to the ‘Claws that were harassing her right before I found her lonely little compartment — and it was honestly… Well, I always forget how weirdly Luna mixes with my boys until something like this happens.

“You’re covered in nargles,” Luna said pityingly, gazing between Lu and Jay and Nate with a frown, patting Jay’s hand gently as she did, “I didn’t think I’d ever see so many nargles in the same room before.”

“Are they worse than I am?” I asked interestedly, watching the scenery whirl by in the window.

Luna made a little noise of distress. “Nargles and wrackspurts everywhere. They’re both worse and better than you, Guinevere. How aren’t you all drowning?”

I’d like to think that, besides her mother’s death, this was the actual most distressed I’d ever seen or heard my favorite female friend. So I looked up at my boys, who seemed puzzled and bewildered in turns by the horrified fascination on Luna’s face as she flitted her silvery eyes between them all, and I glared at them disapprovingly.

“Nate and Lu, stop distressing my childhood friend.” I ordered.

Lu spluttered. “Wha- It’s not my fault your ‘Claw friend hates me!”

Luna gasped a little. “Why would you think I hate you?”

He pointed a finger at her, glaring a little. “You just said so!”

She blinked at him innocently, and by the frowns on my boys’ faces, they just had a revelation as to why I was marginally better than most of them at seeing through Harper’s innocent looks. “You can’t help that the nargles are swarming you. I think you’re a rather nice person, actually, Lucas Vaisey. You make Guinevere very happy, which I think is very good.”

Lu reddened a little, glanced at me. I felt my own cheeks warm a little — Did Luna really have to put it that way, dammit? — and rolled my eyes. “So you don’t get a big head, Lu, all you idiots make me happy, so please stop blushing.”

“You first.” Lu snapped, looking away in embarrassment.

Harper grinned. “We make you happy, Lyssie?”

I grimaced and shot a glare at Luna. “Yes, yes, you all do- Oof! Harper, you’re taller and heavier than me, why do you insist on glomping all over me at every opportunity?”

“This is what I mean by nauseating.” Nate said helpfully.

Luna turned wide eyes on him while I tried to peel Harper off me (who was taking it as a challenge, that little git), making Nate raise his brows at her. She stared at him for a moment, then nodded. “You say lots of things you don’t mean.”

Nate twitched. “And you say lots of things that don’t make any sense at all.”

“Not to narrow-minded logic.” Luna replied serenely.
“Narrow or broad, your mind doesn’t **have** logic, Lovegood. No wonder the Ravenclaws stay away from you- OW! Dammit, Guinevere, why do you keep sending Stinging Hexes at me?!”

I narrowed my eyes, tucking my wand back away and resignedly allowing Harper to lean all over me, the overgrown puppy. “What did I say about playing nice, Nate? What do I **always** say about playing nice, actually?”

Dietrich snorted. “Wilkes would not be able to play nice if his life depended on it.”

“I have others do the playing nice bit for me, thanks, Dietrich,” Nate said sweetly, “Remember Lucas last year?”

I sent another Stinging Hex at Nate, who flinched when it hit, but wisely backed down. Dietrich and Lu both sent me grateful looks in between scowling at Nate. The boy just really **loved** to pick on our weak spots. But, like anything else, I was getting used to it; I had, after all, become friends with Tom Riddle, whose caustic insults were quite stinging for an eleven-year-old me, when I eventually drew him out of that polite facade of his.

Lu snickered at Nate’s fate, who then replied with some insult or other, and those two started furiously exchanging barbs; though, Lu bantering with Nate was usually Nate running circles around an increasingly frustrated Lu. Harper joined in just to make Lu feel better, though his comments were more inane than not, and Jay and Dietrich watched with amusement they wouldn’t ever admit. (None of them wanted to admit that Nate didn’t piss them off anymore, honestly; they’d grown thick skin with him about, which certainly helped in keeping our *parvus* together.)

Luna hummed to herself happily, ignoring the chaos behind her as she plopped down next to me, taking Harper’s spot. “Such a colorful swarm! Guinevere, you must be so pleased with your knights. And I’m sure they’re really happy, too, since you’re the walls to their shadows.”

I pursed my lips at her. “You always say such embarrassing things.”

She giggled. “But it’s true! Did you know? The house of snakes was so dark, before, and there were nargles and wrackspurt *hives* everywhere. I wouldn’t have been surprised if the pale boy infected everyone with his Loser’s Lurgy and Heliopaths started popping up. Then you came and everything is much brighter.”

“I feel that, as a naturally Dark-core witch, I should be offended by how often you call me bright.”

Luna laughed. Then she blinked at me, quite suddenly. “You’re worried about something.”

I raised a brow, but Luna’s shifting moods weren’t all that odd to me anymore. “I’m a leader. I’m always worried about everything.”

She furrowed her brow. “You’re going to do something silly again, aren’t you? The wrackspurts really like making things fuzzy, you know. You shouldn’t always do what they say just because you’re impatient. The Dark and the smile inside of it will wait until summer.”

A smile in the dark. You know what that reminded me of?

A certain white mask, pale as bone, with nothing but a smile carved into it, all serrated teeth. That, and a flowing cloak of black that covered every inch of skin or scale or whatever might be on the body of the child of a demon.

“Ah, but I *am* impatient,” I murmured, “And I’m running out of time.”
Luna looked at me sadly. “Don’t get swallowed by the dark, alright, Guinevere?”

“Not until I get your Christmas present, at least.”

“What about mine?” Harper demanded, intruding suddenly, bored of Nate and Lu’s snarling.

I grinned at him. “Of course you’ll get your present. Maybe after the Hols, since my family owl will probably die if I tried to send all of you presents at the same time.”

Harper frowned. “That’s no good. Owls should be treated more carefully, Lyssie.”

“It’s not like I can help it, our family has a total of two owls, and one of them is Percy’s.”

“Are you not in good standing with the Head Boy? Borrow his owl.” Dietrich called.

“You want me to use my relationship with my favorite brother to get to his owl so you can get your presents more quickly?” I asked skeptically.

Dietrich gave me a dry look. “What do I care for presents? Perhaps more than one letter a week would be called for.”

“It’s not my fault Errol’s old!” I protested.

Nate snickered. “I forgot that you were practically living on the streets, Weasley. You always have such poise in Slytherin.”

I gave Nate a flat look. “I’m not sure if I should be insulted or not.”

“Insulted,” Lu put in, glaring at Nate, “The bastard can’t even compliment properly. Lyssie, I think we should demote him.”

“When you prove yourself better than Hippogriff dung in terms of potesta administration, Lucas, I’ll step down myself.” sneered Nate.

“YOU LITTLE-!”

They scuffled back and forth, as Nate loved provoking and Lu was prone to reacting, and I had to roll my eyes. With how childish that insult had been, Nate was obviously being careful in holding his tongue back, which we all realized at least subconsciously, hence my not needing to actually step in. I sighed into my hand, leaning against it but not looking at the scenery again. I wanted to watch my idiots as long as possible, even if we’d all see each other in two weeks or so.

Heh. I’d miss them. I hoped to accomplish things without them being there as a distraction, but I really did love the distraction. And was it right to call them a distraction, if prolonging these moments was the entire point of all this work? Ah, I didn’t know anymore.

The train whistle blew before I realize we’d even pulled into King’s Cross, and I left my boys — all wearing dark, well-made robes befitting of their stations — and grabbed hands with my fiery-haired older sister and my pale slip of an adopted younger sister, and I looked forward to seeing my Mum and Dad again.
Chapter 28

Chapter Summary

Here’s 28, boys. I am v sorry if these chapters aren’t as good but I’m literally writing them on the spot. DX But! I did put in some family things and plotty things (not to be confused with HP plot, more my OC plot) and this’ll just about wrap up the Winter Hols! So, next time, I foresee Hogwarts and HP plot things. :D

As always, my heartfelt thanks to my readers and reviewers. XD A special place in my heart has been reserved for BajanZealandian, who has caught me and my Vaisey & Harper HP wiki easter egg, and Fee_Verte, who has commented faithfully for a long time and always has lovely, interesting things to say. And corrects me on my shitty German. :) You two, take a shout out.

But! This is not to say that the rest of y'all loyal commentors -- you know who you are :D -- aren't appreciated, because I very much appreciate you. I adore all of you. :D
Thank you all very much. ^^

... 

The Burrow smelled of peppermint and home-cooked meals, glowing faintly due to the wards Bill gifted us with years ago, swirling with my family’s colors. Mostly Mum’s, all warm and friendly reds and maroons, but there were streaks of Dad’s royal blue. My siblings’ colors were lessened, colors fading over the years (especially Bill's and Charlie's), but the Burrow welcomed us back anyways.

Mum was bustling around the kitchen, ready to fix us up a meal and loudly complaining about the fact that Ron wasn’t here and why didn’t he just invite Harry over, the poor dear? Ginny trailed after her, having always been closer to our mother (while I was closer to Dad, obviously), the twins retreating into their room and cackling between themselves ominously, Percy doing the same with quite a bit less cackling and a fond hair-ruffle for me on the way. I waited by the fireplace, knowing Dad would be coming home early (Flooing was more expensive but it was less annoying than the toilet entrances or having to elbow people around at the Apparition entrances) and wanting to see him more than anyone else.

When our clock chimed and I saw Dad’s clock face turn to TRAVEL, I grinned in anticipation. I fidgeted for nearly twenty minutes, sitting on the couch and staring at the fireplace, willing it to deliver my dad. And it did.

The fireplace flared green and Dad’s face chimed to HOME, and he barely stumbled through the soot before he was greeted with an armful of excited Seer-daughter.

“Happy Christmas, Dad!” I yelled, latching onto his waist and holding tight even as he nearly stumbled back into the Floo.
Dad laughed, delighted and surprised and half-grunting with the force of my weight, and I couldn’t even grin up at him before he’d tossed his briefcase to the side and bodily lifted me, hugging me to his chest and swinging around. I squeaked but adjusted, laughing as Dad did, and we almost rammed into the furniture when Dad stopped and gripped my shoulders, peering into my face and studying fondly.

“Hello, my little queen,” he chuckled.

I beamed. “Hello, Dad!”

The rest of my siblings showed up to greet Dad, Ginny getting a similar bear hug and a kiss on the forehead, and Mum pecked Dad on the cheek, but I stuck with him most of the night. As busy as I was, I still loved my dad the most; he was my favorite, and I was sure I was his (secretly). Over the years, he’d gotten a bit thinner and had lost his muscle, making him look even more wiry than before, and there were flecks of grey in his hair, and he had crow’s feet around his eyes, but he remained as clever and warm as ever.

Sitting down to dinner, I found myself missing Harper and Lu’s antics, Nate’s quiet barbs, Jay’s small comments, and Dietrich’s dry commentary; but my sister was sneaking vegetables onto my plate — like the child she was, honestly — and the twins were driving Mum spare and Percy was talking to Dad about a job in the Ministry after his graduation this year, and I smiled contently.

When Percy started yelling at the twins for throwing something suspicious in his hot chocolate, Dad turned to me.

“How’s the year so far, Lyssie?” he asked.

I smiled. “Besides the dementors, all’s well.”

Dad nodded thoughtfully. “No more trouble with them after the last time?” Dad had not been pleased to learn via letters that I’d put myself into a Seer coma because of dementors. I don’t think he and Mum had time to visit, but I remember the written pleas for me not to go near the Forbidden Forest or anything for the rest of the year.

I shook my head. “Alby made the Ministry back off. I’m trying to find more time for meditation, too. It’s a bit chaotic, though.”

“Chaotic?”

I chuckled. “My friends, Dad. And Slytherin. Why didn’t you ever warn me that making a bunch of snakes part of me and mine would result in so much craziness in my life? I might’ve done something differently.”

He raised a brow. “You wouldn’t have avoided yours, Lyssie.”

“Nah, but I would’ve prepared more thoroughly for how much of a headache it is, having to take over an entire House to keep them safe and happy. Did you know that Malfoy answers to me, now?”

Dad grinned. “Oh? Do tell, little queen. I’d love to have something to say to Lucius at the Ministry next time we cross paths.”

I smiled. “You can have all the details you want, as long as I don’t get a lecture on all the odd Slytherin things I have to do. Oh! And I want to go to Diagon Alley for Christmas shopping, and you can’t peek at anything so no supervision for a few hours!”
He reached over to squeeze my resting hand affectionately. “There’s my Slytherin daughter, make deals left and right. Sounds reasonable enough, I think. Whatever you’d like, little queen.”

I grinned at Dad, and only felt a minuscule amount of guilt at the notion that I’d be sneaking into Knockturn Alley without permission. Minuscule guilt… Heh, my boys would be ashamed of me. They were trying so hard to shoo the Gryffindor side of me away, too.

Wandless Shrinking Charms on all my presents — mostly small things, lots of books that I’d had to have retouched a little, some drawings and Transfigured baubles and such, nothing that I couldn't buy with much saved-up pocket money — had them stowed away in my pockets. I tied my hair back, though lots of it was too choppy and short for most, and then drew the hood down. I removed my Warming Charm, much to my discomfort, thinking it better to pull my magic in and be as colorless as possible as I stepped through Knockturn Alley’s quiet, nondescript entrance.

Diagon Alley was all festivities and cheer, warm with the jostling crowd, music playing, colorful ribbons around the red flowers of the lampposts and bells ringing from them. Knockturn Alley was a twisted parallel to that, dark-robed bodies pushing past and against each other, hunched shoulders and foul breath. Crooked cobblestones and half-busted lamps weren’t decorated, but there was a light dusting of snow and ice that made it seem slightly more wintery than normal; that, and the damn cold.

I drew my magic in as tightly as it could, the indigo squirming uncomfortably with how tightly I packed it into my slight body, and then started to... well, for lack of better word, dust colorlessness into it. It took concentration enough to get me sweating, but slowly the tendrils of deep crimson and silver shuddered and blanked, effectively camouflaging into the background and rendering myself into, upon first glance, a Muggle.

Honestly, there was no reason for me to do this but to show the cambion that I had learned some new tricks from the books it had graciously given me. Though, “graciously” is a bit far; I paid for both in blood and knowledge and memory, all of which are supposed to be held much closer to heart than I demonstrated.

I made my way to The Rookery after struggling to bring to mind the directions; another sign that my Occlumency barriers were shitty. My memorization and memory recall were so much crappier when they were this tattered, dammit. At least I didn't come across any Brotherhood of Mirrors this time; I'm sure it was the camouflaging of my colors that did that, though. At least I had some skills.

The silver bell’s clear, flute-like tone sang out when I stepped through the door.

The place hadn’t changed at all since the summer; it honestly felt like a different dimension, stepping into The Rookery. The deceptively small figure of the cambion was standing behind the cash register as it had been before, all black cloth and white mask that grinned at me.

Its voice was clear, chuckling coldly — though I don’t think it meant to sound cold. I don’t think it meant to sound like anything human, because the cambion had never disguised that it wasn’t. That’s probably why this place felt like a different dimension.

“Well, well,” came the clear voice, not low and not high — nothing to prove gender or narrow
down identity, “I had thought I would never taste such lovely blood or feast on such sweet memories again and yet… here you are, again, reveler.”

What was that phrase? When you stare into the abyss, the abyss stares back into you.

I felt like smiling at the half-demon was like smiling at the abyss.

“Hello, again, cambion.” I said, even as I strengthened the shit out of my Occlumency barriers.

My Occlumency barriers that were still not at full strength, especially since the dementor attack at the Quidditch game.

“Welcome, reveler. I admit to hoping for your return,” said the cambion, gliding from around the counter to approach me silently, “Not expecting, no — you humans are so wary of your ineffectual Ministry — but… hoping. And here you are, reveler… my own little Christmas gift.”

I raised a brow, sure that the cambion could see it under my hood. “Do demons do Christmas?”

The cambion chuckled again. “We like exchanging gifts, just like any other sentient. What bargain do you seek today, reveler?”

“Can I exchange nonconventional currency for nonconventional wisdom?”


I frowned. “All in… hopes that I’d come back?”

Another small laugh. “Seer blood and memories… I do not think there are words in your language to describe how wonderful it is, to consume such a thing. And given so willingly? My dear reveler, it is a drug with no negative aspects except the fact that it is limited.”

“…That’s a little daunting. Wars are fought over such… resources. And those wars usually destroy those resources.”

“Ah, but that’s only if other parties are aware of such a resource in the first place. Dear reveler, I am a demon — I do not like to share. But enough of this… You are offering more, are you not? I gladly accept, though, in your words, I would know the terms first, before the bargain.”

I nodded. “The translation of Sollertia Augurium is going very slowly.” I began.

The cambion tilted its head to one side, like a bird. I’d forgotten how tall it was, towering above me; though, honestly, if it had grown since I’d seen it, I couldn’t be too surprised — logic just really didn’t apply in this magical world of ours.

“What do you seek from the Mind Eater, reveler?” asked the cambion.

I hesitated. “Answers.”

The cambion laughed, the sound ringing with an underlying, distinctly inhuman growl. “Succinct, I suppose.”

I snorted, despite myself. “Apologies, but what I’m looking for from Helvynya Prevett won’t be reached until I can examine everything she is, and that can only be done if I can translate her work properly. I’m too slow and I’m running out of time.”
War was going to break out in a little more than a year. I was preparing, little by little, gathering my allies and making a safe place so potential enemies could become neutral instead of full-on enemies. I was learning combat and Healing and warding, ready to hide my family behind the strongest shields I could make, ready to defend me and mine so that future would never be seen in anything more than my head. It was only my own intense curiosity that drove me towards Helvynya Prevett; she was a key to why that future existed in the first place. She’d done something with her Clairvoyance — made a choice— that resulted in the deaths and torments of my brothers.

I wanted to understand what her choice was, so that I could better counter it. I didn’t need to know the why, in order to defend what was mine, but it would make it infinitely easier and more bearable if I did. And I’d have no time to chase the shadows of dead women when the war came. I didn’t want to set aside this project.

(Why was I born into this world? Why me? Why now?)

The cambion watched as I tried to process my own thoughts.

Then it leaned in, hand brought up to touch at my face. I should’ve flinched away, but the black cloth touched at my cheekbone gently. From the feel of the cloth, there were not human fingers underneath the cloth. It was… oddly surreal. The mask was right up in my face.

“Your Occlumency shields are much, much weaker than what they were, reveler.”

I nodded. “I turned twelve and ran into a few dementors.”

The cambion cocked its head again. “That would explain it. Hm… You realize, dear human, that you would grasp such pursuits of intellect more firmly if your mind was not in disarray? Perhaps I might offer my services in such for our bargain?”

I frowned, thinking to myself. It honestly…

Well, it was a bad idea. This was a Legilimency-specialized cambion; it was bad enough that I let it into my head for payment when I was under control, but helping someone craft Occlumency barriers was a very intimate thing to do. Dad was the last person I’d let into my head that freely, and that was years ago, and I’d probably never let him in for anything less than preserving my own sanity at this point; the mind grew much, much more guarded as the body aged, after all, even subconsciously. (Especially subconsciously.) The Mind Arts were so, so delicate.

But that was reason enough to accept the help, too. I would never be a master Occlumens, despite my head start via being a Seer. Sure, Seers naturally had a bit of talent in it, but Occlumency was a rather Light practice and I was anything but. (Legilimency would be much more up my alley, but I wasn’t interested in that.) I’d never get to the point where I could build a mindscape, not many of the Dark would, but I could have some very sadistic defenses, being a Seer. I just didn’t have the skill to make such defenses right now, especially since I still needed to build my shields back up from where the dementors tore them down.

The help would be very, very nice. I had intended to ask for some way to translate it quicker, like a book or a ritual or something, but Occlumency help covered more than just Sollertia Augurium. Occlumency help mean my Clairvoyance would be less distant; I used to have visions all the time, since my barriers were designed to be semi-permeable and all that rot, but now? I barely had them, except as nightmares when I slept. And, really, the book would bond to my magic better if I translated it by hand; it would make it much less uncomfortable to be thumbing through the pages for me, and much more uncomfortable for anyone else who didn't know my magical signature well.
Yes… an organized mind would relieve a lot of the pressure on me, help me learn, get me to Helvynya Prevett’s secrets faster so I could protect me and mine better. Every tool in my arsenal was important, and Occlumency was an underrated one thus far.

Shit. To trust or not to trust, right?

“Should I write a contract?” I asked dryly, though partly seriously.

The cambion took a step forward. “If you so desire.”

The piqued my interest. The cambion took contracts seriously. “Can I come back with it, then?”

“The Rookery will always welcome paying customers.”

“I don’t know when I’ll be able to come back. Maybe once or twice before the term starts again.”

“Perhaps write a contract for rudimentary shields and repair,” the creature suggested, “And another, more intensive one, for when you have free reign to return whenever you wish. If it’s the dangers of our Alley was frighten you, I can always… arrange something. I am not one to let such a willing Seer slip by me.”

I smiled a little. “And I’m not one to make a difficult journey for nothing. You said you set aside some books?”

The cambion chuckled. “Ah, yes.” It turned, shuffled around behind the front counter, then there was a modest stack of leathery old tomes under its clothed hands. “These. Biographies and conspiracy theories, stories, myths. All about Helvynya Prevett, Estmaro Wealse II, Ambrose Wealse, and some on Estmaro I and other family members.”

I looked over the pile curiously. The cambion slid a small, delicate book out from under a larger, thicker volume, placing it on top. It was worn and the pages were yellow with age, but a flicker of Mage Sight revealed some dauntingly strong colors and a quiet hum, though they moved… oddly. Pulsing between two main colors and patterns, a jolt of static between two similar songs.

“This is the crown of them all,” the cambion admitted, as if it were some gleeful secret rather than a business transaction, “A diary Geminio under stasis rituals done in the writer’s blood. The diary of Helvynya Prevett’s sister, Seraphina Prevett. A childhood one to be sure, but still. Perhaps your answers will be found here?”

I raised a brow. “And that’s not as valuable as Sollertia Augurium?”

“The Mind Eater details her life’s work in that reading, dear reveler. There are few Legilimens or Occlumens in this world, but every one of them — if they strive to pursue the Mind Arts properly — will want to know what secrets she uncovered through means that were made illegal because of the publishing of this book.”

I shivered a little. Good fucking Merlin, my ancestor was frightening. The Mind Eater, that’s what she was called. Goddamn.

“I’ll take them all.” I said, nodding.

Behind the mask, the abyss smiled back.

“Ah, reveler… I was so hoping you would say that.”
“I don’t understand why your anaemia acted up today of all days!” Ginny muttered, fluffing a pillow and patting it into place obsessively, brow creased with worry, “Rubbish Christmas present, if you ask me.”

I burrowed into my blankets a little guiltily. I knew exactly why my anaemia decided to rear its head.

This morning, I’d gotten out of bed at the cheerful insistence of Ginny and the demon twins, and I’d nearly collapsed onto the floor when a wave of vertigo hit me with all the grace of a flailing hippogriff. To me, I’d rolled out of bed and then I was suddenly on the floor with George looking down at me worriedly and Ginny and Fred screaming for Mum, but my three siblings had the pleasure of watching me pass out, if only briefly.

Which was understandable, since the less than twenty-four hours ago, I gave several teacups of blood to a cambion and had it wait patiently outside my shields while I rifled through my mind for the kinds of memories dementors liked to drag up in me. God, and it hurt like a bitch because my barriers were so shitty! Unfortunate that I couldn't do the rudimentary repair right then and there. But yes, not a good idea for someone whose iron levels were already rather below average. Not severely, since I did take care of myself and took Iron Supplement, but still. Not smart.

I let Ginny fuss, though. She liked to be fussy, since normally our brothers were much more fussy for her. It was a break from the monotony, for her, to fuss over me again like she used to. Hogwarts forced all us Weasleys to break apart a bit; no one had crept into my room in years, squeezing my hands to ward off nightmares. I learned how to get used to them, I suppose, and it was assumed they were gone, which they mostly were.

In any case, it was a bit nostalgic.

She started pulling an old quilt around my shoulders, and I reached up to squeeze her fingers fondly. Ginny gave me a puzzled look — slightly frustrated and worried, I think — and I smiled at her in reply.

“Happy Christmas, Gin.” I said cheerfully.

She glared at me. “Don’t you, ‘Happy Christmas, Gin’ me, Lyssie! Are you slacking with your supplements?!”

I groaned at my failure of a distraction. “Not you, too. Dietrich’s already on my case about that.”

“Good!” She crossed her arms, nodding to herself. “I’m glad at least your subconscious knows that you’re a reckless, self-destructive idiot and you need minders. Once I got over myself last year, I was incredibly worried that you’d keel over in Slytherin, you know. You’re worse than Percy, sometimes, and we have to bodily drag him out of his room to get him to eat sometimes!”

“I’m not that bad! I like eating!”

“You’re picky. You eat buttered toast and sometimes chicken noodle soup and that’s it.”

“Lies!”
She raised a brow, and I quietly wondered if this was how my opponents in Slytherin felt. “You’re going to deny that you’re a picky eater?”

I pouted. “You sneak me vegetables all the time, don’t you? So I eat like a child. So what?”

“It’s unhealthy! Why do you hate salad?”

“It’s tasteless!”

“That’s what dressing is for, stupid!”

“I hate sauces!”

“But why?”

How to explain to my sister that I was allergic to so many things in my last life that I became a picky eater out of necessity? Nuts, peanuts, beans — those were out for the count, and when I was younger, I’d been allergic to milk and eggs, too. Hence, no mayo or any of that stuff. No condiments because I ate very plainly so I could taste if things were allergens or not. Except this body wasn’t allergic to that stuff, though my mind rejected it anyways. Nuts and peanut dishes? Out. Condiments? No. I ate macaroni and chicken nuggets and buttered toast in my last life, and it was fine. Absolutely fine.

Yeah, this was not something I could explain to Ginny.

So, to prove my maturity resulting from my reincarnate state, I stuck out my tongue at her.

“Stop lecturing me! You sound like Mum. Or Dietrich.”

“That’s my point! Even you know you need someone to scold you!”

“I was never scolded when we were little, I’m making up for it now.”

“Dad scolded you.”

“Dad scolded me when I used my Sight for stupid things or tried to set the gnomes on fire with wandless magic. Dunno why, the little pests keep bothering Mum and I’m sure we could just Vanish the ashes…”

Ginny stared at me. “You know, I never really thought about it, but you’re really, really Dark, aren’t you?”

I was the one raising my brow this time. “It hasn’t been obvious?”

“Well… no? When we were little, you never showed that sort of… desire to win? You always let me do things first, and you always helped me out. Never started fights, took any scolding really well… I mean, you never ever bragged about being a Seer to anyone, or anything like that. You never seemed Dark, but come to think of it, you really liked setting things on fire and tormenting Scabbers, didn’t you?”

“I still do,” I answered with a grin, thinking about how I used to piss Scabbergrew off when I was young. “And you’re right, you know. All those are signs of a Dark allegiance in a young child, one who doesn’t know how to channel their will to dominate any better. But, you forget, dear sister, I *am* a Clairvoyant. I Saw what those sorts of children grew into and did, their cores left to fester and grow Mad. Those were the types that followed You-Know-Who. The types that killed our uncles.”
Ginny’s face grew grim. “I didn’t know you checked yourself like that. Wasn’t it difficult?”

Eh. I didn’t want this solemnity during Christmas of all days. “Yes, because you were a little brat.”

My sister flushed. “Shut up, Lys!”

I laughed. “And I loved you dearly, and still do, so I took care that my Dark allegiance wasn’t flared about with such petty little acts. So you and our brothers wouldn’t exchange too much and change allegiances because of me. I’ve become much, much Darker since Hogwarts, you know. And anyways, you being Dark would be frightening. You’re scary enough, Light as you are.”

She sniffed. “Light and Dark don’t mean not-scary and scary, Lyssie. You should know that.”

I rolled my eyes. “I used to hang about Alby, Gin, I know how frightening a Light core can be.”

Ginny smirked, plopped down next to me, leaning her head on my blanketed shoulder. I smiled a little, undoing a bit of the cocoon so her eyes lit up and she could crawl inside with me. The Burrow was warm but it was better when I had my twin with me; we may not have been like Fred and George, but we had been carried together for nine months and I remembered that her colors were one of the only ones that gave me comfort in those first few months of realization.

When I let the blinders off my Mage Sight, I saw our colors swirling together lazily. Our songs were quiet but calm, blending together harmoniously — not as well as Fred and George’s, or Mum and Dad’s — and her reds and maroons curled around my indigo, welcomed the deep crimson I’d taken as my own, settled together gently. It was very lovely.

“I’m gonna nap.” I mumbled.

“You should, since you fainted today and everything.”

“Please get me hot chocolate when I wake up.”

Ginny scoffed. “We’ll go get some together. I want the hazelnut stuff you always refuse.”

“I don’t like nuts.”

“Then you’re weird. Go to sleep, Lyssie.”

“Wake me up for presents?”

“Obviously, Fred and George will probably carry you to the living room themselves. As in, George will probably carry you while Fred annoys me. Why do you have the nicer twin and I get the git?”

“Fred would be so upset if you said that to him. Also, George is just more conscious of my weaker body since Fred usually made him sit with me when I was having trouble running when we were little. While you and Fred ran around.”

“Merlin, no need to make me guilty. Now go to sleep, dammit!”

“Language.”

“Shut up, Lyssie.”

I decided, anaemia notwithstanding, it was a good Christmas.
Lys,

You want me to write you a contract with a demon.

You want me to write you a contract with a demon because you are going to willingly allow it within your mind to aid you in constructing Occlumency barriers to streamline your learning processes.

You want me to write you a contract with a demon so that it will not use anything it sees in your mind against you.

You want me to write this contract for you.

WHAT ON GOD'S BLOODY EARTH ARE YOU THINKING-

The rest of the letter was so covered in ink splatters and curses and smeared words that I burst out laughing and nearly fell down the stairs. That was Dietrich for you. Overprotective git probably had an aneurysm when I sent him that letter.

Though… it was quite… I hate to say it again, but it was understandable. I was making a deal with a demon so I wouldn’t have to worry about Occlumency anymore, which would be fantastic. It might even give me a better measure of control over the Clairvoyance, and that was important. Only, Dietrich didn’t know about the Clairvoyance so all he assumed was that I wanted something trivial from this. And that very deeply echoed our first year, the Chamber year, and he was probably freaking out that I actually hadn’t learned my lesson from that and had gotten worse.

Well… Soul stealer or cambion? Which was worse? Maybe I got better, y’know?

I was lucky Dietrich still had a cool head when he was pissed. Otherwise it might’ve been a Howler, and then I’d be screwed. My best friend yelling at me about making deals with demons in Knockturn Alley at the breakfast table? Yeah, Mum would kill me. Dad would probably also kill me. Oh god, and Percy and Ron and Ginny...

Where was Bill and Charlie, the calmer siblings, when I needed them? Fred and George making light of everything didn’t substitute for their all-encompassing nonchalance with things. Charlie might even be interested in meeting my cambion not-friend. Business partner?

Well, in any case.

The letter from Harper was a lot longer, and much more cheerful.
Lyssie,

Sounds like you’re having a very interesting break! I am, too, since I’m in Egypt with my Mum again. She’s doing merchant things, but she’s really impressed with my progress with the Patronus! She’s giving me pointers, since she’s Light. Dad knows how to make a shield, but not an animal.

Do you think we’ll be able to make the animals? It’s called a corporeal Patronus, if you didn’t know, though you probably did. It’ll be tough because we’re Dark and young, but I hope my Patronus animal is wicked! Lu said mine would probably be a rabbit and I used that blister-thingie potion we accidentally made to seal his last letter. He hasn’t written back yet.

Anyways, the cambion! You want to write a contract for it? That’s pretty safe, though I really don’t think you should be letting it into your head. But at least you didn’t do it right off, and waited for a contract, even if demons don’t really honor written agreements as much as spoken. Which means you’ve got to write a script sorta thing, one that you speak aloud!

I dunno much more than that. I could ask Mum but she’d be really, really worried if I hinted at being friends with a cambion. Maybe Lu’s family library has something? Or Jay’s, since his dad had free access to the Department of Mysteries before.

Anyways, I hope Dietrich didn’t scold you too much. He sent me a very panicky letter. It was sorta funny, but I also felt bad for him. You know he freaks out at every little thing, don’t you? Oh, and thanks for the present! This scarf is so warm. Hope you liked yours! I think it’s funny we gave each other scarves, actually. Did Jay’s gloves fit? He thought you’d like some dueling gloves.

I’ve got to go, but write back soon!

Tristan Harper

—

Lu and Jay, well.

Lu didn’t have the best of relationships with his family; the motto “heir and a spare” certainly applied to Lu and his brother, Edward. With Edward not being incompetent or insane, he was a viable heir, meaning Lu was sort of… neglected, I think. Not physically, that wasn’t possible with House Elves, but… Well. There was a reason behind the boy’s willingness to bully and threaten
his way to leadership — to companionship of any kind — last year.

And Jay... That was a different story. The boy rarely spoke of home; if he did, it was about his mother. I remember from last life that his father, Augustus Rookwood, was Voldemort’s spy as an Unspeakable and was incarcerated with the Lestranges and Crouch and all the rest.

We didn’t... well, we tried not to pry into Jay and Lu and Nate’s histories. Dietrich had no Death Eater family history, with his being half German and French, and Harper was on the verge of being a halfblood, only being apart of the Harper Family out of technicality; he wasn’t even main branch. Those two, and myself, we could freely talk about our home lives. My other three, with Death Eater parents that likely made their home lives straining? I wouldn’t force them to recount things like that.

Also, I thought to myself, frowning at Harper’s much happier letter, I need to remember that Harper’s first name is Tristan, and start calling him that. But it’s so weird, he doesn’t sound like a Tristan at all!

By the time I’d flopped down onto my bed, I’d mentally planned out replies to these two letters, plus some of the thank-you’s from my boys and Josephine and some of the other Slytherins I was on neutral terms with. Small gift for those, like candy, of course. Josephine got some of that, plus a few notes on some upper-years from other Houses, blackmail material and the like; especially that little fuck in Ravenclaw, Towler, who wouldn’t stop flirting with the girl.

My writing painstakingly — a wandless Wingardium Leviosa on a flat book so I could lie in bed and write — was what Percy walked in on when he came in. He was, quite grumpily, wearing his Weasley sweater, and the scarf I’d gotten him to match it. He didn’t look perturbed at all at my position, carefully waiting for me to stop writing to sit himself on the edge of my bed, near my waist.

I glanced at him. “I hate that Harper’s first name is Tristan.”

That Percy didn't blink at the sudden subject and dove right into it was telling of our relationship. “His first name isn’t Harper?”

I shook my head, starting to write again. “Nah. I can’t come up with a cute nickname for him, the way Lu and Jay and Nate have theirs.”

“You don’t call Bastion anything.” pointed out my brother.

“Dietrich is... Dietrich. I don’t know how to shorten it.”

Percy pushed up his glasses, sat back a little. We settled into companionable silence again. One of the things I loved the most about Percy — and this went for Dad, Bill, Dietrich, and Jay as well — was that we could simply sit with each other. Harry, too, come to think of it, with all the Hospital Wing things. Some people liked chatting and doing things incessantly, like Harper and Lu and Nate and the demon twins, but it was nice to just... be able to relax like this.

“Thank you for the scarf, Lyssie.” Percy spoke up suddenly.

I grinned a little, but kept writing. “Of course, Perce. Thanks for the earmuffs. I really hate the cold, they’ll help. And the color’s really nice, too! My favorite indigo color. Where’d you buy them, then?”

“...made them.”
I blinked, pausing and looking at my lightly blushing brother. “You knitted those yourself?”

Percy cleared his throat. “Well, it’s not like we have a lot of money, Lyssie. Mum taught me.”

I gaped, in awe of my big brother more than ever. “Percy, why are you so perfect? Why did Penelope break up with you, you’re literally the best?”

He flushed a darker shade of red. “Penelope and I had… disagreements on the future.”

I snickered. “You two were sixteen. Why were you thinking of the future?”

“Mother and Father married right out of Hogwarts.” he reasoned, shrugging. Then he eyed me. “Which you will not be emulating, Lyssie. With any of your friends. Ever. Especially Tristan Harper. I’ve heard through the grapevine that his sect of the family is underworld-related.”

I shot up (dodging the levitating book), crying out triumphantly, “HA! I knew it! His mum’s a smuggler!”

Percy flicked my temple, rolling his eyes. I pouted, exaggerating the wince.

Then I thought. My brother… He was slated to go work at the Ministry, wasn’t he? An Undersecretary for Crouch, I think, is the position he applied for; hadn’t heard back yet, but according to canon he’d get it, and knowing my brother, in this world he would, too. Which meant he was good at organizational duties and legalese and such things.

Such things as contracts.

“Hey, Perce?”

“Yes, Lyssie?”

“Do you know the contracts between Legilimens and Occlumens instructors and instructees, by any chance? Since, y’know, Dad and I didn’t do that, ‘cos we’re family. I didn’t think to look it up last Diagon Alley trip.”

Percy frowned. “Hm… They might not be found in normal books, or public records. I’d say that’s a private matter between a mentor and a mentee, so perhaps in private collections? Since the Mind Arts have such a small community, it’s very… master and apprentice, you know?”

I nodded. “So Alby would have a version that, if he had an Occlumens or Legilimens student, he’d give to them. And someone else would have their own version, probably passed down from whoever taught them?”

“It’s not quite master-and-apprentice level, mind you, Lyssie. That fell out of favor a while back, with how many people abused the system. Though I hear the pureblood Dark sometimes use it, not that they’d show you the tattoos.”

“But it’s close?”

Percy nodded. “Close as it can be, I think. Enough that those contracts aren’t public record.”

I narrowed my eyes. “But if you’re classically trained in Occlumency or Legilimency then you’ll know them. Why didn’t I have any contracts like that with Alby?”

Percy frowned, as he always did when I called Dumbledore by my preferred nickname for him. Then he reached over and poked my head. “Perhaps because Father was your primary teacher? The
Headmaster usually did nothing other than test your shields, didn’t he?”

“I used to show him some visions.” I admitted.

“Well, you gave him verbal consent for that, I assume? And he probably stated that he would not reveal anything he saw? Yours wasn’t an official pseudo-apprenticeship, Lyssie. You were more Father’s apprentice than the Headmaster’s, and it was only so that your visions weren’t so…”

“Overwhelming.”

He nodded again. “Yes. And they aren’t, are they?”

I smiled. “It’s better than when I was little.”

Which it was. But it was worse than when I was eleven; I used to See a lot more, in a much more controlled setting. I think what was happening was that rather than controlling my visions, my collapsing shields were absorbing or blocking them, which put a strain on my mind and health — the strain I hadn’t really paid attention to because no visions was better than too many, as witnessed with the dementors. My shields weren’t working the way they should’ve, point being.

Ergh. What a bloody nightmare. The more I thought about this issue, the more serious it seemed. And the faster I should get to writing a contract so the cambion could set it to rights, as I obviously didn’t have the skill or time to do so myself within the timeframe I’d set.

In any case, I had a lead for the contracts. My boys would help, once I let them in on it and calmed Dietrich down — he'd likely demand such an airtight contract that it'd be disgusting, which was exactly what I needed here; his Chamber-induced paranoia was good for things, I swear it was — and I could possibly ask Alby, maybe even Professor Snape, about those contracts to base mine off of. I’d have to thank Percy subtly at some point for the idea, because I really would like to not be attacked by a cambion but still get what I wanted from it.

Percy ruffled my hair. “Good. Well then, I do think Mother said something about hot chocolate before Diagon Alley?”

My eyes lit up. “We’re going?”

“You and I, yes. No one else wants to read, apparently.” Percy rolled his eyes.

I grinned. “Thank you, Perce!”

He let me hug him without any trouble. “I know you were upset at Christmas, being confined to your bed. Just don’t tire yourself out so much this time, Lyssie.”

I nodded. “I just want to pick up some books I asked for last time and read them before the Flourish and Blotts clerks realize I’m not actually buying them.”

A somewhat lie. I still needed to pick up some books from the cambion, since out of the nine it had set aside for me, I’d elected to only bring three back after I’d paid in memories and blood. I might also discuss a verbal contract and reaffirm its unsaid promise not to reveal anything from my head. Not that it didn’t just linger outside my shields and let me push the memories at it, but still; Harper and Dietrich’s letters were worrying me.

Percy just nodded at my given explanation. “Little Slytherin.”

“I’m parvus potesta reigning.” I retorted, gently shoving Percy out of my room so I could change.
“I should be much more worried about your following Head Girl Zabini’s footsteps.” he sighed.

I looked at my brother slyly. “I see you two interact, you know. Especially after the first time you tried to tell her off for ‘corrupting’ me, which you didn’t. You think she’s clever and pretty, Percy, you should be glad I’m following your new crush’s footsteps.”

Percy flushed. “How do you know that??”

I grinned at him. “Hm? Well, we’ve got the same taste, dear brother.”

Then I slammed the door shut and ignored Percy’s panicked yelling and the banging on the door, loudly humming to myself and wondering what information I might be able to drag out of the cambion to reassure Dietrich when I replied. I might have it guide me into putting quick repairs on my shields myself, since I really didn’t want it inside of them until I wrote the contracts. That would help quite a bit, I think.
Chapter 29

Chapter Summary

*screams a little*

I just finished this chapter. Like... I agonized over this one, even with my three-day weekend. So, in light of that, I have to do the shitty thing and announce: NO CHAPTER NEXT WEEK. I am SO sorry, but I'd rather you guys are informed and get nice, thought-out chapters rather than wait forever for crappy, last-minute ones like this one. :'( I'm going to try to catch up as much as possible so the weekly updates are back, but for now, I'm struggling a bit.

But! I am very, very happy that this is being followed and commented on and given kudos as much as it has! XD I hit 600 kudos and have nearly 240 bookmarks and, wow, that is so COOL. :D Like, I love you guys. Thank you so much for reading and commenting, and I'm sorry I've gotta delay the next chapter. :(  

...  

I’d forgotten what it felt like to not have shitty Occlumency barriers.

It’s... not that big of a difference, not in daily life. Not the barriers I put together, with spoken guidance from the cambion. It taught me some tricks of the trade, some shorts cuts that were within my skill level — very much reminding me of writing back and forth about wards and healing with Tom Riddle — but I had told it that I was wary of letting it in my head to actually do construction. The cambion was understanding, thankfully, and I did a patch-up job that was of much higher quality than the one after the dementors.

Ah, right. The way it showed. Well, for one thing, as soon as the Hogwarts Express passed the patrol borders where the dementors were — double the numbers, since it was the start of the new term, as I was helpfully informed by my worried father before us Hogwarts kids left — I didn’t grit my teeth in anger. My emotions weren’t shut away, not the way Dietrich’s were, but the instinctive negatives which were part instinct, since I was a Seer, weren’t as strong. That, and the translation for Sollertia Augurium was going fabulously.

Enough that it took me until dinner to start getting suspicious.

“Are Jay and Nate alright?” I murmured to Dietrich as we passed into the Great Hall, tucking Sollertia Augurium out of sight.

Dietrich raised a brow. “Why do you ask?”

I nodded at the two, trailing behind the rest of us. “Their colors... are behaving a bit oddly.”

Dietrich narrowed his eyes, glancing back surreptitiously to observe. Obviously he didn’t have
Mage Sight, but his discerning eye might help out.

(My lovely boys didn’t make a big deal of the Mage Sight as much as I thought they would, but they did pay a bit more attention to how I observed people, since I had such a skill. Plus, they now knew why I was so good at tutoring spell practicals; I just watched the way their magic moved and made them adjust accordingly.)

“Julius is… withdrawn. More than usual.” Dietrich muttered.

I agreed quietly. “I didn’t speak much on the train, either, since I’ve finally got my shields straight and I can read my bloody book properly, but…”

My Second crinkled his brow a bit. “Even the salaud is quieter.”

I glared at Dietrich. “That’s a bad word.”

He looked at me incredulously, sitting down beside me at the table. “You cannot speak French.”

“As if I haven’t picked up enough by now.” I sniffed, turning to the head table so Alby could say his pretty little speech and we could get on with dinner.

Meeting my boys on the train had been lovely, despite my newly re-acquired Occlumency skills. Harper and I had happily given everyone a hug, several times over in our excitement; Nate, being Nate (but not as snotty as usual), squirmed away from both of us, Jay accepted with a resigned-but-pleased smile (but not as happy as he normally was), Dietrich had stiffly allowed our affections (though his poker face was just a bit softer), and Lu had hugged back cheerfully. The train ride was all chatter, Harper going on about Egypt and his obviously smuggler Mum (“She’s a merchant, Lyssie! She’s certified by the ICW and everything!”), Lu excited about more Quidditch and more flying with us, Dietrich explaining his own holidays in between Harper’s questions and probing.

I had never noticed until that train ride, but our colors were… well, they reminded me very much of my family’s. Not in shade or tone or whatever, of course not, but just the way… See, like, Dietrich’s deep, steel-tinted blues, the strings like silver, entwined with my grey strands, blue and indigo edges brushing together. And then Harper’s teals and turquoises intruded, mixing, zig-zagging through and knocking Nate’s black-scarlet and Lu’s corals into each other. And Jay’s moss green wrapped silkily around everyone else’s colors, curling as my indigo wrapped around it protectively.

Our colors acted like mine did with my family. Always swirling together, bumping into each other, mixing silvery strings and black edges, but never breaking or shattering or losing their individual color. Harmonizing, not diluting.

Only… this is where I became suspicious.

Jay’s and Nate’s and Lu’s cores weren’t… right? Normal? They were Dark, of course, Dark as I was, but there was a certain… rigidity to them? Like silt clouding a normally clear stream, that sort of feeling; natural but not normal. Lu’s wasn’t as bad, and his coral and burnt-reds relaxed as the train went by, but Jay’s and Nate’s?

Yes, I was suspicious.

Dinner passed somewhat peacefully; as peaceful as it can be, with my crazy boys together and energetic from Winter Hols. I still kept an eye on Jay and Nate, resisting the urge to stare blatantly at them in concern. Normally, Jay’s colors were very quiet and liked to hide inside others, and Nate’s did the opposite and crept around everything, but they were… keeping to themselves, for
some reason, and…

Well, I didn’t like it. The way they looked somewhat… brittle.

(Reminded me entirely too much of a certain vagabond in Knockturn Alley.)

Dinner finished up and then we returned to the common rooms where Snape gave an intimidating speech (of course he did), then our lovely Head Girl — I really ought to properly introduce Josephine and Percy, I might’ve had a tiny crush on her but I would love her as a sister — then our prefects, and then we were sent to bed. Or to do whatever the fuck we wanted, since Snape left that to the potesta leaders’ discretion and Josephine and I didn’t care, as long as you didn’t embarrass the House.

“Lyssie! Can we please, please, please go to the Kitchens?” Harper begged as the House dispersed into unwinding from the train ride.

Perfect. “Sure, Harper. Dietrich — think Tilly’s up for hot chocolate right after the Welcome Feast?”

Tilly being Dietrich and my favorite House Elf. She always made sure we were accommodated when we snuck down there; I’m fairly certain she was the one who always made sure our parvus potesta lounge area was spick and span, the snacks we liked kept in the end table drawers and such.

Dietrich inclined his head. “She would be ashamed if you thought such a small thing would tire her.”

“Small thing, sure,” Lu snorted.

“Are you teasing Tilly because she’s small, Lu? That’s rude!” Harper complained.

“Don’t point your wand at me, Harper, everything you magic explodes!”

“Does not!”

“Does too!”

“Does no— Dammit, I’m not a child, why do you always do this, Harper?”

Lu and Harper got into another playful spat — my god, they were hyper, hot chocolate would make them bounce off the bloody walls — and I thanked Merlin (and Harper) for the distraction; Nate was watching and conspicuously not spurring the argument on like he normally liked to, and Jay was distractedly trying to reason with the both of them. I looked to Dietrich.

“Stall the louder two for me, won’t you?” I asked softly.

It was a testament to his trust in me as both a friend and leader that he only asked, “How long?”

“Half an hour.”

Dietrich blinked at our quieter duo. “Are you sure? Both of them?”

Shit, that was true. Wouldn’t it be better if I did a one-on-one talk with them? I was trying to address them as individuals. And, really, they might be more open with me alone than with someone else there, too. Jay, at least, would. Who knew with Nate? The kid did whatever he wanted, and never had to pay the consequences. Except when he fucked with Dietrich and my
circle, but that’s water under the bridge.

But yes, maybe I should speak to Nate first. I could talk to Jay tomorrow, while I was doing his braid, after he got a bit of rest.

(How Dietrich and I communicated entire paragraphs in vague sentences was beyond me.)

I nodded. “I’ll check on Nate.”

“Are you finally booting him?” Dietrich asked.

I… honestly couldn’t tell if he was hopeful or not. Dietrich’s poker face + every conversation he and Nate had ever had made me wonder.

“He’s trustworthy.”

“He’s a liar.” Dietrich intoned dully.

“We’re all liars. Slytherin.” I retorted.

“I am not a fool.” he hissed suddenly, grey eyes flashing, “Tell me he does not feel like him. The boy in that filthy book.”

I stiffened.

Nate was like… Tom?

He… Maybe. Maybe he was. They both had that sneaking, sly look about them. Handsome, dark-haired, tall, wiry… Good Slytherins. There was a bit of honey in their voices, too, and a bit of poison. Good speakers, excellent arguers. Proud, very proud. Somewhat spiteful, very opinionated, but… amusing. Fun to listen to, to snark with, to play games with. Challenging.

He was. Mother of fuck, he was. And I didn’t realize until Dietrich pointed it out, because Dietrich hated Tom, but I loved that stupid fuck. Filia, but yeah.

Fuck me.

I looked away. “You still don’t trust him?” I asked.

Dietrich took a bit to reply. I was a bit… afraid, I guess. If Dietrich still didn’t trust Nate — because arguing and snapping at each other like cats and dogs was not the same as the knife-edge tension that they all used to have between them — then… I mean. I had promised them, I’d promised all of them, that the moment they wanted him out, then he was gone. The moment they seriously believed they could not take his presence, I would remove him. I promised them, and I intended to keep this promise, because they were mine and even if I considered Nate-

No, no. I shouldn’t think about that. I got so easily attached, this was why I put my trust in my boys to tell me when to hold back or stop when I got too far. I’d gone too far with Tom Riddle. I didn’t want to make that mistake with Nathaniel Wilkes. I didn’t want to put my boys in danger because I didn’t know how to stop getting so damn attached.

Dietrich’s pale face — shallow rasps, pale skin, no more snarls on the enemy’s face. But that’s not what she wanted, she knelt and touched at his pulse points desperately — “Because I was weak?” “No, because I was.” — Chamber of Secrets, Slytherins face set into the stone and a basilisk sleeping in his throat, a deadly silver tongue. — “It has happened,” she said gravely, “Students
I frowned at Dietrich. “Stop doing that. You know I can’t understand you. And I know you love it, because you refuse to teach me.”

Dietrich rolled his eyes, just a little. “Whatever.” He paused, glancing at Nate. “He said to me, once, Nathaniel… He said, ‘You have a face like stone, Bastion. Is your heart the same, too? Can you feel anything?’”

My jaw unclenched, relaxing into a near-gape. I blinked rapidly at Dietrich, feeling warm.

He raised a brow. There was a very Do I have to spell it out for you? look to him. “I do not like him. But I suppose I trust him… to an extent.”

(And if Dietrich — the most paranoid, the most antagonistic, the most mistrustful of us all — gave his blessings to Nate’s place in our circle… well, no one else would disagree. As it was, Harper and Lu and Jay turned expectantly to Nate as they did to Dietrich.)

Dietrich turned on his heel, marching the opposite direction and grabbing Lu’s collar and Jay’s braid in the passing. They protested, Lu whining and Harper following after them, but Dietrich didn’t even turn to address them. He just walked with them in tow, three of them being pulled at awkward angles and protesting — or not protesting, in Jay’s case — as he led them away from the boys’ dormitory we’d been standing in front of. I grinned at the sight.

Nate made to follow, raising a brow at their antics, but stopped — flinched? — when I laid a hand on his arm. He glanced at me, then his eyes narrowed behind his glasses.

He smirked a little, though that was his default expression, the self-assured git. “Is this the part where you confess?” he asked.

“This is the part where I ask if you’re okay.” I said, tugging on him — he flinched again, didn’t he? — and guiding him to his room, which he shared with Jay, Dietrich, and Lu. The common room was too public for a heart-to-heart.

Nate tilted his head to one side. “I’m rather well, thank you, Guinevere. Taking me into a bedroom though, how scandalous. What would your brothers say?”

I rolled my eyes. “You’ve got a demented way of flirting, Nate.”
“And you don’t flirt at all. Skipping right ahead, are we?”

“Ergh, that’s disgusting, we’re twelve for Merlin’s sake.”

“I’m thirteen. And you’re the one dragging me into a bedroom-”

“Dietrich’s right, there’s something disturbing about you.” I snorted.

No witty comeback came, though. I blinked, turning to him once we entered the room and the door was shut and warded lightly. He was stone-faced, as expressionless as Dietrich on his best days, and I frowned. A read into his colors showed me that the odd brittleness was still there, but the clouds of magic were stilling, freezing in place, somewhat like… shock? Surprise? Horror?

Horror?

“What’s wrong?” I asked, alarmed.

“‘Dietrich’s right,’ you said… So you’re finally doing it.” he said softly.

“What?”

Nate chuckled a little. “Getting rid of the one loose end.” he said, gesturing to himself. “I suppose it was a long shot, trying to ingratiate myself into your first circle.”

I swallowed. Not because of how casually he said that, but because of his colors. They were shrinking in on themselves. He was hurt. And that it was showing in his damn magical fucking core meant that he was really hurt. Things didn’t show there unless… Well, the colors normally behaved according to your mental state, the state of your heart; no surface irritation, no laughter at a joke, no crying at the movies or anything. Things that affected you personally.

Ah. So he was one of those. People who just couldn’t wear their hearts on their sleeves. Like Dietrich, who blocked everything out with stoicism. Like Jay, who wore that gentle smile even if he was stressed. They couldn’t express things; they didn’t know how, they were too scared to.

Well, then.

“I suppose it’ll be slow? Ease me out of the first circle. To save face, yours and mine. Of course, I’ll be waiting for when you fall. I know more about the second circle than you do, having put it together, so maybe one day when you’re dethroned just as pathetically as Malfoy, I’ll-”

“I wasn’t giving you the boot.”

Nate’s jaw snapped closed. There was that look in his eyes, the one where he was trying to very rapidly calculate his way out of the current issue. “As a Slytherin, of course, I would always be waiting for you to slip up, and the fact that your first circle doesn’t think the same is odd, and I’ve remarked on how nauseating it is before-”

“You really don’t have to make excuses.” I interrupted, again, lightly.

He twitched. I understood; in his eyes, he’d just made a really big faux pas, threatening me when I hadn’t even planned on dropping him. He just made himself untrustworthy. Dangerous.

But to me? I saw a kid who was hurt, and who would have lashed out in it. Jesus fuck, he was exactly like Tom Riddle. Before all the craziness, that is. Like if Tom Riddle weren’t as fatalistic and cheerful. Like if he’d continued on without us, without someone that dared to keep him in
check, Nate could have become him; just without that dangerous, Dark Lord charisma, because Nate was much too amused with messing with people and didn’t care enough about them to hide it away from public eye.

I sat down on Lu’s trunk. “I just wanted to ask if you were okay.” I said.

Mm-hm, Tom definitely wouldn’t have let himself look that stupefied. “What?”

I smiled. “You were quiet at dinner. Didn’t piss anyone off as much as you usually do, which was weird to see. We’ve all gotten used to you riling us up. And when I grabbed you, you… winced. Are you alright, Nate?”

He stood still. Didn’t move at all. For Nathaniel Wilkes, who loved poking at things and prodding at things and all that, to be shocked into complete stillness… Well, it was weird. And unsettling.

So when I dragged him over to sit beside me, it made me feel better. Though it seemed it only made Nate more nervous. Still, though. I liked to have me and mine tucked close, especially if I thought they were upset, somehow.

Dietrich had given me permission and everything, after all.

“Listen, Nate,” I told him gently, “You’re first circle. Got it? You’re first circle. You’re one of me and mine. I’m not going to boot you out. I trust Dietrich with my life — you know, like a horrible Slytherin — but I trust you, too. You didn’t have to help us out. And more importantly, you didn’t have to stay. Don’t think I didn’t see you scare away those ‘Claws that were bullying Harper and Lu last term. Or those Gryffs who were teasing Jay.”

Nate blinked. “But there was no one around. I—”

The beauty of Sight, of course. “I’ve got a spy network all my own, you know. It’s not nearly as reliable as yours or Dietrich’s, but I have it. Sometimes it picks up things like that. I usually don’t say anything about it.”

“…You’re honestly the worst Slytherin I’ve ever met.”

I raised a brow.

Nate snorted, looking away, hands resting on the edge of our shared seat. “Sure, you put down idiots like Malfoy and the rest easily. And you’ve got a clever thing going with Head Girl Zabini. But you treat your allies like… like they’re all that matters. I don’t understand.”

“Close. Allies are treated well, the second circle and the like, but mine? My first circle, my brothers, my parents, my sister, Luna, Harry… yeah, they’re all that matters.”

He looked at me, then. Studying. “You really mean it, don’t you?”

“You’re the one that’s good at picking apart liars.” I said, shrugging.

Nate grinned. “Fine. I can’t believe I got myself caught up in your insanity.”

I snorted. “Don’t change the subject now, Nate. Are you okay?”

He smiled a little. Oh. I’d never seen that before: fondness. There was always glinting amusement and mischief and whatnot, but I’d never seen that sort of warmth in this one. It made him a lot… softer, somehow. Reminded me that he was just a kid on the verge of teenagerhood, not a Death
Eater lying in wait.

(Not a boy who murdered a schoolgirl in an effort to live forever.)

“Yeah,” he sighed. “I am, Guinevere.”

―Lys.” I corrected.

His smile widened. It started to turn back into that creepy smirk, of course.

―Lys.” he repeated.

...  

―Lys, where are you going after classes? We were going to work on our Patronuses, were we not, Lys?” Nate drawled, looking especially amused at how twitchy Dietrich and Lu were getting. He turned to them. “Lys likes to wander around, doesn’t she? Must be because of how many of Lys’ family members are scattered about. Such a Lys-like thing to do, checking on anyone who calls her Lys...”

Lu was grinding his teeth.

Harper and Jay, partnered up, were blissfully ignorant. Or willfully. Both. They were concentrating on the review Flitwick was trying to give us. Re-learning first term spells like *Diffindo* and *Arresto Momentum* was just... well, I knew most of the curriculum *wandless*, so obviously the boys I tutored were rather good at it. Harper was attempting to get an overpowered *Diffindo* to sever things through a chain of explosions, incidentally. Jay had smartly hidden his braid.

Dietrich and Lu sat next to each other, though Dietrich was my partner and Lu was Nate’s.

―I say, Lys, how did you derive Lys from your name? Guinevere, that is, not Lys. And how did it, your name, Lys, become a rite of passage, Lys?” Nate went on.

Dietrich’s wand motion for *Engorgio* jerked to the left, the statues we were practicing Charms on growing bulbously huge arms but not much anything else. I snorted at the attempt, and Nate chuckled a little.

―Lys would never make that mistake, Dietrich, or don’t you know our Lys? Even when Lys was a first year, such good marks in Charms. Lys, say, would-”

―THAT’S IT!” roared Lu, standing up and startling all the Slytherins and Hufflepuffs in the room. He jabbed his finger at Nate, who was taking this all in with glinting, dark eyes. “IF I HEAR YOU SAY LYSSIE’S NAME AGAIN, I’LL BLOODY KILL YOU, NATE!”

Professor Flitwick squeaked. “Mr. Vaisey! Sit down! Language, too! Ten points from Slytherin!”

Nate blinked innocently at Lu. “But Lys gave me permission-”

―YOU’RE DEAD!”

―What are you going to- PROTEGO!”
“YOU COWARD, NATE! Let me just punch you a little!”

“Get away from me, Lucas!”

“Twenty points from Slytherin!”

Harper was laughing uproariously. “Get him, Lu! Avenge my ears!”

Dietrich had an evil glint in his eyes, nodding at Lu’s attempts to bodily bash his way through a Shield Charm so he could strangle Nate with his bare hands. Jay and I glanced at each other, slightly in the same boat: stunned. Was this actually happening in the middle of Charms class on the fourth day of the new term?

Nate was the type to take things he liked and play with them until he got bored, and then proceed to break them into pieces just so he could put them back together again in the most interesting and convoluted way possible. AKA, Nate got permission to call me Lys — the name only me and mine called me by — and decided that it would be extremely amusing to annoy everyone else with his privilege. Or, at least, the more hotheaded of us; contrary to Dietrich’s poker face, the kid got annoyed pretty easily.

Or was that just a Nate thing? Cats and dogs, like I said before.

“DETENTION, MR. VAISEY, MR. WILKES!”

“I didn’t do anything-”

“He deserves it-”

I sighed. Show was over, I think. “Take your detentions with grace, if you please.”

Nate and Lu knew a *parvus potesta* order when they heard one. They both straightened, nodding — sulkily, in Lu’s case.

“Fine, Lyssie,” sighed Lu.

“If I must-” Nate smirked at Lu. “-Lys.” he finished.

Lu twitched again.

I narrowed my eyes. If we lost anymore points today, *with me in the class*, the fourth day of term, Josephine would *kill* me. And worse than that, I’d disappoint her, and it was a horrible fucking feeling, disappointing someone I liked and looked up to. That, and Snape would devour my soul.

Wait, that made him sound like a dementor-fuck. Never mind. Snape would carve up my insides or something equally disturbing.

“And what do we say when we’ve inconvenienced our professors, children?” I said lightly, though I gave them both pointed glances.

Lu and Nate grimaced.

“Sorry, Professor,” murmured Lu, embarrassed.

Nate followed, a bit less sheepish but probably smarting in the pride a bit more. “Apologies, Professor Flitwick.”
The Hufflepuffs snickered. I didn’t move, but my eyes slid to glare at them coolly. It gratified me that they shut up immediately, though I did flare my magic a little — oh, how it liked that, my lovely Dark colors — to make sure they knew how I wouldn’t take their malicious laughter. If only for the boys’ sake. But also mine, because I was a Slytherin and we did not like to be laughed at. Petty and hypocritical, yes, because I would undoubtedly laugh at people I didn’t like if they were forced to bow their heads to a professor, but eh.

Sebastian Flint, sitting behind us, muttered to his partner in crime, Edwin Rosier, “Merlin. Four days in and the queen’s flexing her claws already.”

I smiled to myself as Rosier replied quietly, “Can’t deny that it’s nice to have Weasley on our side, Seb. ‘Puffs shut up from just a glare, you know?”

...

To answer Nate’s question, which was nearly buried with all the stupid things he said to get a rise out of the rest of us, I showed my boys the little letter I’d received yesterday evening:

—

Lys,

Didn’t see you yesterday or the day before, so I had to send Hedwig. You still up for Patronus lessons with me and Lupin? The first one’s going to be tomorrow night, sometime after dinner. Lupin said he can write us notes if we stay past curfew.

Let me know.

Harry

—

Hedwig is a gorgeous owl, by the way. Snooty, yes, but very beautiful. I loved petting owls when they permitted it — Hermes was a little git and hated my pets, Errol was usually too dead or busy to sit still while I spoiled him, unfortunately, and my boys’ owls preferred quick deliveries and business — and Hedwig had been quite receptive to my awed attentions. Last life, I had a plushy of her and I went to bed with it a lot. Y’know, like a mature eighteen-year-old.

Anyways. Putting aside finally meeting that lovely owl, Harry’s letter was a bit… clipped? Not that I expected pages of text, especially considering we’d be seeing each other for the Patronus
lessons, but I hadn’t gotten a letter from him the entire Hols — Ron sent letters home — and knowing Harry, such a down-to-business letter was unlike him.

I was slightly concerned as I waved my boys goodbye, heading out of the common room to meet Harry near the Defense classroom. (They’d hold court fine by themselves; Dietrich was a magnificent Second, after all.) Maybe Harry didn’t want me to come along? Come to think of it, that might be the case, because Lupin is his quasi-godfather… Though Harry shouldn’t know that. Did Ron do something over the Hols?

What happened over the Hols? I frowned to myself, stopping.

I could check, I thought absently. After all, my Occlumency barriers weren’t blocking and absorbing visions as much as before; and a bout of meditation might do me good anyways. My Sight was a bit upset with me, though, probably because I’d neglected the barriers for so long, but perhaps it would cooperate; not enough to give me the complete picture, as many people thought Clairvoyants could do, but enough to get hints?

With that, I let my feet take me to the meeting point while I consulted my private, shitty information network in my head.

Gleaming handle and polished wood, pointed bristled, crinkling paper — wide green eyes — Ron was nearly twitching, voice croaky. “I don’t believe it…” — hands, rough and calloused, carving wood from an old tree, murmuring voice, old and sighing magic singing as he worked. Hewn by hand it was better, his magic bled into the broom.

“-can’t believe it. Who-?” he murmured, stunned at it, unable to see the light magics still mingling in the core — rough hands — wind whipping around his face, clear blue sky and — “It’s the best broom there is, Hermione.” Ron sighed, then he grinned. “And Harry’s got it. Safest broom to take someone up with, you know? Maybe you’d like flying on a broom that isn’t rubbish!”

McGonagall raised a brow, Hermione looked guilty but determined. “What if… what if it was sent by Sirius Black, Professor?”

Stop.

Right, right, the Firebolt. That was taken away, though, wasn’t it? For a bit. I frowned, resisting the urge to blink the Sight from my eyes. That can’t be why Harry’s upset; it’s just a broom. No, no- I can’t say that, honestly, I live with Quidditch nuts, brooms to Quidditch nuts are like what cars are to suburban-living Muggles: precious babies.

Still, though. I might as well practice with my Clairvoyance, maybe make it happy so I could figure out what the hell was going on.

Snow drifting down gently, grey sky and black pine, castle standing in the background — dry and dusty and dark, quiet steps and a silvery cloak draped over his shoulders, heart beating in excitement. Harry ran down the tunnel, snuck out the trapdoor — “What should we get for him? S’not like I have a whole lot of Galleons here, so… candy?” Ron said, shrugging. Hermione nodded, “Harry doesn’t have a lot of experience with wizard sweets, I don’t think.” “Neither do you, yeah? So? Shall we?” — bright and crowded and the smell of sugar and chocolate — “Ugh, no, Harry won’t want one of those, they’re for vampires, I expect-”

Stop.

Flash of green light, a scream, a child wailing-
“I’m not going to be the Secret-Keeper? You wound me, Prongsie.” — exaggerated pout, a playful shove. Lily Potter rolled her eyes — “Think about it, you prat. Everyone knows it’s Sirius and James, Padfoot and Prongs… When they can’t find Lily-flower and me, who’re they going to turn to?” — motorcycle roaring in the night, thrumming underneath him, hand cradling the baby. Fat globs of tears rolled down his cheeks, his beard. “I’m sorry, ‘lil Harry, I’m sorry-”

Well, fuck my life. Harry found out about Black’s supposed betrayal, didn’t he? Before I even left, though after we’d said goodbye already. No wonder there were no letters from my favorite Potter. Not that I’d blame him, he was at that angsty age and his life story was absolute shit, my poor friend.

By the time I made it to the Defense classroom, I was well and out of my Clairvoyance — quietly celebrating in my head that my visions weren’t as in your face, weren’t as floody, as they’d been since the school year began — and I was more than a little excited to get tips from a real Patronus caster. While I had asked Alby to demonstrate a Patronus for me real quick last term, it’d be different with a bit of supervision. And with Harry — I loved my boys, but Harper so often got jittery and Lu and Dietrich got frustrated, plus Nate didn’t try and Jay tried too hard, it got pretty chaotic. Harry would be a nice change of pace.

And there he was, waiting for me, leaning against the wall. I beamed when I saw him.

“Harry!”

He looked up, brightening a little. “Lys.” He rubbed the back of his head, looking a bit sheepish. “Sorry I didn’t say this in the note, but welcome back. Had a nice holiday?”

“Yes, it was nice being back home. Did you like your present?”

“Oh, er, right. I never wrote you back after you sent it- I’m sorry about that, Lys. It was a… strange holiday for me. Thank you, of course! I think I’m getting the hang of your meditation exercises; I used them a lot to, er, calm down.”

I patted his shoulder fondly. “Better than me. The dementors really pissed on my Occlumency barriers, so meditation is a bit difficult to get into and I’ve been spoiled so far, so I just don’t do it.”

Harry shrugged. “Well, that’s what we’re here for. Shall we?”

“Sure. …But you’re alright, right? First Nate, then Jay, now you… Winter Hols seem to either make people as hyper as Lu and Harper were, or they suck the life out of them.”

“What happened to Wilkes and Rookwood?”
“Nate’s not going to tell, apparently, but he feels much better. He’s one of mine, now, you know? Calls me Lys and everything. Too much, actually, remind me to tell you about Charms class today. And Jay… well, apparently he’s got a marriage contract set up now, to an American witch, and it stresses him out.”

Harry looked mystified. “Marriage contracts?”

“Yup. Purebloods, you know? Apparently they get engaged at twelve or thirteen, and- Wait. Don’t distract me, prat! You’re alright, aren’t you? Nothing like a surprise marriage contract or whatever the hell goes on in Nate’s house happened, did it?”

He hesitated a little. “Something like it. I just… I mean…”

Harry glanced at the door to the Defense classroom, which would lead into Lupin’s office. We might be a bit late. But at the same time, Harry was the one who listened to me when I was messed up because of Tom, so I’d be damned if I didn’t return the favor.

“I have Herbology tomorrow, just before lunch. I might accidentally stab myself with a spade or something.” I said casually, folding my arms.

Harry, bless his damn soul, caught on quickly. “Transfiguration. Ron’s wand might slip, miss the cushion, hit me.”

We grinned at each other.

But then he frowned, back to timid, hesitating Harry. “Erm… Are you sure, though, Lys? It’s not a big deal, really-”

I held up a hand. “Ron’s fault aim or not, I’m probably going to stab my hand with some pointy plant or other tomorrow. And you’re my Hospital Wing mate, so you’ve got to be there. And I very vividly remember someone listening to my drivel about a stupid book from last year, so obviously it’d be beyond prattish if I didn’t listen to that same friend’s strange holiday, yeah?”

Harry smiled warmly. “What if you’re not working with tools or spiky plants?”


“Yeah… Thanks, Lyssie.”

“I think you’re the one who invited me along, Potter, so that’s my line. C’mon, let’s go see how much vapor and frustration we can work up.”

…”

To be honest, I hadn’t paid much attention to Lupin at all this year. He was an effective teacher, but I was already ahead in all my classes, and I usually used class time to do paperwork. (Got very good at glamours, us firsties. Had to pretend to be taking notes and such.) He was mild-mannered and gentle-eyed, light scars running all over his sickly skin and dipping underneath his raggedy clothing. Kind, is what I would say about him. Kind and thoughtful and…

Well, he reminded me of Jay, actually. Huh.
“I have Mage Sight,” I muttered to myself, gritting my teeth, “I know the pattern my magic should be going through, I can see it. But why won’t it do it?”

Lupin looked sympathetically between Harry and I, both of us tired with so much magical expenditure and frustrated as hell. The fucking boggart-dementor pissed me the hell off. It wasn’t nearly as horrible as the real ones, and I think both Harry and I could feel it — magical sensitivity and whatnot — but it still sent us into cold sweat and had our hands trembling, almost too much to actually cast spells. Harry had looked on the verge of collapse the first few times, but I think he was slowly growing used to the damn thing.

“You are a naturally Dark witch, Miss Weasley,” Lupin explained gently, “The makeup and intent of this spell is Light, with a touch of Grey, perhaps, and your magic knows this. It resists.”

“This is the only way to fight off dementors, though, isn’t it?” Harry asked, “So Dark-allegiance witches and wizards have it worse off, with dementors?”

Lupin shook his head. “This is the safest and easiest way to ward off dementors, actually.”

I narrowed my eyes. “There’s a more dangerous way? A Dark spell, then.”

“Fiendfyre,” replied the professor with a grave nod, “The only known way to actually kill a dementor; Fiendfyre consumed everything, anywhere. But I like to think no professor at Hogwarts would dare teach their students such a spell. It’s one of the Darker, more Maddening ones.”

I swallowed. I’d Seen Fiendfyre before. It used to be called demon fire, and myth said that its first caster was a cambion who was taught the spell by their demon parent. Cities had been consumed by Fiendfyre before; oceans used to burn, because the stuff didn’t feed off oxygen, it fed off magic. And what gave off magic, even just a little? Everything.

“Well, looks like I’m sticking to this, then.” I sighed, “Though I won’t be able to come every session, Professor, sorry to say. Parvus business and whatnot.”

Try as he might, Lupin looked pleased at that. Ha. I knew it, these lessons were so he could spend time with Harry. I couldn’t even be offended, really, because Harry deserved any sort of connection to his parents that he could get ahold of, even unknowingly.

“Alright, ready?” Harry asked, wiping his face tiredly.

(We had to do the Patronus together, since it was Harry’s boggart, not mine. I didn’t even want to see what mine was, and I was glad my year didn’t have the boggart lesson. I don’t think anyone would like to see what sorts of horrors were in my head.)

I nodded my assent. “If you are, Potter.”

He smiled grimly. “Right, then.” Lupin stepped towards the trunk the fucking thing was rattling inside of. Harry turned to me with a more amused smile. “We go at this enough, I might be so exhausted tomorrow, I won’t need Ron to send me to the Wing.”

I snorted. “Might be better, anyways. Ron’s got a nice, new wand, but it still does weird shit when he isn’t thinking. I said he was a less explosive Harper, magic-wise. Never seen him more offended, honestly.”

Harry and I stood shoulder to shoulder. He was nearly a half-head taller than me. Our wands were ready.
“Alright, you two. Remember — circular wand movement, but not too twisty.” Lupin advised.

“I cannot wait until I get this down enough not to need the damn movement.” I muttered.

“Is that a thing?” Harry asked.

“Oh, Merlin, yes. Magic memorizes the patterns, you know? Anyways.”

Lupin unlatched the trunk, and it burst open. Harry stepped forward just as Lupin jumped back, the boggart focused on him, and the feeling of ice and horror slid down my spine and had goosebumps prickle across my skin. I clenched my jaw, pouring magic into my Occlumency barriers — they held up well, thank you cambion — and the black, tattered cloak and scabby, long fingers of a dementor hovered before us. It reached for us.

“Expecto Patronum!” we yelled.

(It didn’t take, that time. Or the time after that. And, really, I didn’t expect it too. But we were exhausted after Lupin finally shut us down, and I was hopeful that I could speak to Harry tomorrow without any stabbing or Harper’s awry magic at all. That, and a nap.)
Chapter 30

Chapter Summary

GODDAMMIT. I didn't make it... I'm sorry, fellas, I was hoping to get this in before midnight and I guess I failed...

Which brings me to my next, unfortunate announcement: due to rising pressures of real life, and evidenced by how I failed to update when I said I would, I am going to slow down the updates considerably. Once every other week *at the most*. DX I'm sorry, guys. I promise that I'll try to catch up, but I'm not fast enough to refill my backlog the way it'd been in the beginning.

So, yeah. Sorry about that. And sorry about this, too. It's kinda cliff-hanger-ish. :( I still love you all for bookmarking and commenting, though, and I feel bad about letting y'all down, but just know I really appreciate how cool everyone is with the last skipped week and stuff. :) See you guys next time!

... 

“I really do love that you’re Head Boy, you know, Perce.”

My brother gave me an entirely unimpressed look. “You love that my position gives you power in Slytherin.”

I gasped. “How could you say such a thing, Percy?”

He gave me a wry smile. “Because you just had me give those fifth-years that were teasing your friends three nights of detention. Oh, and those Ravenclaws who were harassing Luna last week. And somehow I was roped into giving Harry Potter a hallway pass two weeks ago, so he could safely sneak into the Hospital Wing where you had, apparently, been resting after a slight asthmatic attack in Herbology.”

I beamed at Percy, trotting alongside him. It was like the parting of the red sea, students standing back and letting us through; after seeing Percy yell the shit out of a bunch of his own House’s fifth-years, because I may or may not have provoked them (one of them insulted Jay and Lu last week, nearly tripped both of them down the moving staircases; only Lu’s Quidditch-honed reflexes saved them a trip to Madam Pomfrey, and needless to say, when they told me later I was pissed). One of them may have been ready to curse me out, another one making a grab for my hair after I said something quite rude about his own…

Well. See, Percy was protective of his siblings, yeah? When we weren’t driving him up the wall.

“It’s not like I don’t make it up for you,” I retorted, grinning at him. “Plus, Josephine’s been really grateful that you’re dealing out punishments for our sake. Slytherin’s, that is.”
Percy’s face darkened a little, and the crowd thinned enough that we wouldn’t have to care about eavesdroppers. “Because of how much your House is targeted?” he nearly hissed, “I had no idea, before you came to Hogwarts, that students thought it was alright to push a child down the staircases if that child was a Slytherin.”

I blinked in surprise. “I didn’t know that got around.”

He glared, pushing his glasses up smartly. “I don’t just blindly trust that the students you hiss at deserve it just because you’re my little sister, you know. I love you very much, Lyssie, but as Head Boy, I do try to be responsible for everyone under me. Which means knowing things.”

“…You would’ve been a magnificent potesta leader.”

Percy looked away. “I do believe Head Girl Zabini said much the same.”

I squinted at him. Then I grinned, tugging on his sleeve. “Are you blushing? You are-!”

“Hush, Lyssie!”

I laughed at him. “Well, well. I always knew you were the most Slytherin of my brothers. How did you find out?”

Percy side-eyed me. “The portraits are quite forthcoming, since they seem to like you, Bastion, and Harper, and I am your favorite brother.”

I gasped again. “You’re using my spy network? I don’t know whether to be insulted or proud!”

He shoved at my shoulder playfully, and I bumped into him ‘clumsily’ and I really should be more worried for our reputations as Head Boy and parvus potesta, two of us horsing around like elementary schoolers. Our little walk was taking us vaguely in the direction of the Owlery, where I think Percy was going to mail the collective sibling letter to our parents before I’d flagged him down for some nice, Slytherin-style, toddler-level revenge. At some point I’d snatched the letter up and started reading over it, grinning at Percy’s absolutely beautiful handwriting detailing Fred and George’s latest prank — they’d demanded he include it, because they wanted Mum and Dad to know how harmless and brilliant it was so as to cut down on nagging — and how Ginny was doing in classes.

I’d finished off the ‘I’d sign this with all our names but it was hard enough tracking all of them down to ask what they wanted in the letter, so I’m afraid this is the best we can offer, Father, Mother. All my love, Percy.’ and had been about to offer to send a Nuntiam to our errant siblings to make them sign it, but we heard a CLANG! in the Owlery, a few yards ahead, and jumped at the noise of it.

Percy and I glanced at each other, then increased our pace. There shouldn’t be anything metal or very heavy in the Owlery besides the beams the owls liked resting on, and one of those falling would be impossible — Hogwarts wouldn’t let herself go like that, honestly — so what was that noise? I was about to stomp right in, intent on finding out what sort of idiot managed to piss off an owl enough to have them drop one of their water dishes or something on them, but…

My brother held out his hand. I paused instantly, glancing at his intent expression, then turned to the shut door again, narrowing my eyes. He’s stopped me because there were voices, and they’d grown louder as we approached, but they were still quiet.

It was Percy’s inner Slytherin, I’m sure, that smelled a secret.
“-teach… this time… such an annoyance… I-”

“-want her here… both of them-”

“Should we-?”

“-ah, yeah, it’s just… not like-”

“-bothersome! Why my father ordered… befriend the Zabini girl-!”

“-done with this, yeah? Year’s almost done, I’m tired of following a damn girl, and I’m sure once we chaps take Zabini down, someone’ll do something about Weasley.”

“Bloodtraitor whore!”

“And Zabini’s no better-”

I glanced over at Percy. His hands were clenched, knuckles pale and trembling. Yeah, they insulted me one more time, I think he might lose it…

“-matriarchal family in Italy, but it’s patriarchy here. Zabini doesn’t seem to realize that, though, does she? Well, we’ll show her-“

Or Josephine.

I snatched Percy’s arm, right before he rushed in to curse the ever-loving shit out of whoever was in there. He was strong enough and I was weak enough that it shouldn’t have mattered, but he stopped, swung around to face me with his face red and teeth gritted. I tightened my grip on his wrist gently, shaking my head, eyes sharp.

Not like this, I mouthed.

Percy snapped his gaze back at the door. They were insulting Josephine again. He glanced at me, eyes narrowed and pointed. I read that as something along the lines of, I know you have the Weasley temper, Lyssie. Why not?

I tugged on his wrist, waiting until he followed my gentle guidance. I scooted us right up against the opposite wall, and then pointed my wand at our feet, drawing a lopsided circle around us and muttering the incantation, “Muffliato.”

My left hand’s fingers twitched to flick my Mage Sight on and watch the magic take, a little more clumsily than Snape’s had, but it spiraled into a thinly-woven barrier that was nearly translucent to my weak Sight, and I smiled grimly. Flicking the Sight back off, I looked at Percy.

“It’s better if we can catch them, Percy, and I report the names to Josephine to do with them what she will,” I explained quietly, “They don’t sound my age, so they’re probably more her responsibility than mine, ‘specially if they’re Slytherins.”

Percy glared at the door. “They shouldn’t be talking about you like that. Or Zabini.”

“They’re snubbed purebloods, probably. And what’s the worst thing you can do to an uppity pureblood? Piss on their pride. Josephine and I have been doing just that, taking the potestas and making Slytherin so solid that the old bullying we’re supposedly used to just… doesn’t take.”

“Shouldn’t they be pleased, then?”
I gave him a look. “And if they’re not Slytherins?”

Percy flushed a little. “Ah, right. Right. So… you want to find out who they are?”

“Mm. I can cast a strong Notice-Me-Not, though I have to practically glue myself to your side for it to take both of us. Can’t have us forgetting about each other. I’ll get their faces, pull up the memories through Occlumency if I need to. Their grievance is mainly directed at Josephine, so I’ll defer to her. She’s been my potesta and Slytherin mentor, you know?” Then I grinned. “Plus, she’ll owe me one.”

He gave me a tired look. “Should’ve known you’d use this to your advantage.”

“If I didn’t, Josephine would be much more insulted, I assure you. Potesta mentor, remember? Now hold still.”

I verily glomped my brother, wrapping myself in his robes and arms like a blanket, and concentrating a fair portion of my indigo into a Notice-Me-Not. For a moment, as soon as the silver-blue threads snapped into place, I wondered what the bloody hell I was cloaked in (These aren’t my robes, why are the sleeves so big, what the hell-?) but I snapped out of it when Percy poked my cheek hesitantly, as if he was checking I was there. He probably was, I poured a bit much into it. I twisted my face around to grin sheepishly at him, and we waited.

“Does the sound spell you used prevent them from hearing us?” the blank wal- Percy asked.

I frowned. “From what I remember, it makes the conversation somehow indistinguishable and quieter.”

“So not completely.”

“Nope.”

“Silencio.”

We waited for a while, narrowing our eyes at the doors. Eventually, five teenagers thundered out, huffing insults and snickering amongst themselves, one of them covered in feathers and grimacing at the sight. Two ‘Claws, a ‘Puff, and two Slytherins. I immediately pinpointed Peregrine Derrick, with his handsome looks and straight-backed posture, but everyone else was only vaguely familiar.

“She’s your sister-in-law, Perry. Well, soon to be, anyways.”

“Yes, meaning I didn’t choose to be related to the bitch. Hopefully father can order her to give me the magnus potesta so I can finally put us to rights.” Derrick muttered, “Only women would make Slytherin like this, all of us falling over ourselves to cater to one another. Who cares if the parvus is targeted? Who cares if you nearly pushed some brats down the stairs? That means they’re weak, and they’d come flocking to the magnus for protection. All the better for us. But no, the stupid whore wants to put a bloodtraitor bitch into position.”

One of the Ravenclaws scowled. “She’s been targeting us ‘Claws, too. As if Looney Lovegood would actually fight back. She deserves to be at the bottom of the chain in that case, you know? Not clever enough to get out of being the crazy little shit of the tower.”

“And who allows it? Zabini. The woman is burning bridges left and right, practically prostrating herself to the Light to make nice. We don’t need that sort of rubbish leadership. Always knew a girl’s rule would be weak. Didn’t Bagnold prove this?”
“Zabini’s worse, because she can’t be puppeted like Bagnold. Bagnold let loose hundreds of criminals because we had the right people in the right places. Zabini’s too aware of how fucking incompetent she is as a leader, it’s made her paranoid. Osbourne says she wards the hell out of her bed every night.”

“Weasley probably taught her those.” murmured the Hufflepuff, shaking his head.

Derrick snorted. “In exchange for some out-of-proportion favor or other. Why a bloodtraitor can ward that well, it’s unthinkable. Her and that Curse Breaker brother of hers, they probably stole their techniques from a proper pureblood. Or perhaps a trade or bribe? We all know Weasleys are basically in poverty, but they do have pretty faces, don’t they?”

There was a tightening around my shoulders. Percy was about to lose his shit.

Which is why it was lucky they turned the corner, a trail of feathers and insults marking their leave. I struggled to undo the Silencio — silent casting was more fine control than power, you see, and though I had a lot of the latter, it made it proportionally difficult to have much of the former — and then spelled away the Notice-Me-Nots. Percy’s face was red with fury, the letter in his hands half-crumpled with his clenching fingers.

“Derrick from Slytherin,” I sighed, “Says the same things every time.”

Percy whipped around to me. “He’s said that before?”

I shrugged. “To my face and to Josephine’s face and behind our backs and around our fronts, whenever he likes. She can’t be too harsh on him because his brother’s apparently her betrothed, and he can’t do much because Josephine’s too clever.”

Percy scowled fiercely. “That was Nicholas Rowle and and Benjamin Quincy from Ravenclaw. Rowle is a seventh-year, Quincy is a fifth-year. Derrick is sixth, I believe? The other Slytherin was Maverick Sinclair, seventh-year. The Hufflepuff was Torrence Lockwood, sixth year.”


He sniffed. “I try to be responsible for everyone under me, Lyssie. As Head Boy, I know things.”

“Holy Merlin, you’re my favorite brother.”

“I know.”

“Prat.” I shook my head. “I’ll let Josephine know. And I’ll give you a good mention, brother. Please hurry up and ask her to Hogsmeade, okay?”

Percy squinted at me. “I thought you fancied her yourself?”

I gave a quick grin. “But you’re my favorite brother and always have been.”

He grumbled to himself, not embarrassed in the least. (A lie.) “Let’s just send this letter, shall we?”

“Hopefully Mum and Dad can read it after you’ve crushed it like this.”

“Hush, Lyssie. Hurry up so you can have Zabini do something to those… people, so I don’t have to.”

In the end, three things happened. First: we mailed the letter and wrote a post-script apologizing for the state of it, which our parents replied to cheerfully though Mum did scold Percy for not
tucking letters in between book covers like she’s always said we should. Second: when I got back
to the Slytherin commons, I informed Nate and Dietrich what happened, and in the end, got some
tutoring in advanced spellwork from some fifth years in exchange for dropping the names off to
Josephine. (Those boys had trouble looking her in the eye after that, for quite a while. I don’t really
want to know what she did, but at the same time, I bloody wish I knew what Josephine did to
them.) Third: Josephine marched up to the Gryffindor table one lunch and demanded that Percy ask
her to Hogsmeade, which he — blushingly — did.

…

“…Strange holiday?” — white walls and white blankets, pale sunlight through the tall windows.
Arching ceilings were familiar to her — “Sure you want to hear me complain? It’s not as
interesting as your duels.” he said, smiling.

She patted the place next to her — side by side, a tiny Notice-Me-Not swirling around them, he
marveled at her wandless magic even if he couldn’t see it. She grinned at him anyways — “I don’t
believe that. I’m as bothersome as you, Professor Snape thinks. Means you’re the original
troublemaker. I’m sure you’ll blow me out of the water, Harry.” — tightened his fingers, pale skin
stretching across bony knuckles, teeth gritting. He remembered.

Stop.

“I think I consider you sort of me and mine.” — a smile and a laugh, shaking her head. She looked
up at that ridiculous girl with red hair and a steady gaze. The girl looked back, crossing her arms
and waiting — “Only you, Guinevere.”

Stop.

She threaded her fingers through the hair, cherrywood in color, browner than her own, longer and
silker. There were few knots, and — “You talked to Nate last night didn’t you?” asked the boy, lip
nearly curled into a smile. She laughed. “How ever did you guess?” “He won’t stop saying your
name. Lys.” — pushing up his glasses, cocky smirk, dark eyes glinting with mischievousness —
three sections, twist under and under and over and braid, and braid, and — “I meant to speak with
you, too, Jay. …You’re alright, aren’t you? Your colors… they seem… stressed, I suppose.” —
jolting moss green, crackling with blackened edges, brittle, shy. Jay bit his lip.

No one was in the common room this early, no one ever was, this was their time — Jay leaned
against the couch, she sat with her legs folded underneath her, surrounded in knitted blankets and
fluffy pillows and not very Slytherin things — nest, she nested, Josephine postured and Lyssie liked
to nest — “You’re the worst Slytherin I’ve ever met.” — Jay smiled.

“I’m getting a contract,” he said quietly, “to a girl in America. My mother arranged it all.”

Stop.

Her hand darted out, quick as silver, and gripped his tightening fist as best as she was able. He
was cold, and she frowned at it, looking — “Harry. You don’t have to… It’s okay-” He shook his
head — blazing house, scream of magic, the cry of an infant — “I am Lord Voldemort. I. Do. Not.
Fail.” — “Not Harry, please, not Harry, not Harry, have mercy-” — tightening jaw and fists and
hardened green eyes, high windows and streaming light and white arches, red hair trailing down
her shoulders. He trembled, almost unnoticeable—

“No. I want to tell you, I need to... I just... I hate him, Lys, I hate him. He killed my parents. It’s his fault and I... I want him dead.”

Stop.

?? — tunnel, black and shadows and glints of moonlight silver, breath running short — the full moon above, she turned on her heel, fell, her hands began to bleed — “HOW DARE YOU~” roared the man, eyes wild and hair stringy and robes filthy, the other trembling before him. Dust clouded his footsteps — Choice? — rat scurried away, a wolf howled, the black cloaks swarmed and darkened the moon — silver stag — ??

Stop.

“...Do you want to kill him?”

He jolted. “What?”

She held his hand. It hurt. “Do you want to kill him yourself?”

He looked away — There is no good or evil — the golden snitch on front of him, the cool of it touching his fingers, the rush of wind around his robes — She squeezed his hand. “I don’t know. I... I want to know why. I want to know... I want the traitor dead and I want to know whether he was an evil person or a coward or both, or- or anything. I want-”

Stop.

Gentle smile, crooked a little, like her dad’s. “Then I don’t think you’re a bad person at all.” — She’d do much worse, much worse if — sting on her cheek, Molly gasped. Arthur looked at the little girl in front of him harshly, panic and helpless anger in his eyes. “Never. NEVER. Never ever think that, Lyssie. Pandora Lovegood’s death was not your fault. Luna’s grief is not your fault.” — she patted his knee, fingers relieved to have blood back, Harry grinned sheepishly. — “You’re a much better person than I am, Potter, believe me.”

Stop.

I opened my eyes, and immediately winced.

“GAH! Fucking Seer headache, fuck you!”

(Thank Merlin I didn’t have roommates.)

Seems I’d pushed a bit too far that time. But, oh my oh my, my Clairvoyance was giving me some hints. Some useless garbage, too, stuff I’d lived through already — Harry and I had a lovely chat in the Hospital Wing about Sirius Black and the morality of wanting revenge, not that I had a good track record in that department being a Slytherin queen but whatever — but hints. I was further along the choice, as there was much less insecurity around the choice. It was solidifying, and when it did, I’d be able to better find out what the hell was going on.

Pettigrew... ah, how lovely it would be, to do something to him. I couldn’t nab him, for whatever reason, but...

Anyways.
Thank you, cambion, I thought to myself for the millionth time, pinching between my brows to try to stave off the headache anyways, I can at least See more now. Fucking finally.

I scrubbed my hands down my face tiredly. The outcomes were sharpening into focus. And I was almost completely sure I was going to add Josephine to one of mine, or at least peripherally — like how Alby was — and that part of balancing or causing or whatevering the choice. There was another component, though. Missing ones, I think. Like... like fulfilling necessary objectives for the outcome I wanted, I was halfway done with the Josephine bit and probably fulfilled quite a few others by just generally being Harry’s friend and thusly involved in all this... but there were others, because the outcome wasn’t solid yet.

Ugh. Fuck. When, when was I going to get to the Clairvoyance bits in Helvynya Prevett’s damn book that would help me with this stuff? She’s the most powerful Clairvoyant in recorded history, there’s no way she didn’t know how to interpret choices and fate better than I did.

Knock knock.

I blinked at my door in surprise. I didn’t have many guests in my dorm.

“Give me a moment.” I called, rolling off my bed and grabbing my wand in one smooth motion.

I started casting some cleaning charms, just to give off the impression that I was much more organized than chaos, then had to adjust my wards for temporary entrance. Annoying stuff, that; some of the defenses, I even took down completely. But it was enough for the door to get itself open and for me to greet one of my first-years, an Adaline Mercer.

She looked at me a little nervously, but not fearfully — I wasn’t Malfoy or anything. I’d spoken to her before; she was in my potesta, after all. “Weasley? Dietrich Bastion said to come fetch you for potesta business. He said he’ll be in the usual place with the usual people.”

Abandoned classroom with the boys. Got it.

I nodded cordially to Mercer. “Thank you, Mercer.”

The girl gave me a dimpled smile and then ran off. I looked at her back fondly. She used to be teased and cornered by these three Gryffindor girls a lot, before my take-over. Malfoy couldn’t be bothered to do anything about it, and Mercer had been quiet and paranoid. With a magnus mentor to tutor and guide her, a Slytherin support structure to keep her steady, and the mandatory traveling in three’s and four’s... Mercer was much more sociable now. As loyal to me as someone like that could get, with a healthy dash of Slytherin-wariness added to it.

I Summoned and levitated my things together, tucking Sollertia Augurium under my arm. Nate was helping the translation, very interested in the Mind Arts that were later in the book. In between business, we’d work on this.

I was just locking up my wards when my head pulsed with pain. Once. Then twice. Then three times. My eyes narrowed mid-chant and I halted the warding, centered myself quickly, and dove. Clairvoyance was warning me of something important (another sign my Occlumency wasn’t a fucking mess anymore) and it must’ve been considerable, if it was just after I let it play around during my meditation.

Walking in the corridors, footsteps echoing. She had her wand at her — ??? — in her hand, gripped tight, wary expression, narrowed eyes. ??? The shadows in the corners stilled, hesitated — Choice? — tucked into her sock, under her skirt, waiting.
Hand drifting at her side, careless toss of rose-colored hair — ??? — stepped out, grey eyes trained and inhuman and — filthy, black, matted and — ??? — “Who’s there?” — Choice — ??? — “Lysie’s a bit late, now, isn’t she?”

Truth — hide lies price — paid choice choice choice — ??? — clacking on the floor, hands loose. She looked up at the approaching — “GET THE RAT!” — Josephine laughed and shook her head at the girl, rolling her eyes fondly. Always — blood dripped on the grass, dribbled, warm and black in the moonlight — “I am so sorry-” she said, she pulled, she ??? — ??? — her hands loose at her sides. She looked up at the approaching-

Stop.

Haaaaah, this is when you really knew my Sight was fucking back. After abandoning me in first year — likely due to how tightly I had to draw my mind in with fucking Tom and his tricky shit, added to the fact that I apparently was not in mortal peril the entire time — and then being bitch-slapped by several dementors on two different occasions, I’d nearly forgotten that it could give me head’s ups for things like this. Ginny falling down the stairs, Ron falling in a river, neither were life-threatening to myself but they were important and I could affect them.

Well.

-at the approaching dog, is what it was. Who did we know that was a dog that could somehow have an influence on important matters this year? Hm.

And let’s not forget: it was looking more and more likely that there was an outcome, here, where I could… possibly catch Pettigrew. Which would be, you know, pleasant for everyone. Especially me. I had some… pest control spells I’ve always wanted to try on him, just to see if they’d work. And this would be the most desirable outcome, yes?

So all I had to do was slip my wand in its usual place and walk. Easy. Another objective, struck out.

...

I took a meandering path to the abandoned classroom, hands swinging nonchalantly at my sides, wand hidden neatly under my uniform’s skirt and in reaching distance of my fingers. It happened a bit slower than I thought it would.

I didn’t have extraordinary senses, but I did have Mage Sight. I hated using it in Hogwarts, I really did; even at a 75% veil, there was bloody golden sparkles all over the place and the deep, chorus-like humming buzzing faintly in my ears. I had to actually adjust myself to it for a minute or two, resisting the nausea of that much shit going on, before I felt even remotely okay with searching out other magical signatures.

That of the dog’s wafted by in broken, shredded, Dark colors — a jolt of disharmony in the hallways I was walking in. I didn’t even hear or see or smell the dog, I just knew it was there by the very odd pattern to the faint fog and floating strings. After a few minutes of painstakingly tracking its following me, the colors growing into something less faint and more maroon-ish, that’s when I felt the eyes on my back. That hair-raising, half-paranoid feeling only hit when the evening shadows grew a bit too dark; dark enough to hide a Grimm, say.
There was a soft click-click-click of nails on stone, and I turned, unsurprised in the slightest when a massive, black dog blinked sunken grey eyes at me. Even expecting it, I inwardly pinched my brow. Of course I come across the Azkaban escapee.

“Well, then. There’s no way you’re a normal dog. Hogwarts wouldn’t let just any mutt inside her walls.” I said blandly.

And even without that little tidbit of knowledge, the dog wasn’t a normal dog. It looked big enough for me to ride, honestly; the crest of his head was at my shoulder. I know I wasn’t the tallest around, but I was a respectable almost 5 feet, okay, that was ridiculous. He could probably knock me over, even looking starved enough that he was probably half the weight he should’ve been even a bit thin.

That was… actually a bit worrying, honestly. There were patches of fur missing, like his body couldn’t even support that much. The patches were sparse, but large, and I could very plainly see the jutting ribs. Man, dogs were not supposed to look like this. (The bit of me that once had a lovely little pupper cringed in sympathy and horror and itched to pet the coarse fur-)

The dog sat on his haunches, looking at me patiently.

I stared back, waiting for him to move.

After a few moments, he stood and very, very slowly approached me, steps deliberate and eyes trained on mine. Like he was the one approaching a wild animal, and I was the one that was worrying. The massive thing’s head was at my shoulder, and me being three inches shy of five feet tall, that was a little fucking ridiculous. It very carefully reached down to my robe sleeve, though, and tugged at it.

Man, if I didn’t know this was a wizard already, I would’ve been very hostile at this point.

“So you want me to follow you, then? I suppose…” I said reluctantly.

Because I am apparently the sort of person that follows strangers into empty and dark corners, I let the dog tug on my sleeve and I eventually end up walking with my hand resting on his shoulder, fingers absently trying to untangle the matted fur. (Matted fur is the worst, and I itch for either scissors or a tiny Diffindo to fix this, goddammit, this poor animal-) We end up in an old lecture hall that I’ve never seen used — likely for an elective that no professor teaches anymore, or something similar — and the dog stares pointedly at the door until I’ve locked and warded it.

When I finish a Muffliato around the room, I raise a brow at the dog. “My wand’s out, so I hope you know that if you attack me, I’m a very Dark witch and I happen to know the Blood Boiling Hex, which is amazingly still legal.”

We’re standing far enough apart that I could cast the spell and hit if the dog lunged for my throat. I’ve never cast it before, but I’ve Seen it enough to know how to. I’ve never cast a purely Dark spell, actually, but I think I have enough drive to do it if I have to. Dark spells are fueled best by the will to win, and there’s nothing in me but that, sometimes. It’s Sirius Black, he’s one of the good guys by most definitions, but I don’t trust myself to know that anymore.

Because I was weak? — No, because I was.

Stop.

There’s a beat of silence, the dog blinks, and then his form shudders and warps and twists, and then instead of an ungodly large, Grimm-like dog standing in front of me, there’s a skeletal man in
rags instead. I expected it, but I still flinched. (I always expect it and I always flinch.) He staggers forward, robes and lanky hair swaying as he does, and there’s a trembling in his fingers that I can see from even here.

“I knew it,” comes a hoarse voice, “I knew you wouldn’t be surprised.”

There’s a distant part of me that sort of thinks Well shit that’s not good, but it’s mostly covered by the more immediate and hostile part of me that wants to know why I think Sirius Black is telling me he thinks I know things. I shouldn’t know things. He shouldn’t be looking at me like that, like I’m a Seer. I’ve very carefully set up spy networks and gossip rings and my own competency as a parvus potesta reigning to make sure no one suspects this sort of shit. Might not have been my purpose when I set out to become a queen of Slytherin, but it worked out nicely.

“Hello, Sirius Black.” I said, hand gripping my wand.

Sirius Black grinned, yellow and gaunt. “Hello, Seer. I have a few questions about a rat.”

Yellow colors, curling, glassy, red-rimmed and rotting at the edges. I flinched as — “Well, hello, Peter. Long time no see.” — above, watching as the magic sunk into their skin and made them scream. He trembled and looked away as the Dark Lord laughed. He — “THEN YOU SHOULD’VE DIED!” screamed the skeleton — ?? — red flashed in the night, she screamed in pain. Her fingers were slick and the moon made everything monotone.

The rat curled in his hand. “Don’t be scared, Lyssie, he’s just a rat.”

She gripped at her brother’s sleeves. Percy frowned — never backs away from him like the others do, always goes to him for comfort, not Bill and Charlie, she always — “I’m not afraid of the rat. I just don’t like him.”

Stop.

How should I play this? is what the smart, good Slytherin would ask.

I was raised by Gryffindors.

In a blink, my wand was pointed in between Sirius Black’s eyes, my other hand tensed and ready to start spouting fire spells wandlessly if he tried to do something stupid, like grab my wand. My heartbeat was thundering in my ears and adrenaline was kicking in again. Adrenaline didn’t slow down time, after all; I’d have thought I’d Apparated if I weren’t sure Hogwarts wouldn’t allow it.

“I should Obliviate you for knowing that.” I heard myself say calmly.

Sirius Black was careful to be still. As still as his weak frame could take. “I can explain.”

“Why should I let you? One of my dearest friends-” One of mine- “-wants you dead. He’s quite the sweet boy — if he wants anyone dead, I’m sure they deserve it.” I heard again. (My god, my mouth really just liked running on its own, didn’t it?)

He wavered. “I do deserve it. But you know. The rat isn’t a rat. I know you know. I can explain.”

“Again, Sirius Black…” My voice took on that dangerous, lilting tone that I know I heard a lot in Nate’s voice regularly, and Jay’s voice when he was angry. That tone. “…Why should I let you?”

“Because I know you want him dead as much as I do.”
…That was very true.

In every way, really. I wanted Pettigrew punished properly. I didn’t want that little fuck to get away, I wanted him fucked up for infiltrating my home and threatening mine and allowing his disgusting colors to plague my Sight all these years. And I allowed this meeting — I made this choice — in hopes that this would happen eventually, and the punishment wouldn’t be as severe as death or Squib-ness, as many punishments threatened when I tried to change these things.

Everything was for this. To get revenge for my family, all of whom didn’t even know they’d been wronged already.

(And maybe if I could change something this important I could change-)

(Maybe if Pettigrew went away, Bill wouldn’t have his throat torn-)

(Or if I proved I could play the long game like this, Fred wouldn’t-)

(And maybe if-)

(Maybe my family could-)

(Maybe-)

“I don’t like being caught off-guard like this, Sirius Black.” I said, lowering my wand slightly, “It’s not nice, being blindsided. So talk.”

Sirius Black grinned. “Better than I expected. It’d be nice to have a Seer on my side.”

“Not yet.”

“You’re the Clairvoyant here, missy. It’s already happened.”

Sirius Black, grey eyes rolled up to look at her — wand lowered, back in her sock, meaning all was safe. She rolled her eyes at him — “Tilly, if you could set up making me some extra snacks? Easy to eat, easy on the stomach, because I’ve been-” — ??? — red red red all over — Peter Pettigrew screamed, the moon rose, the wolf howled — ? — “He’s my godson, you know.”

Stop.

“Maybe.” I said, stepping back stiffly. “Depends on the choices, Black. You better choose to talk soon, or you’re not getting another chance out of my questionable Obliviate.”

Sirius Black nodded. “Yeah. Yeah, just- Sit. Please. There’s… a lot. There’s a lot. I need your help, I- I- There’s a lot.”

“Start with what I want to hear,” I said, “and tell me how you knew what I was.”

“Well, that’s easy. I knew the last Clairvoyant in Britain. Your great-grandfather, Septimus.”

I stilled. “That’s… impossible. Wasn’t… He was a Weasley. His wife was disowned because of it.”

Black grimaced. “I… I don’t know where you’re getting your facts, girl, but Aunt Cedrella wasn’t disowned. I knew them, both of them. The last thing Septimus Weasley told me was to approach the girl carrying the Mind Eater’s work at Hogwarts for help, when I needed it.” He gazed up at me steadily. “And that’s you.”
Well, then. Looks like canon switched up on me again. And, evidently, Helvynya Prevett’s Clairvoyance choice wasn’t the only one that echoed down to affect me.

I crossed my arms, leaned against a speaker’s podium. “Tell me everything, Black.”
Chapter 31

Chapter Summary

I LIVE!

Okay, so y'all who don't read these, here's the rundown:

Sorry for the sporadic updates, I have reasons, you're all the fucking best for sticking with this fic, and thank you so, so much for reading! :) I also appreciate comments, but know I love you all no matter what. Enjoy the chapter!

So. For those of you who care about admin stuff, I have some announcements.

Firstly: Sporadic updates will persist until further notice, though I will of course attempt to post at least twice a month on a Tuesday. :D Secondly: Rose Petal Red now has that outtake series I've been talking about!! :) ‘Tis called Quicksilver Thorns, and currently only consists of a Dietrich POV, and will have even more sporadic updates than this one. Thirdly: I mean to post this chapter AGES ago but my laptop broke -- I was deep in mourning -- so this here is the first chapter written on my new laptop! :D Fourthly: not gonna lie, this was a bit of a rush chapter, but I was pretty excited to finally not have a broken laptop, so have fun.

Aaaaaaaand that's that. Thanks for reading! :)

…

“It’s a long story,” said Black, oddly hesitant again.

I narrowed my eyes. I glanced at my wand, then slowly started casting — wouldn’t do to alarm the skittish Azkaban-escapee, right? My wand went through the motions for Nuntiam, the paper-message spell, which I was casting on a spare bit of parchment Summoned from the bag slung across my chest. A quick note penned to my boys, telling them not to wait up for me, was folded into a paper airplane and I rolled my eyes when I had to dismantle my touchier wards to let it shoot out the door.

When I’d turned again, Sirius Black was a dog. Probably spooked when I opened the door, the paranoid bastard.

“There,” I said, putting wards up again and lamenting the waste of magic silently, “I have all the time in the world now, Black.”

The dog’s form shimmered and twisted back into the skeleton of an ex-con, the man frowning and swaying where he stood. “Where… I don’t… I don’t know where to begin.” he murmured, backing into a desk, his arms wobbling to support him.
Good god, the man was going to keel over.

“Begin with Septimus Weasley,” I said primly, edging nearer to stand in front of him; as if I were a professor, lecturing an Azkaban prisoner in a dusty old lecture room. “I was under the impression that Cedrella Black’s marriage to him led to her being disowned. I was also under the impression that he was a weak Clairvoyant, only had visions once a week.”

Sirius Black stretched his gaunt face into a Glasgow grin. “Good. That’s what he wanted everyone to think.”

“Everyone except you?” I asked, skeptically and silently pointing out that the man’s name had been Septimus Weasley.

Surprisingly enough, Sirius Black’s mind was sharp enough to pick that up. “He was a Weasley by name, but he married a Black. You don’t have one of my family in your school-”

“Besides the one in front of me,” I murmured.

“-but my family is- was one that liked its power. Septimus Weasley’s visions didn’t come often, but when they did, they were as coherent as an Assessor’s.”

The implications were…

Well. This meant that my great-grandfather tricked the world into thinking he was a weak Clairvoyant, similar to the way I was tricking the world into thinking I was only a Soothsayer, if they even got to that level of information. This implied that the reason Cedrella Black wasn’t disowned as I believe she was supposed to be, was because of this; Septimus Weasley had power, and he had guile, and that cancelled out his bloodtraitor status.

(Considering the fact that I was a parvus potesta reigning, that wasn’t that surprising.)

But this also meant that he was a DAMN STRONG Clairvoyant. A stronger one than I was: powerful, coherent, possibly controllable visions? Fuck. That was so damn unfair. That was so damn unfair.

Burning with jealousy and trying to hide it — probably didn’t succeed, with how amused Sirius Black looked, though the guy was crazy so who knows what was going on with him? — I frowned at the man.

“My grandfather, Bilius,” I started, “If Septimus was taken into the Black family that closely, wouldn’t all of his children and their children, my father included, be raised Black? We’re bloodtraitors, though.”

The man coughed, which had me wincing at the harshness of the sound. “Septimus Weasley was a seventh son. His six older brothers didn’t take kindly to the fact that he got on better with the Blacks than his own family. Bilius, Enid, Arcturus, and Phineas Weasley were raised half Black and half Weasley, but the only survivors of Septimus’ line by the time the first Blood War ended was your father.”

My hands clenched. Dad didn’t like talking about the first Blood War because of that. I liked to pretend I never had uncles or aunts on that side — the ones that were there were all fucked off in other countries, having hidden from Voldemort and never deigning to return. The only one who’d stayed was Quintus Weasley, who’d raised Dad and his siblings but also died in the war. Lots of people who were ghosts to me and my siblings, basically.
It wasn’t hard to forget the Weasley family used to be huge, since they really weren’t anymore.

Eight magical children was a lot in this time, but people tend to forget that that used to be a normal thing in pureblood circles. They stopped because of some stupid belief that more children meant less powerful magic — bullshit, all my siblings were hella strong — and because people were tired of siblings assassinating each other for heirship. (Shoutout to my bloodtraitor roots, for deciding that the grand House ceremonies and positions were rubbish and abolishing the competitive practices, therefore allowing children to get along.) The Weasleys and to a lesser extent the Prewetts never really engaged in that rot.

No, we just ended up on the losing side of the first Blood War, and all our branch families fled into obscurity.

(“We didn’t really win the war, you know,” my father said to me and Ginny once.

“Didn’t we?” Ginny asked, small and inquisitive, “Harry Potter killed You-Know-Who, though!”

Dad looked distant and sad. “Harry Potter isn’t just the Boy-Who-Lived. He was our miracle.”

I’d tugged on my Dad’s robes. “So we were losing before then?”

“Yes.” He tugged both of us closer; bedtime stories usually weren’t this wistful and sad, but Ginny and I liked the extra attention anyways. “We were losing before then. In fact, little queen… I think we had already lost. I certainly had.”)

“So Septimus Weasley’s grandchildren were… taken from his influence. Dad doesn’t remember much of his father or Septimus, just… just Quintus Weasley. But he liked Septimus, certainly. Enough to name me after the man’s mother-in-law.” I muttered to myself, trying to keep it all straight in my head.

Sirius Black must’ve had a dog’s hearing, because he hummed a confirmation. His hum was more of a groan, of course, but I can’t fault the man for looking like an escaped asylum patient and a concentration camp worker had a very unfortunate child.

“It wasn’t hard to love Septimus Weasley,” said the man, his eyes going even more distant than they already were, “He was a good man. He was… a… What was he? He was… protective. And… And he wanted…”

Oh.

Oh god.

He couldn’t remember. He couldn’t remember, because it was easy to love Septimus Weasley. Because Septimus Weasley made people happy. Because Septimus Weasley made Sirius Black happy, and Sirius Black couldn’t remember happy things because of the dementors. Because he’d been stuck with dementors for twelve years, or was an animal that didn’t possess human emotions or human memory.

The man hunched in on himself, murmuring under his breath too loudly, trying to remember why Septimus Weasley was important. His eyes were wide and unseeing, his arms were wrapped around himself as he bowed, hair nearly covering his pale face.

“Uncle Sevens was… He gave us… things. Brooms? No, that was… Uncle Algie? But… But no. Uncle Sevens was a Clairvoyant, he said to- he said- he told me to find the Clairvoyant with the Mind Eater’s book, I read it Uncle, I read all of it, it was horrible- It was horrible- She did things to people’s heads, she was- Helvynya Prevett was- No, no. No. Uncle Sevens, why did you make me
I was not Septimus Weasley. I did not love someone enough to let them call me ‘Uncle Sevens’.

But Sirius Black begged for help, like a child crying out for their mother, and how could I stand like a professor lecturing a student in a dusty old classroom when there was a man standing before me, who couldn’t even remember the name of his godson?

My first steps were hesitant, testing. He didn’t notice me move, didn’t see the dust shift. The next steps were faster, more confident, and then I was in front of him, leaning forwards. I didn’t touch him, grab onto him — that was like trapping someone, right? I didn’t want to trap Sirius Black.

There was always an emergency bit of chocolate in my hidden pockets, where I used to hide Tom Riddle’s diary. The boys insisted on it after I’d put myself in a fucking coma because of shitty Occlumency barriers and many, many dementors. They wouldn’t let up until I mastered the Patronus, and I hadn’t even gotten close with that.

It would be donated to a good cause tonight.

“Easy, Sirius,” I said gently, fetching out my chocolate, peeling it from the foil, trying to press it into his twitching fingers, “This is chocolate. For you, okay? You take a bite of that, see if you don’t feel better. You know why it will make you feel better, don’t you?”

Sirius’ eyes, grey and bloodshot, darted from my hands to my face. He slowly got a grip on the chocolate bar. “Because,” he said slowly, ‘Chocolate is… sweet. And… Uncle Sevens used to- he- need to eat. He said to. And… And it helps with… dementors. With them. Alright. Yes, I can…”

I breathed a sigh of relief when he took a nibble of the chocolate. His face seemed to light up in understanding, because suddenly the bar was gone and his shaking had stopped. He looked at me, part confused and part grateful, and I grimaced at my lack of self-preservation. I was right up next to fucking Sirius Black. Even if he hadn’t blown up a bajillion Muggles on the street and (unfortunately) hadn’t killed Pettigrew, he was still an accomplished Dark wizard and a Black. Being just a Black should be dangerous enough.

“Thank you,” he rasped.

I took a step back and tried to recover what distance I had before. (Didn’t work.) “I want answers, and you won’t give them to me if you’re…”

“Being insane?” he suggested with a grin.

“Something like that,” I allowed. “Don’t… think about how great Septimus Weasley was, if it’s difficult. I want to know what he told you. Why you came to me.”

Because orders or advice or whatever it was, Sirius Black remembered it even through the Azkaban stint and the dementor-crazy. He knew to look for me eventually. I wanted to know why. I wanted to know what Sirius Black knew about me already, what I had to be careful of.

Besides the whole, he’s the heir of the House of Black bit. Or rather, its Paterfamilias, now, since Orion Black is dead and has been for a while. That, I know, is for certain because there was an obituary in the Daily Prophet years back that Dad skimmed at the breakfast table. Oh, but wait.
Sirius Black has read *Sollertia Augurium*, apparently.

After Septimus Weasley and all this business was done, I would have *questions*.

“He told me… He said that he would always *see* a girl. A girl with hair the color of rose petals, a Clairvoyant just like him, who carried around… who carried the Mind Eater’s book. I read it, you know… I read it. It was… horrible. The things that woman did to people… The things she did to enemies of her House… I read it. And you are, now.”

I nodded. “I’m highly interested in her notes on Clairvoyance.”

The man barked out a laugh. “Yes, there’s that. Uncle Sevens… who- NO. No. Septimus Weasley, he read it, too. And he said that… He said that the girl he saw, the other Clairvoyant, she would help me. When I was stuck and I couldn’t think straight, the girl with the Mind Eater’s book might help me. I… I took the chance. You’re a Clairvoyant — you know. You have to know, you’re a Weasley. You have to know that Peter Pettigrew has been lying to you — to both of us — for years.”

“He betrayed you,” I said quietly.

“He betrayed *all of us!*” Sirius Black hissed, “He killed my brother! My sister! They were- James and Lily- They- He killed them. I did too, it was my fault, but it was Pettigrew that did it. He has a Dark Mark, hidden in his sleeves. In glamours. He was always good at Charms… Better than every other subject. He betrayed them, and I killed them, and *I want him DEAD.*”

He was breathing hard by the time he finished, the last word punctuated by a slam on the desk he was leaning on. It rattled with his strength, and I couldn’t imagine how angry he was to be able to pull *that* off in his skeleton body. He barely looked like he had muscles, but the dust was still settling and he was gasping it into his lungs. Were he any stronger, I’m sure he’d be pacing.

I opened my mouth to ask more questions-

“Need to protect the pack,” he whispered, “Prongs and Lily-flower aren’t here, Moony hates me- I’m sorry, Moony- but the puppy. The puppy is still around and I need to kill the threat, can’t let the rat get to him, can’t- I can’t- My pack. My pack, they’re gone but little green-eyes is still there, I can’t remember how to hold him, James.”

After years of being in this body, treating it as my own, I’m rather sure I fluctuate between being the twelve-year-old than I am and the nineteen-year-old that I was. That said, it’s *heartbreaking* for a child to watch a grown man break. I’ve never seen someone more broken than Sirius Black, trying to remember the names and faces of the people he loved the most.

My decision was made.

“Sirius,” I said quietly — have to use the first name, he might be triggered by the last name, right? — “Turn back into a dog. We’re going on a field trip- Go on. Back into a dog. I’ll guide you and everything.”

Tilly would probably know better than me how to feed a starving dog. Questions could come after that; I knew that the man would kill to protect one of mine, so I think he deserved a bit of rest. And maybe a bath.

…
It’s a side-room for when House Elves are sick, I think. None are at the moment, so its small walls and the tiny bed that functions are more of a seat are free for us, Tilly insisted. A metal wash basin filled with warm water and a bottle of baby shampoo sits in the corner, wooden stool across from it; for me to wash “Miss Lyssie’s doggie!” The end table near the bed is heaped with foods easy to digest — I’d told Tilly my stomach felt odd and I didn't think I’d be able to keep anything down — like plain breads and clear sodas and a huge bowl of broth, along with a Nausea Tonic and a my supplement potions, and some boiled cod and rice wrapped in paper for the dog I’m supposed to own.

I had cast wards on the door — lightly, just enough that the House Elves will know I want privacy — and then had dragged the stool to an empty corner and levitate the bed to stand sideways and trap me against the wall so Sirius could have some semblance of privacy to clean himself up. His dog-form had given me a very odd look before I’d done it, but I’d just shrugged.

It had been twenty minutes. All was silent but the clatter and bustle of the Kitchens outside, and the splashing of water. Sometimes Sirius would start muttering to himself, but I resolutely started working on Occlumency. Might as well get something done, in the most awkward situation I’d ever created for myself.

“Black,” I called, “toss your robes, I’ll repair them best I can.”

A grunt.

I rolled my eyes. “Fine, I’ll Summon them. I can sew, you know. My mother is Molly Weasley.”

I did just that, just after liberal use of Scourgify and such. Magical cleaning wasn’t as good as hand-washing, of course, but it did the job. Tilly had given me a needle and thread when I’d asked — tearfully, of course, “Why is Miss Lyssie insists to be working?! Tilly can sew! Tilly can fix hers clothings and make patches!” “Oh, I know Tilly, I know you can, but I really need to practice my… my embroidery.” “OH! Miss Lyssie be artsy with thread! Tilly gets yous more threads! Colorful ones!” — and I started closing gaping holes. If I used stupidly bright pink thread and started doodling yellow swirls all over the place, well, Sirius Black shouldn’t be taking so long to bathe in a dog bath. With baby shampoo.

(And really, the man was a Marauder. Maybe this would… cheer him up?)

(God, I was a disgusting person who grew attached to people too easily. Suspicious people. The more suspicious they were, the more easily I liked them. Why hadn’t I learned my lesson with Tom Riddle?)

Shit. Mum was way better as sewing. I could kinda do it. Better than last life, certainly, but…

Yuck, these stitches are gross.

But they were done, and I called out a warning before I tossed ‘em back over the temporary bed-screen-thing. It wasn’t long until Black murmured an all-clear, and I could poke my head around the thing real quick to make sure he was okay. At least he hadn’t drowned or something.

“You look a lot better.” I said, standing and starting to put the room to rights.

“I… feel better.” said Sirius Black, eyes trained on the food.

The bed was set in the corner again and I patted the mattress. “Go on, then. Sit. Drink the tonics
first, so you don’t accidentally kill yourself, and then eat. Slowly. Eat slowly. If you die because of over-eating, I swear to Merlin, I’ll… I dunno, I’ll tell Harry that you had an affair with Pettigrew and you were hunting him down to kill him for cheating or something.’”

Sirius Black make a choked sound, but he didn’t start eating. He was staring into space.

I frowned. “Oi. Sirius, if you don’t eat everything, Tilly will cry. If you make Tilly cry, Dietrich and I will actually murder you.”

There was a faint twitch of his lips, an almost smile, and he gave me a grateful look before slowly starting to eat. I let out a relieved sigh; whatever I was in my last life, in this one I was Molly Weasley’s daughter, and having someone starving in front of me just didn’t sit well. I was glad my stupid attempts at levity were well-received, though — I didn’t handle emotions well at all, didn’t know how to be all… Dietrich-ish, able to say the right things and with the right tone and all that.

While he ate, I elected to speak. Best get my own story out of the way, since he’s told what I wanted to know about his.

“I’m a Soothsayer, you know,” I said quietly, “Seeing-sight and a bit of hearing-sight, too.”

“Born-in, then,” Sirius mumbled.

I nodded in confirmation. Born-in Soothsayers more often than not had two senses — taste and smell went together, for instance, and usually only born-in Soothsayers could have those two — though one was more dominant than the other. My seeing-sight was much stronger than my hearing-sight. Learned Soothsayers usually only got one sense, and it would never be as strong as born-in Mage Sight; after all, learned Soothsayers didn’t suffer from physical afflictions to balance that advantage out, so there had to be some equality in the world.

When I was little, it was a bit flattering to know that my Mage Sight would always be stronger and more detailed than Alby’s. Then I realized my Mage Sight gave me fucking conditional asthma and there was only an on-off switch for the headache-inducing bullshit, so that smugness disappeared right quick.

Of course…

“Alby trained me, but I’ve learned more from The Magick of Man-Hunters than he could teach. I guess it’s a born-in versus learned sort of thing, but- Well. Anyways. The point is, I’m a stronger Soothsayer than Alby is, and while he’s never noticed from the once he stepped foot into my house, I know the difference between an transformed Animagus’ magical core and a wizard’s and an animal’s.”

Sirius nearly dropped his food in excitement, eyes gleaming with something not so sane. “So Pettigrew-”

“Is on my shit-list, yes,” I interrupted, leaning forward and glaring until he got the hint and started eating again. “He hasn’t done as much to me as he has to you, but that little fuck has slept in my brothers’ beds and eaten out of my favorite brother’s hand, and I’d very much relish the chance to see his mind torn to pieces by dementors.”

The way my mind almost was.

At this, Sirius Black dropped everything in his hands so they could curve into and out of claws, growling like the dog he half was. “I’ll do more than that to him, girl. I’ll tear his throat out with
my teeth.”

By the way he was baring his yellowy fangs, I believed him wholeheartedly.

(I also, wholeheartedly, approved at the display.)

“Not a good idea,” I warned, slightly glum at the thought.

The man snarled again. “And why not? You said- Uncle said- I- You’ll help me.”

I wanted to be offended, I really did. The way he said ‘help’ sort of felt like ‘follow’, and I was quite used to leading at this point in my life. And, really, this life or the last, I’d always hated being told to do something I didn’t want to do.

And I did want Pettigrew to die for being an unbelievable creep around mine, but I also would rather he serve a purpose if he was going to fuck off, and what better purpose than to get my dear friend Harry out of his shitty household and with someone who actually cared about him? Never mind the questionable sanity of the man — if Sirius forgot to feed Harry, I’m sure Mum and I could think of something.

“I want the rat dead, too, you know,” I sighed, “But he’s necessary. Black, you’re never going to get your… puppy back… if you don’t have proof of your innocence.”

I wasn’t quite sure if he remembered Harry’s name, honestly. Harry might’ve been attached to too many happy memories for it, and the dementors certainly did a number on Sirius. Which was goddamn depressing, that Sirius was beginning to forget what happiness was. He sat, hunched and nearly frothing at the both in anger, muttering to himself but gazing at me wide-eyed when I spoke; he was the very picture of mentally unstable, driven by revenge and, I think, his inner dog’s pack sense. He knew he had to protect a vulnerable pup of the pack, but that’s all he knew clearly. The rest was…

A blur, I suppose.

“No.” he hissed, “Pettigrew dies. The rat dies.”

Pitiful and insane or not, I twitched in irritation. I tried to appeal to the possible-intact pack sense. “If you kill him, you will never get your pup back.”

“Threats to the pack die, girl. You said you’d help- You- Get me Pettigrew, and I’ll do it myself.”

“You’re not killing him, Black. We need him alive.”

“I can smell the anger on you. You hate him as much as I do — Let me kill him!”

How can one want to throttle someone at the same time as get some food into them? He’d stopped eating. And now I knew how Mum felt on a daily basis, Merlin preserve me. “If he weren’t so useful, I’d help. But as is, Black, you need to eat and I need to explain why—”

“HE BETRAYED THEM—”


Sirius Black stood, the platters clattering, his body swaying as he did. He sneered at me. “So you’ll betray me, too—”

“When you kill the rat, what is next?” I interrupted snappishly.
He paused.

I sensed a weakness. Like the Slytherin I was, I chased it. “Hm? What happens when you rip the traitor’s throat out, Sirius Black? He’ll be dead. What will you do then? Will you go to Harry, ask him to run away with you? He’s never met you, and you’ve murdered his friend’s rat. He’s thirteen years old, a half-trained wizard — can you bring him with you as you run? Teach him magic? Raise him? What great service are doing for the wizarding world that they won’t hunt you down? They’re already hunting. To them, you’ve killed thirteen Muggles and James and Lily Potter. Will they care that you have another body to your tally? Will anyone except you and me?”

I had stood slowly over the course of my ruthless, hissing questions. I barely reached his chest but I stared into his sunken eyes and didn’t see a ferocity to match mine.

“What happens after you kill Pettigrew, Sirius Black? What happens after he’s cold and dead? Will you die, too? Will you leave Harry alone, to live with those filthy fucking Muggles that starve him, to live and find out his own godfather abandoned him, too? Is that what Pettigrew’s death is worth? Don’t be a fool. You are suffering, but you are also twice my age and a half, and my friend deserves better than dead family all over the place.”

(Let it never be said that I didn’t have the Weasley temper. It just came out a little differently.)

Sirius Black wasn’t gaping, but he’d gone so pale that I wouldn’t have been surprised if he started fading away then and there, and he was shaking. I winced inwardly, wondering if I’d been too harsh or demanded too much from his barely-functional self, but refused to take back words or apologize. No meaning in that. His eyes were wide and blank as he slowly sunk back down into the bed that was his seat, his hands balled into his robes and ruining folds of dirty black and dusty grey and bright, bright embroidery.

I took a breath, willing my irritation to fade and beckoning my pity to come back. I’d never seen a man look more lost.

My voice was much, much gentler, hand reaching to brush at his shoulder. “Sirius… You’ve been hunting the rat for so long. But you don’t hunt for the dead. You hunt for the living.”

There were tears glistening in his eyes. He was rigid and still, then he was defeated. His shoulders sagged and water spilled over his cheeks, and he looked at me with desperation. There was a helpless smile on his face, and that alone had me flinching back. It wasn’t even that crazed; he looked more lucid now than when he’d been eating.

“He’s my godson,” said Sirius Black.

“He is.” I said quietly.

“That’s his- He was- He was named fo-for- H-Hadrian. Hadrian’s Wall and- and James’ grandfather. James wanted Harry, b-but Lily-flower demanded a Roman name… because… I-I-Harry. Green-eyes. Pup.” Sirius looked down at his hands. “He lives with Muggles?”

The man looked much more… whole. Crying, but lucid. Unstable, but standing.

“I used to sneak him my Nutrient Supplements,” I murmured, “But I can’t- I can’t do anything to help him, and you can. The rat’s better alive.”

Sirius gave me a confused look. “Why…? You, more than anyone, should- You should want Pettigrew dead. You shouldn’t care- He’s- He’s my godson, but- your friend? He’s your friend? You’d spare the rat for…”
I realized I was folding my arms, clutching at my sleeves. “Harry’s my friend. And I have a really stupid bleeding heart for suspicious characters of dubious origin.” Then I smiled, sharp as razors. “And really, death isn’t that bad. I’d much rather see Pettigrew’s mind shredded by dementors.”

“He can have my old cell,” Sirius growled, his face returning to a more natural color. The lucidity seemed to be sticking, despite the nearly manic anger.

Then he paused, looking thoughtful, scrubbing the tears from his cheeks and leaving his eyes only slightly red-rimmed as proof. He looked at me. “I- Thank you. You’re thinking of- You’re doing more for my godson than I ever could. I just- I- Thank you.”

“He’s one of mine,” I said, thinking of the timid boy in the train station becoming the boy who sat with me in the Hospital Wing, laughing at the stories I had of a creature we’d both went through hell and back to kill, “He’s one of mine, and I take the protection of mine very seriously.”

Sirius Black smiled faintly. “Protect the pack.”

“I’ve been Seeing the deaths and torments of the Blood Wars my whole life, Black,” I answered, “There is nothing more important to me than protecting my family from the things I’ve Seen. I will fail in some cases, but not a single one of them will suffer more than I have tried to prevent.”

He smiled more broadly, and there’s a sharpness that has nothing to do with his jutting, skeletal features. “I came- I came to ask you to help me kill him. Now… I don’t have a wand, but we need to capture the rat. That’s- That’s how I’ll get my pup back, isn’t it? Pettigrew just has to-”

Sirius Black went pale again, suddenly. I almost started forward, worried he’d eaten too much and was about to be sick or something.

But he looked at me with horror. “Pettigrew is your family’s rat. Wouldn’t- He- Does he know?”

Know-?

Know.

Ah.

I never believed it when people said their stomach’s dropped. It can’t be that bad, I always thought. It’s really, really not.

It’s worse.

It felt like my heart was falling into my gut. My chest ached with nothingness, felt like it was falling and collapsing in on itself. There was a vacuum in my chest and it was ripping the air out of my lungs.

“Oh fuck,” I think I whispered, “He knows I’m a Clairvoyant.”

And whether he escaped to Voldemort or was clasped in chains before Cornelius Fudge and Lucius Malfoy, the rat would say so.

...
“Listen, Weasley. You have to go-”

“Go? I can’t- No, we need- I need-”

“It’s- It’s late. People will be looking. Meet me- Shrieking Shack tomorrow night. We can- We’ll see, then.”

“Black, I don’t- I can’t- No one can know, you don’t understand, if they know then-”

“Oi. Weasley-girl. You’re panicking- I-I-I’m the crazy one, remember? It’s late and you- you have to go. You- You’re going to help me, so I’ll help you. We’ll think on it. Then we’ll see. Can’t- Can’t have a Slytherin Seer disappear, or we’ll never even touch the rat. Go.”

CRASH!

All eyes in the dungeon turned to me, wide and shocked. Except for Snape. The man stood boredly at the front of the classroom, just about to ream into Ginny for her Potion-making probably. I blinked at the mess of shattered glass and bubbling blue syrup at my feet, the contents seeping into my trainers and making them feel a little odd and fuzzy.

Much like my head.

“Oh. Fuck.” I said simply.

Jay, my table partner for the day, hissed. “Lyssie!”

I heard Lu mutter to himself, “Is he mad about the potion or the swearing?”

Should’ve been more surprised and pleased when Dietrich casually reached over, waving his wand and muttering spells under his breath to repair the glass flask and try to save my shoes. In vain. The shoes were ruined, looking vaguely bubbly and exposing my radish-patterned socks (Oh, Luna, how I loved her presents) and the scuffed hole made by my right toe. I blinked, trying to help him clumsily and realizing how ridiculous I was being, but Snape was suddenly towering above me with a more sedate version of his customary sneer.

“Impressive, Weasley,” Snape drawled, “I see you begin to follow in the footsteps of your Gryffindor counterpart.”

A very light cuff on the back of the head, in Slytherin insult terms. All the Gryffindors who were on good terms with me or my sister or my boys looked insulted. So, basically, all the Gryffindors looked insulted.

“Apolologies, Professor,” I said, cursing my inattentiveness and shoving any and all dread/horror/panic/shock/oh-god-I’m-fucked behind my Occlumency barriers, “It won’t happen again.”

“Fortuitous, I think, that your partner did not Vanish the cauldron.” Snape said, walking away after righting what he could. The shoes were a lot cause, torn with holes from the Fizzing Potion, but at least my toes didn’t feel floaty anymore.

Someone muttered, scandalized, “He’d Vanish my potion if I did that!”

“Stupid git.”

“Vanishes Longbottom’s potions all the time. Potter’s, too.”
“And her brothers’.”

All Gryffindors. Obviously. There were only eight Slytherins in the class, after all, excluding our beloved Professor. Poor things were so confused; defensive of Ginny’s sister or Lucas’ and Harper’s friend or that alright Weasley snake, or to be indignant that her professor favored her? It was almost amusing enough to distract me from why I dropped the potion in the first place.

Snape went back to swooping around at the kids who weren’t finished with the Fizzing Potion — thank Merlin for fussing Dietrich, neglecting Harper and his tendency to ignore instructions and blow shit up instead, opting to help Jay and I out and steal samples from us instead — and Jay nudged me gently. He was ladling more of the potion into a funnel for our flask, the workstation a sanctuary of neatness compared to the messes Harper and Lu made of their respective stations, looking uneasy and worried for me.

“Are you alright, Lyssie?” he asked in a low voice.

Because Jay was the sweetheart type that wouldn’t want to embarrass anyone in public unintentionally. Intentionally was a different story; Jay and his lovely auburn braid and jade eyes weren’t so sweet, then.

“Distracted,” I murmured back, “I got held up by a lot of things last night. Didn’t sleep much.”

“The portraits said you were walking back to the dorms when it was almost light out, looking like a ghost.”

Tch. Portrait spy network wasn’t being very good, now, was it? Used by everyone and everything. At least, though, Jay was sufficiently distracting me from my real worry by forcing me to come up with something to hide it well. Disguise a little, I guess; it’s hard to lie to these boys’ faces, after all.

“Something with my family came up, not that any of them know about it. Had to take care of it.”

Jay gave me a shrewd look. “You mean you’re still taking care of it.”

I huffed out a laugh, accepting the flask pressed into my hands — corked once again — and rewriting our names onto it with my lovely, curling, slightly-less-acceptable-than-Percy’s handwriting. Jay liked forcing me to do the writing when he could. He was probably the only one of us who thought paperwork was actually quite fun and relaxing, the crazy boy.

“You caught me.” I said with a shrug.

Dietrich was 100% listening in on us, and he accepted another flask Jay handed to him from our cauldron and nudged it into my shoulder that I started absentmindedly writing ‘Dietrich Bastion’ and ‘Tristan Harper’ into that one, too. He remained quiet, though, letting Jay handle the speaking for once.

“If it’s family, I suppose we can’t really ask for you to say.” Jay said sadly, “Family matters are private.”

Dietrich snorted. ‘Lys’ less so than others.”

Jay put on that scolding look of his. “If Lys doesn’t want to talk about it…”

My Second raised a brow. “I’m not going to force an issue.” He turned to me. “But we will help if you find yourself in need of it, of course, regina.”
The fear and dread plaguing me all day, making a home in that empty hole in my gut, was abated by a bit of fond warmth. I smiled at both of them. “Which I appreciate, really. If things get particularly troublesome, I’ll find you.”

“Particularly troublesome, she says,” Dietrich scoffs, leaning across — to his disgust, I’m sure by the grimace — Nate, who was distracted with snobby insults with Flint and Rosier, and grabbing the flask of putrid blue goop out of Lu’s confused hands. He Vanished the contents, Scourgify’ed it, and started filling it with my and Jay’s potion. “Writes to a soul-stealer for months on end and only looks for help after it’s half-ensnared her. Meets with a half-demon alone in the summer and asks for help on how to not die, after.”

“Careful, Dietrich,” Jay said, amused, “You have very pale hair, but I’m sure if you stress any more, I’ll be seeing the grey ones soon enough.”

“If you were Lys’ Second, Julius, I think you would have a very silver braid by now.”

“Why is it, if you’re not giving me inspiring speeches, you’re either making fun of me with the others or you’re speaking in a language everyone refuses to teach me?” I said, writing ‘Lucas Vaisey’ and ‘Nathaniel Wilkes’ onto the new flask that Dietrich shoved at me.

“Oh, Lyssie. Dietrich needs some sort of way to one-up you. Otherwise you’ll run us all over and get yourself killed challenging everyone to duels.” Jay sighed.

I sighed dramatically, standing and holding all three flasks. Snape’s desk was clear, meaning it was alright to turn ours in. “You used to be my favorite, Jay.”

“We all know I am your favorite.” Dietrich snarked.

“I hate both of you, Ginny’s my favorite.” I called loftily.

“I bloody well better be, Lyssie.” Ginny called from across the room with a cheeky grin.

“Ten points from Gryffindor for language and driving your classmates to distraction.”

Ginny twitched, and I could hear the The bloody hell do you mean, you git, Lyssie’s turning in her potions right now! but I’d schooled my hot-tempered sister in keeping her tongue around my Head of House. (Though... maybe I offset that with the language thing, because my poor Ginny was rapidly picking up on the fact that I was comfortable cussing, which I was more open to show since I was finally old enough.) The Gryffindors muttered mutinously, and eyes were on me as I walked to and from the desk with obviously three assignments, but what else was new? Poor Gryffies.

I started forging the others’ signatures on the assignment sheet, logging the assignment absentmindedly. My mind returned to the cause of the first flask’s shattering. What the actually bloody FUCK was I going to do, since it was entirely likely that the little shit knew about my Sight? More specifically, the fact that I was a pretty strong Clairvoyant — not on the level of Septimus Weasley, I realize this now, but still.

I was probably the only one in western Europe.

You know what that meant? Asset. Ministry or Death Eater, they would want my ability, they would want to control it, and if that didn’t work, they wouldn’t want me — bloodtraitor, Muggle-loving father, rising political opponent, opinionated, leader of a group of purebloods with connections — to have such a power. I wasn’t sure about the Ministry, but I’m sure Voldemort would fucking just... kill me off.
Death wasn’t all that scary, but death meant I wouldn’t be able to protect my boys or my brothers and sister, or Luna, or my parents, or Harry, and that was unacceptable. In fact, until this entire fucking Blood War was over, death within the me and mine category was absolutely banned.

_Pettigrew knows_, a voice murmured in my head, _Black wanted to kill him. It’s safer that way._

_But Harry- And Black. Harry won’t get a home and Sirius Black will be a criminal forever._

_They did okay before, didn’t they? You, on the other hand, will die._

_Yes, but this isn’t the before. Can I trust anything, with how different this world is? Not just because of me, but the other Clairvoyants before me who have somehow managed to fuck everything up. I can’t trust my knowledge, and I don’t want to subject Harry and Sirius to misery._

_Their fleeting suffering isn’t equal to your death._

Fuck. Conversations with myself never helped this stupid shit, I swear. Only made things worse.

When I sat back down, carefully hiding my turmoil behind Occlumency barriers, Jay had switched seats with Nate — to Dietrich’s irritation, Lu’s chagrin (How. How did Lu make that much of a mess while also provoking Flint and Rosier to a sneer fest? Nate, probably.) and my surprise. Nate was thumbing through my fake _Monster Book of Monsters_ and humming to himself. Dietrich was apoplectic, for him, which meant his poker face had lowered itself into showing a faint crease of the brow.

I could see it. Nate reached into my bag for it, pissing Dietrich off with the invasion of privacy and the fact that Nate was keyed into my low-level wards. Dietrich hissed something, Nate laughed back, and then I’d shown up.

Cats and bloody dogs.

“If I say you’re _both_ pretty will you stop clawing at each other?” I asked innocently.

“But I’m the prettiest, aren’t I?” Nate asked, batting his eyelashes.

“Demented way of flirting.” I reminded him, sitting down primly and leaning over to look at my book, which seemed to have somehow been adopted by Nate, too.

Dietrich made an odd, choked noise. “Flirting?”

Because I was a merciful person, I cut off the mischievous glint in Nate’s eye and Dietrich’s rising temper with a wave of my hand. “For the sake of my sanity, Dietrich would you please help Jay convince Harper what a bad idea it is to add fairy dust and ground pixie claws and salamander eggshells together?”

I snorted when he paled and whipped right around, starting to snarl rapid French to a very contrite Harper and sniggering Lu, sandwiching an exasperated Jay trying to talk Flint and Rosier down from their irritation. Nate huffed a little laugh, then tapped his wand on one of our half-done pages — we were just about a thirty-second fraction into the book, because I was _incompetent_ and Nate was a perfectionist _nag_ — to let my odd annotation/extension charm roll out our notes.

“You really should patent this spell,” Nate said, grinning over the many, many cusses I’d scribbled into the translation notes, “Might as well get some money of it.”

“Maybe I’ll write to Dad, ask what he thinks. He helped make it.” I muttered, trying to find our
place — Had Helvinya Prevett described this particular aunt before? She was being called a
different title for some reason…

“Family trouble, Lys?” Nate asked lightly.

But not lightly enough to fool me. I looked up, squinted, flicked my Mage Sight on. Nate’s dark
reds seemed fine, though there was just a hint of shakiness. Just a very slight worry for me, I
suppose; almost made me want to smile.

“Nothing too bad,” I lied guiltlessly, “Just something I need to take care of before the end of the
year. Some annoyances that need to disappear, that is.”

Nate’s smile was quite frightening. “Oh? And who are we disappearing?”

“Don’t be nosy, I’ll handle it.”

“Is it more ‘Claws? I love messing with ‘Claws. They always think so logically, they get so
flustered when you deviate from the norm.”

“And you are nothing less than a deviant of the worst kind.”

“Oh, Lyssie, I’m blushing.”

I rolled my eyes. “It’s fine, Nate. You’re all so fussy. Though I guess in your case, you just want to
have free reign to piss someone off or make more first-years cry.”

Nate shrugged. “It’s what I do best, I think.” Then he side-eyed me, expression still playful but not
as careless. “Nothing too bad, hm? You dropped Fizzing Potion on your shoes. Your only pair of
shoes.”

“Well, this just means I get to ask the House Elves to look through the lost and found for me, don’t
I?”

“Disgusting. Actually.” Nate wrinkled his nose, because he was a snob. Then he put on his normal
smug expression again, recovering admirably fast. “Well, if you’re going to keep your silence, I
guess the only thing I can do is distract you. I did translate something that will lift your spirits,
here, on this page…”

I gave him a dirty look. “You know I hate it when you go ahead to random pages and just pick out
interesting words. It gets all disorganized.”

Nate dismissed me with a chuckle. “No, look. Fifteen- No, Nineteen more pages, and she goes on a
little monologue about memory and her experiments later. See this? She actually finally mentions
an Occlumencic and Legilimencic technique.”

I peered over.

Nate grinned at me. The boy really liked history and translation, got all childish and pleased when
we were working on my disguised Sollertia Augurium. This book was probably the only reason I’d
bonded with him so quickly, to be honest.

“Look. See that? Offensive Warding Envisioned through the Use of the Skill of Legilimency.”

My friend went on to talk about researching in the library for such a thing, about how little he
found and how disgustingly Light and Grey the library was, even the Restricted Section, but I
skipped ahead into his translation notes. My breath caught when I saw the next few lines, and Nate was surprised to silence when I clutched at his shoulder.

*Memory Wards within the Control of the Legilimens — Complete Lock untoward a Memory of the Castor’s Choice — to Unlock such a Technique without the Permission of the Castor or the Key Words, the Affected Mind will Break and such Memory be rendered Unretrievable.*

Memory wards.

“Lys?” Nate asked, sounding confused for once.

I’m sure the manic smile spreading across my face actually alarmed him. He had a raised brow when I met his eyes and grinned. “Nate, I could literally kiss you.”

“Oh, please do. I want to see what sort of face our dear Second will make.”

I snorted and pushed his face away playfully, calling him a git or something. A git I was extremely grateful to, because I had many ideas. Nate and I chatted for a while, though my mind remained on *Sollertia Augurium*. Sure, I hadn’t gotten this far into the book to actually get to the techniques, but who had read the book already?

Sirius Black.

*Look at that,* said that same voice in my head, *you get everything you want.*

*Lucky,* I agreed.

*This just means you’re going to pay for it tenfold, you know.*

I decided to ignore my mounting suspicion towards good fortune. I’d take what I could get.

*...*

Sirius Black met me in the Shrieking Shack that night, looking a bit bedraggled, but pleasantly surprised when I set down a platter of food from Tilly — the dear Elf had no idea my dog was actually an Azkaban escapee, but I’m sure she was suspicious about something — and the Mind Eater’s book, opened to Nate’s translation.

The vicious smile on his face was a mirror of mine. I had a feeling this was the start of a beautiful friendship.
Chapter 32

Chapter Summary

This chapter is dedicated in loving memory of my old computer, who is now in whatever lovely afterlife there is for computers. RIP my fantastic friend, and thank you for helping me write 30.5 chapters of this insane fanfiction. :')

Okay. So. I don't really like this chapter, since it's largely filler (blech D:), but it's important to establish some stuff. Namely: where Lyssie is in canon. I've been writing the next few chapters and they're MUCH more interesting, and tbh this one is a real zombie with nearly half of it being from a very old draft, but it works to establish the above, thus. Well. :D

ALSO! I've been noticing that I don't really describe scenery anymore. Which bothers me. :P So I'm gonna try to be better on that, set scenes more firmly, and start wrapping the year up. (HAHA I say that and here's a filler chapter for you. :'D ) Anyways. Please enjoy!

...

Ah, and Snape would actually expel me before doing something of this calibre for partly Sirius Black’s sake.

Yeah, nope, that avenue was *closed.* Thank you, Sirius Black, for being too crazy and bitter to realize we should just ask Alby. Or maybe he didn’t know Alby was a Legilimens? Eh.)

Anyways, all these *Things* led to late-night adventures in the Shrieking Shack trying to figure out Legilimency quick enough that I’d at least be able to *enter a mind* to perform the hazily-remembered Memory Lock technique, and *a lot* of translation of *Sollertia Augurium* with Nate.

Nate was a precious child who deserved everything in the world, of course, because the boy did not even *question* my sudden obsession with the Memory Lock technique part of the book. He just helped out with a knowing smirk, as he always did, only giving a soft, “Do explain one day, won’t you, Lys?” before he did.

(I’d asked, “You’re not going to demand answers? Explanations? Trust?”

Which Nate laughed and replied, “My *regina,* that you are asking for help at all is all the trust I need. And you have *my* trust that you’ll explain one day, because you’ve infected me with your particular brand of sentimental stupidity, to my detriment. Why? Did you think I needed hand-holding just because I have never had such affectionate friends before? I’m not *Dietrich,* you know, Lys.”)

(Git.)

Sirius Black looked much better than he did a week ago. Mundanely speaking, that was impossible.

But one should never underestimate the potions of Professor Snape, retrieved by a suspicious-but-trustingly-helpful Tilly, along with all of Tilly’s food and my continued presence in Black’s hideout. The small drawing room of the Shrieking Shack, nestled way in the back of the first floor, had been cleared of its layers of dust and raggedy furniture. Old claw marks and scars in the floorboards and wallpaper couldn’t be removed, but I’d stolen a fluffy rug from what I assume is the Room of Requirement’s lost and found area — never got near the place, Dagby and Effas fetched all my lost and found things, thank Merlin for them and their enthusiasm to help — and a few pillows. It made for a very odd scene:

Sirius Black, cross-legged, starting to evolve from skeleton to anorexic, wolfing down warm bread dipped in tomato soup. A little medical box on the side, empty potions bottles collecting near it. Blood stained tissues in a pile, from when my headaches and magical exhaustion creeped in too close. Books stolen from the library on Legilimency and Occlumencic learning streamlining. A mound of goddamn chocolate in the corner by the unusable fireplace. Candles floating all over the place, thick cloth boarded all over the room so no one would see and I didn’t have to keep casting wards.

“I could cast... I can borrow. Your wand, that is. Cast the wards,” Sirius Black pointed out.

“Don’t talk with your mouth full.” I reprimanded absentely, thumbing through some of Nate’s translations from today in between classes.

He man cracked a smile, swallowing his food. “You’re just… like your Mum. Molly.”

I raised a brow in his direction. “I’ll take that like the compliment it is.”
He scarfed down his food in response. Good. The damn mutt had to eat.

I sighed. Every night for the past week, I’d snuck out to get a bit of Legilimency practice and to help Sirius out. We had three avenues possible for the Rat Catch: Sirius does the Memory Lock, I do the Memory Lock, or Something Bad. It was a race against time, basically; whichever came first, me mastering Legilimency enough to do this once or Sirius’ mind recovering enough to do this once, we’d go with it. Not the most artful of plans, but the only one we agreed to have.

“Molly…” he muttered.

There were warning bells ringing in my head.

“Molly… Red hair, very cheerful, she was…” His voice was getting quieter, more garbled. I looked up sharply.

Oh dear.

“Red, red, red… Lily-flower? Sorry. I know, I know, I- I’m sorry, Jamie, I don’t know how to- How does one even hold a baby? Green-eyes, you got the short end of the stick, Moony would’ve been better, your parents flipped a coin, you know… Flipped a coin, chance, Choice, Uncle Sevens I don’t want to read the book-”

Fuck, he lost his head again. I Summoned a bar from our masses of chocolate, peeled it open, walked slowly but obviously over to Sirius. He was staring into space, a smile fixed on his face, hands clenching and unclenching. The dementors were close to Hogwarts and Hogsmeade borders, but they tended to keep away if possible — Alby’s wards kicked their asses. It wasn’t so bad in here, but even the slightest thought of, ‘Oh, it’s a little cold’ could lead to Sirius’ body and mind triggering, going back to Azkaban even if the misery-inducing magic wasn’t here.

Essentially: Sirius’ mind jumped from memory to memory, he reacted like they were all bad but desperately tried to remember the good, fluctuated between happiness and despair and horror because of it, pseudo-dementor’ed himself… All of this, rolled into one head.

This was why I was here every night, feeding him and working with him on Occlumency barriers. The Occlumency would just barely keep his mind together, a patch-up job of his brain one could say, but that’s all we needed at this point. Something to float us through the Memory Lock. After the rat was caught, hopefully things would fall into place. Hopefully.

“Easy, Sirius,” I said gently, pressing the chocolate into his slack fingers, “Eat that, yeah? You’re not there anymore. No Azkaban here. No dark, no rain and sea, none of those cloaked fucks. Just candles and this rug I got from Dagby and me. Guinevere Weasley, remember? Septimus Weasley told you to find me.”

Speak enough truth, he’ll come into it. Give enough logic, he’ll get his emotions under control. Eat a bit of chocolate, remember that it’s not cold here, and he’ll pull himself through. Sirius Black was, in the end, the most tenacious son of a bitch I’ve ever met.

His eyes unclouded, focused as the sweet melted in his mouth. He blinked, looking a bit disoriented, then found my eyes. His shoulders slumped with something I might call shame, though I refused to do much Soothsaying out here, where the dementor’s chill brushed against our raggedly walls.

“Sorry,” he whispered.

“Oh, hush.” I said, rolling my eyes and feeling a little bad he was so embarrassed; it must’ve been
tough, to be a grown-ass man depending on a twelve-year-old stranger to get one through PTSD flashbacks. “I’m happy to help. Not happy enough to forget my head feels like it’s trying to cannibalize itself with strain, but happy enough.”

Thank Merlin, the man cracked a smile. It was important, I think, for him to try to find happiness — even as small as laughing as dumb jokes — in the present, so his mind would anchor there instead of past pains or past happy memories. Sirius Black just needed a bit of structure, and if I could start him off with structuring his sense of time, then at least he’d have that.

“Headaches from- from both the Seer visions and the Legilimency?” he croaked.

“Seer headaches are things I’m used to. Legilimency headaches hurt all the way down to my neck, it’s ridiculous.”

“You want to practice a little? I feel… better. A bit better.”

Because, hi, it was dangerous to traipse into the mind of an insane person. Sirius Black had to be very, very good at Occlumency and direct me towards those safer bits of his head for me to practice. It was such a broken little project we had going here: me, with my natural inclination towards Legilimency thanks to my Dark core and my past experiences being taught Occlumency by Dad, and Sirius with his half-remembered Occlumency and my own coachings — based off the cambion’s words of wisdom — to pull him through.

We were both messes, my god.

“Are you sure, Black?”

“I’ll kick you out as soon as the fog comes on,” he promised.

I grimaced. “That’s what causes half the headache, you know.”

He looked apologetic. “Needs and means, Weasley.”

I sat down in front of him, resting on my knees comfortably. Eye-contact was necessary for Occlumency and Legilimency practice. So was trust, but Sirius and I were at an odd point in our lives where we didn’t quite know each other, but we trusted each other to want the same thing: Pettigrew’s incarceration, his subsequent lack of memories on me, and a happy ending to all this.

“You should call me Guinevere, Black. We’ve been jumping around each other’s heads for a week, now.”

“Feels longer,” he muttered.

“Well, mental time and whatnot.”

“Guinevere…” He trailed off. I was going to hit him if he thanked me again. Instead, he grinned a bit. “I thought you were called something else.”

“Lys, for my middle name, Lysandra. As in, Cedrella Black’s mother.” I smiled a little. “Something tells me this was all fated.”

Sirius Black smiled. “You would know, Miss Guinevere.”

Both of us came away with massive headaches and grimaces. I snuck back to the dorms at around two in the morning, exhausted and wondering if that hadn’t been a bit more seamless than last
Legilimency attempt. Next time might be even better… I mean, Dad learned Occlumency and Legilimency in four fucking months. What was it, almost February? I could learn a bit of crappy Legilimency in three, couldn’t I?

... 

There was a dull throbbing behind my eyes and temples. I scrunched struggled not to wince — just furrowing my brow a little made the pain spike, sharpen into ringing, and it only faded when I breathed evenly and stayed very, very still. My sternum was radiating pain, too. My muscles tightened in waves from my chest, up my neck, to my head. That must’ve been part of the headache, on top of the slight magical exhaustion.

I curled up a bit more under the comforter, gritting my teeth together as a new wave of pain came through. It was warm and nice in here, my little black cocoon, but I knew I had to crawl out some time, face the day.

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK.

Were I any less dignified, I would’ve whimpered. Unfortunately, it was 100% another Slytherin — likely of my potesta — so there was no way I could be anything less than as dignified as possible.

I unburied myself from the comforter-pillow-quilt burrito I’d built around myself, relaxing at the fresh air but wincing at the faint light emitted from the lake-windows. Should’ve closed the curtains last night, dammit.

“Who is it?” I called.

The voice was muffled by the wards and door, high-pitched the way a firstie’s is. “Erm… It’s Adaline Mercer, regina.”

I wanted to groan. Regina was such a formal title… It was always said respectfully, hence why I’d never heard anyone calling Malfoy rex ever, and only used in rare moments when potesta business was about. Regina meant I had to get out of bed because something serious had come up.

“Give me a moment to take the wards down, Mercer,” I said, crawling from my blankets and hating myself for doing it.

I nearly slammed into my bedside table, fumbling for my wand and grimacing at the pull of thin magic — three hours’ sleep did not a magical core refuel — as I organized and cleaned. I tidied my books and journals, letting the slot into the low bookshelves underneath the twin windows, curtains open to the faint green lake-light, and struggled to get my clothes to fold themselves into the wardrobe in the corner… Yeah, giving up on that. They’d have to just be shrunk to fit for a while, which I did with a sigh, shutting the drawers and then turning to the desk across my messy bed…

Oops. Both of those could be messy. I’d just woken up and had been working on Sollertia Augurium nearly all night, all scholarly-like, Mercer would shut up about any mess if she knew what was good for her.

My wards were taken down and I cracked the door a bit.

“You know to be discrete, Mercer,” I stated, nodding and allowing her in.
It was a dignified move — the nod and opening the door politely — and a dignified room — shades of greens and greys, sort of like a succulent but more fancy European than that — but I was dressed in rolled-up sweats and one of Fred’s old T-shirts. His ‘At least there aren’t two of me!’ graphic design one that he’d went absolutely ballistic over when he was ten and Dad took him and George to work with him in London.

Mercer, bless her heart, simply seated herself on my thankfully-clear bedroom bench primly, acting very much as if it was a privilege to be in here.

Which… maybe it was? I didn’t have roommates, was the only person in the school who didn’t — which I think was a deliberate move on Alby’s part, to hide my Occlumenciic meditation and Clairvoyance more easily — and I warded everything. My private life was spread amongst the first circle, that was an extremely exclusive but envied gathering. Slytherins didn’t know my brothers and sister, only knew me as their regina…

Haha, yeah. Mercer was inwardly freaking out, wasn’t she?

“Apologies for my appearance,” I said with a faint smile, plopping down on my desk’s seat and bearing the new throbbing in my temple, “I thought I’d sent a note to Dietrich that I wasn’t attending classes or holding court today, so I just woke up.”

The slip of a girl twisted the end of her uniform vest in her brown fingers; she was pulling that Harper puppy-face, all wide eyes and biting her lower lip, only her coils of hair were drawn back neatly and her eyes were brown.

“I’m sorry to bother you, regina.” she whispered.

I raised a brow. Didn’t sound like Dietrich sent her, then. I resisted the urge to lean forward; might scare the poor firstie away. “Are you alright, Mercer? Is something wrong?”

Mercer’s eyes were darting all around the room, quick and subtle; she was studying the place while also giving me news. Good girl.

“There’s… Bastion got the news through the circles, that you weren’t to be bothered, but… down in the common room, Bole’s challenging you an-and Derrick’s backing him. They- Both of them are criticizing your rule and the Head Girl’s… Lucas Vaisey was going to duel but his brother held him back, then- Wilkes somehow managed to curse some of the fifth years, and Harper did something with an explosion on Bole’s bag…”

I twitched.

Mercer caught the movement and flinched. “I’m really, very sorry, regina, but neither you or the Head Girl are down there, and Zabini said his cousin is working on Head Girl and seventh year business so she can’t be bothered, but…”

I winced inwardly for Mercer’s sake. If I were Malfoy, I’d read that as, ‘but you were lazing about in your room so I came to get you’ and would consequently be extremely offended. I knew my potesta better, though. Adaline Mercer was a shy girl with quick eyes, growing into her House — much better under my influence — but she was good-hearted for the most part. Josephine was busy with magnus stuff, getting ready for real world things. That work was more important than the temporary state of my health, probably, is what Mercer thought.

Well. I’d written Josephine a Nuntiam at the same time as Dietrich, so she was supposed to take care of this. Guess I wouldn’t be giving her that concession on the the Cornfoot-Chambers
mentoring contract that was just about to go through. And she’d owe me.

I nodded. “Alright. Go on back, I’ll be there shortly.”

Mercer nodded, standing and readying to go.

“Parvus-” I stopped her as she had the door open. She looked back inquisitively. “Name a few prices, would you, at some point later? We’ll haggle about it, but you’ve been helping my circle out quite a bit. I appreciate it.”

The girl schooled her wide-eyed shock admirably quickly, then nodded. “In a few days, Miss Weasley.”

She left.

I sighed, starting to put on jeans and somewhat-nice shirts. My head was aching and my magic was whining at me, singing its exhaustion. My exhaustion slowly built into irritation as I flicked more cleaning spells at my things, warded my desk up, righted things before I went. The idiocy of Bole and Derrick… And my boys! What were they thinking, reacting so aggressively without the backing of a *potesta* leader? Lu probably lost his temper again, Harper probably thought it’d be funny, and Nate just wanted to fight. Jay would be too hesitant to stop them, Dietrich too flustered-

Bloody idiots, all of them.

And my head was pounding, still- Honestly, *fuck Legilimency*. Also, fuck you Sirius Black, for these decidedly torturous four nights of crash-course Legilimency training. Also, fuck Helvynya Prevett for making her shit so difficult to translate into proper English.

But most of all, *fuck Bole and Derrick* because I had Important Shit to do and they were being distracting and obnoxious.

“You’re all going to owe me *so much* Headache Relief,” I growled to myself.

(Poor scholarship o mine didn’t cover as much as I needed. I’m relatively sure Alby chipped in with the Nutrient and Iron Supplements. Wouldn’t ask, it would be a little embarrassing if I was proven right, but still. Headache Relief was only provided once a week, for meditation accidents…)

My magic was low, but my core was purring with contentment as I flared it out when I left, looking as irritated on the outside as I was inwardly. A passing third-year — Basilia Carrow, I think, a rather weedy looking thing that reminded me of my mental picture of Petunia Dursley — jumped when I turned a corner, stilling and shrinking back as I passed; like a prey-creature waiting for a predator to walk past. Fitting imagery, because I was ready to sink my claws into goddamn Lucian Bole and Peregrine Derrick, and maybe slap my boys around a bit, too.

I loved them, I did, but why.

…

“I’d like to point out that this is kidnapping.”

I never thought I’d see Harry Potter, Lu, *and* Harper roll their eyes. At me.
“This isn’t kidnapping, Lyssie. This is an- an intervention!” Harper said brightly.

Lu nodded in agreement. “You haven’t been sleeping.”

I frowned. “Why would playing Quidditch help with that? Shouldn't I be sleeping in that case?”

Lu gave me a flat look. “Would you really sleep if we told you to?”

I huffed. “Well I’m not going to sleeping on one of your flying deathtraps, so.”

“Have you got something against brooms, Lys?” Harry questioned, looking a bit lost.

“I have many things against flying. Because I’ll fall. And then die.”

“Huh, you are stressed. You never snap at Potter, Lyssie!” Harper commented, looking wide-eyed.

The three of them were lined up in front of me, my boys with Harry in between them, brooms on their shoulders. We were standing on the Quidditch field — it was odd, seeing the place in the bright afternoon sunlight, rather than nighttime like I usually see it in — where the stands were empty of a crowd, only reserve Quidditch players and little figures zooming around above us. Most of them were friends of Lu and Harper or my brothers.

One minute I was going over schedules and profiles for firsties, the next, Lu and Harper dragged me outside and everyone was on the pitch, waiting for me. Harry had, apparently, asked if they’d like to play a bit of Quidditch since he’d finally gotten his Firebolt back and he couldn't wait until the practice tomorrow or the game on Saturday to actually use it — and then Ron wanted in, and then the twins wanted in too, and then a Hufflepuff, and a Ravenclaw, and now there was just a bunch of us out here. It was still nice weather, for very early February, and I liked watching Lu and Harper fly, so I decided to leave my delicate work for a moment, and allow myself to be kidnapped.

And, really, I was tired. If I wasn’t holed up with Nate, partnering with him in every class to blast through the chapter on Memory Locks in Sollertia Augurium, then I was running around with Jay and Dietrich trying to keep the potesta together. Harper and Lu had their tutoring put on hold so they were bored and restless, my family was worried about the bags under my eyes — the likes of which they hadn’t seen since I’d first begun to adjust to Clairvoyance nightmares — and even Luna was telling me, in her own unique way, that maybe I ought to sleep.

Yeah, I wasn’t opposed to being kidnapped. Even for Quidditch.

Harry sighed, running his hands through his hair. Made it messier than it already was. “I can’t believe you don’t like flying.”

“I told you I didn’t, didn’t I? And Hermione doesn’t like flying! It’s not rare!”

Lu shook his head as Harry’s flabbergasted look, sympathetic. He gave Harry’s shoulder a pat, a rare show of solidarity with someone outside of the first circle, from him. “I’ve been trying to get her to play Quidditch for forever, Potter,” sighed Lu.

Harper sighed, too. “Lyssie’s really smart, so we thought she’d be a really fun opponent. But she barely went up in the air for flying lessons, and when we tried to play with her last year, the broom went mad.”

Lu scowled at the reminder. “That broom was rubbish. I hope it’s food for the bowtruckles now.”
Harry gave Lu an odd look. “You chucked one of your brooms in the Forest?”

Harper laughed. “It was a school broom!”

“The bloody thing almost killed Lyssie! Of course I chucked it in the Forest!”

I smirked, though I really felt amusedly affectionate when I remembered it. Overprotective idiots, my boys. I shook my head. “Harry, physical activity is just bad with me. You know? Anaemia and asthma?”

Harry frowned. “Flying’s not that difficult, though. Maybe Quidditch, but I can’t believe you don’t like flying. Out of everyone, I feel like you’d like it the most.”

“You’re never going to convince her, Potter,” Lu said, shaking his head and starting to walk off, dragging Harper with him, “C’mon, Harper. They’re probably starting up the team divisions.”

Harry called out, “Don’t count me in.”

Harper’s blue eyes widened. “But you’re the best Seeker in the school! We wanted you on our team!”

“Call him in, I’m going to join Dietrich, Nate, and Jay in the stands,” I said, shrugging.

“Don’t call me in, Harper, please?” Harry argued, giving me a challenging look.

Harper, unable to turn down polite requests from people he liked, pouted and nodded. “Next game, you’re with our team, right, Harry?”

“Sure, Harper.”

“Ergh, hurry up, you girls,” Lu groaned, already mounted on his broom and hovering around us.

I rolled my eyes and Harper took to the air, waving goodbye cheerfully.

“C’mon, Lys, what’s wrong with flying?” Harry asked insistently.

I grabbed his sleeve and started towards the side of the field, so no Bludgers or rogue Beaters smashed into us accidentally. Percy was on the other side of the pitch, acting as referee — just like at the Burrow, at the behest of the whining demon twins — and Lee Jordan was commentating with a Sonorus rather than a magical microphone. I think Hooch was in the stands, as she was supervising our impromptu inter-House flying session.

I gave Harry a crooked smile. “Why’re you so set on me flying? You set this up, right?”

Harry frowned and shrugged. “Me and Harper and Vaisey, yeah. And… Er… I dunno. I just… With Ron and your brothers all into Quidditch, I thought you’d be, too. You’d like flying, Lys. It’s relaxing up there.”

“Or you’re pouting because I have a Seeker’s build and you want a challenge.”

His cheeks pINKed. “Maybe.”

I laughed, and patted him on the head. (His wild hair was actually quite soft.) “Ask Ginny. She hasn’t told our brothers, but she likes flying. Chaser or Seeker, she practices for those positions when she can sneak about at home.”
Harry shook his head. “I don’t think she’d want to fly against me.”

I blinked. Then I snorted. “Right, she’d probably be too shy of you to beat you.” I looked up thoughtfully. “Maybe I can order Malfoy to go against you? I am the parvus potesta leader, I have the right to strongly suggest it.”

He laughed. “I can’t believe you actually dueled him. Wish I could’ve seen him when you beat him, must’ve been hilarious. But… Ergh, no, I’d rather not be around the git longer than I should. Might catch.”

“You couldn’t be a git if you tried, Potter,” I snorted, eyes drawn to the fliers above.

Lee Jordan was having a hell of a time, since there was no McGonagall to force him to be nice. However, I noted — surprised — that Dietrich seemed to take it upon himself to snark at Lee Jordan’s cheerful barbs (attempting to force him back to neutrality, in vain, of course), and Jay was in the background trying to make them stop arguing. Nate was around there, too, though he was probably having a hell of a time, provoking one or the other just to perpetuate the argument. Kid loved doing that shit.

(That was… good. They all needed a break. We all did. I wondered if Sirius was in his Grimm form, lurking around somewhere and watching.)

It was a huge mass of people who just liked flying, even if they weren’t on Quidditch teams, and I was tempted to suggest trying to do a three-way game with all the students in the stands, having been told they’d go in the second wave. This was a rare occasion, though, because usually the pitch was scheduled for practices or games. I suppose Lu and Harper used my name to claim the field, though, and maybe that was better, because I’d never seen this many Houses interact (mostly) peacefully outside of year-groups, in class.

(Wasn’t that a little odd? I’d need to organize more of these, if only for networking’s sake.)

Harry suddenly spoke. “Oh. Lys, are you afraid of heights?”

I blinked. “Hm? No, I don’t think so. I just… I don’t trust myself to keep up in the air, if a dizzy spell hits or my weak body quits. I don’t fancy the falling part, and it’s much more likely to happen with me.”

I was suddenly the subject of narrowed, green eyes. I frowned, raising an eyebrow.

Then Harry broke out in a grin. “I’ve got an idea.”

“Potter, I don’t like that smug look you’ve got about you…”

“I’m preparing to be smug, there’s a difference, Lys. And you call yourself a Slytherin?”

I rolled my eyes, opening my mouth to respond, but Harry started clambering up on his broom. I watched as he inched forward a bit more than most Quidditch players did (a lot of them liked to press themselves down to the broom, make themselves go faster with less air dragging on them) and then turn to look at me. Expectant eyes and a bright grin, which strongly reminded me of Harper when he wanted to learn how a new spell he noticed me playing around with.

“What are you doing.” I asked flatly.

“Come on, then. If you’re not the one doing the flying, it should be fine, right?”
My mind screeched to a halt. “Wait, what?”

Harry grinned. “I’ll just take you up to the stands. Just a quick flight, no risk. C’mon, Lys!”

I grimaced. “And if I fall?”

He tapped at one of his pockets, which presumably held his wand. “Wingardium Leviosa. C’mon, you’ve probably been up on a broom with one of your brothers, right?”

“Er… no. Actually.”

“Come again?”

“Well, the older the broom, the less weight it’ll hold reliably,” I said succinctly, “It’s dangerous.”

“Yeah, well this is a brand new Firebolt.” I swear, his eyes were sparkling. Goddamn Quidditch and broom nuts. “It’s a good broom, Lys.” he insisted.

I narrowed my eyes. “I’m going to die. You’re going to drop me.”

Harry rolled his eyes. “I wouldn’t drop you. What, don’t trust me, Lys?”

“You aren’t making a convincing argument, and I resent you for this,” I said primly, stepping forward and trying to will my magic not to give into any visions so I didn’t fall and die. “And as a matter of fact, I do trust you, just not your horrible Potter Luck.”

“Well, that’s fair.” Harry muttered. Then he grinned lopsidedly. “Come on, then, Lys. Please?”

Bloody… Bloody PUPPY EYES, dammit dammit dammit it’s not FAIR!

“Erghhhhh… Fine.”

Goddamn skirts. I was tempted to say ‘fuck it’ and sit normally, but there were some Slytherins in the crowd. And Dietrich or Jay or any of my boys would freak the fuck out at my lack of propriety. So I sat facing Harry’s left and twisted so my arms were wound around his waist. Harry was about as tall as Dietrich, which was a bit short for a 13-year-old, yeah, and he was built like a shorter version of Nate: thin and bony and agile.

“If you kick off and I fall, I am going to murder you, Potter,” I murmured grudgingly.

Harry laughed. “Just try it out, yeah, Lys? And just up to the stands. Besides, I think you should control Bastion. I don’t know what he’s saying, but he sounds right pissed off.”

“It’s probably vile. Dietrich has the worst potty-mouth in the- GOOD GOD!”

Suddenly I was in the bloody fucking air, and my hands dug into Harry’s robes as I squeaked at the unsettling feeling. Compared to real Quidditch kick-off’s, it was a very gentle rise, but I felt unbalanced and clung to Harry for dear life, burying my face in his back and fucking praying that this was over with soon.

My weight shifted as Harry guided the broom differently, and I concentrated my efforts on not thinking about leaving the ground behind and possibly falling, but on Dietrich and Lee Jordan snarling at each other, Percy roaring at the twins for something or other, and the manic laughter of Oliver Wood that was decidedly not odd at all on the Quidditch pitch, which was saying something.
“Er… Lys? Lys, it’s okay, we’re barely off the ground.” Harry said.

I glared at him, though he couldn’t see it. “You’re a crazy teenager who likes diving fifty feet. I don’t believe you at all.”

“We’re maybe ten feet up, promise.” Harry snickered, “And you’re balanced, though you were shifting about earlier. But you’re good now, yeah?”

C’mon, Lyssie, you can do this, I told myself firmly, You were raised by Gryffindors!

But I’m also a Slytherin, whose singular interest is self-preservation…

Bold, adventurous Gryffindor-raised! Ten feet, you can survive that much!

If I look, I’ll have a vision and then I’ll fall and die.

Harry wouldn’t let that happen, idiot!

Which was… true. Harry had a people-saving thing. And was very firmly protective of his friends, though not as crazy about it as I was. For no reason whatsoever, he went into the Chamber of bloody Secrets last year; he and I had been friendly, but he didn’t have to go save Dietrich. But he did, and in another world without Helvynya fucking Prevett, he would’ve saved my twin. So, obviously, if I happened to topple off this deathtrap, Harry would probably dive for me. Which might hurt, but I wasn’t having any visions concerning me becoming a splatter on the grass, so…

My eyes opened very slowly, and I shifted over, reluctantly bringing my face away from Harry’s back.

My first thought was, Oh hey, this isn’t so bad at all.

And then Harry started to climb.

“Potter, I swear to GOD-

Harry only laughed, and I flailed as he slowly wound around the pitch, his hair ruffled in the wind but not bothering me because I was too small for that. My own hair was a bit irritating, but it was a small complaint compared to the bloody ground leaving. He wound up and up and up and kept gently laughing and giving me odd assurances as I muttered and swore and squeaked into his back, my grip on him probably suffocating (though he didn’t complain).

“I thought you were an honorary Gryff, Lys,” Harry teased, throwing me a grin.

“Eyes on front, you bloody prick, thank you very much! And I’m only a Gryffindor because I was raised by ten of them, can you imagine? Ten Gryffindors and a Slytherin, it sounds like some horrible comedy show…”

“You’d think ten Gryffindors would’ve gotten you to be a bit more brave, hm?”

I narrowed my eyes at him, though he was thankfully watching where we were going and not smirking at me over his shoulder anymore. “I’m a Slytherin, and I prize self-preservation. This is entirely too high off the ground to be safe.”

Harry was still chuckling to himself. He was enjoying my torment, the little bastard. “We’re going at the pace of a flobberworm, Lys. Don’t worry so much.”

“You know how I said you couldn’t be a git if you tried? I take that back. Git.”
He laughed brightly in response, entirely too entertained. “I never thought the great Lys Weasley would be afraid of flying. You duel Malfoy and basilisks but you can’t get on a broom?”

I sniffed, very indignant. “Hush, Potter. If I get annoyed enough to hex you, we’ll both be falling, and then where would we be? Bloody youngest Seeker in a century, goes and gets himself killed by a pissed off Slytherin.”

“Yeah, but you should look down.”

“I’m not falling for that.”

“Nah, Lys, really.”

“I’m- Ergh. Oh dear Merlin. Merlin, Morgana, and Mordred help me- Why are we above the bloody stadium, Harry?”

There’s a breathless laugh from him, one that I could feel with me clinging to him like a limpet, and then he turned. I blinked in surprise (and maybe a bit of awe) because his eyes are dancing and he’s wearing such a wide grin that I was surprised it didn’t hurt.

It was the absolute happiness Harry had radiating off him, I think, that stopped my mounting panic. He seemed so at home up in the air, and it made me relax enough that my arms stopped trying to break his ribs and I slid a bit away, enough to look at my own sneakers, limply hanging from my legs and the world underneath them. The ground was further away than ever, but the white noise of the Quidditch match and its spectators made me feel very not-alone, which was what I’d expect with all this space around us. Dietrich and Lee Jordan were screaming at each other, Percy was joining, and I could hear Oliver Wood and Harper cackling, the crowd cheering and laughing, small splashes of color made bright by the afternoon sun.

I felt my lips twitching to smile. “Is this why you’re always this high up during games?”

“Well, that, and it’s easier to look for the Snitch this way,” Harry replied with a shrug.

“It’s… peaceful. Up here.” I said, finally giving into that smile.

Harry grinned at me wryly. “Yeah, right? This is why I thought you’d like flying. You’re always running around doing all sorts of things. How you never collapse without something like flying, I don’t know.”

“I meditate.”

“Not the same, I don’t think.”

I chuckled. “Yeah. It’s not.”

He flew in lazy circles, taking care not to startle me. I still tightened my hold when there was a sudden shift or a stronger breeze, but this was better than meditation. There was literally nothing up here to distract you, just the blue sky and the cheerful white noise and the feeling that you didn’t have to do anything, there were no obligations, and everything you had to worry about was frozen in time, waiting for you to breathe.

“Everything was beautiful and nothing hurt.” I snickered to myself.

“What?”
“Nothing, nothing,” I said, grinning. Then I poked at his side, which he squirmed at (but his flying was steady). “So you brought me up here because you thought I was stressed? Well, aren’t you a sweetheart, Harry.”

Harry smiled sheepishly. “Well, Ron was worried all week, saying you’ve never looked so stressed before… and then I thought about how our Patronus lessons aren’t going so well, and how you have it worse off with the dementors, with your Mage Sight, and then you’re running around leading Slytherin and with Wilkes being all suspicious and Bastion yelling at you all the time… I dunno, you looked like you needed a break, so I asked Vaisey and Harper to arrange this. Really thought you’d wanna fly it out. That’s what I do.”

Fucking adorable, this kid. That was a ‘I wanted to make you feel better so I dragged you into things I like to do’. Good god, I hope he and Ginny were happy together. Scratch that, I just hope this kid was happy in the future. If he wasn’t one of mine already, that would’ve cemented it.

(Worth it, I think. I was working this hard, getting so little sleep every night, welcoming pounding headaches into my brain… for this. To protect this sort of person, to help my friend, to defend the boy I was going to follow to war in a few years.)

(Yeah. Worth it.)

I smiled warmly. “Thanks, Harry.” Then I arched a brow. “Even if you had to pretty much blackmail me up here.”

“It wasn’t blackmail!” he protested.

“You used puppy-eyes. I banned that ages ago in Slytherin.”

“…Harper?”

I nodded. “Harper.”

Another laugh. Must’ve been the air, he was probably light-headed and giddy. Or something. Who knew how crazy-gits-who-liked-flying thought? “I can’t believe that bloke’s a Slytherin, really. So… cheery, you know?”

“You should’ve seen him before I got my claws in him,” I said with a laugh. Though I sobered, actually remembering last year. “Used to act like Parkinson, you know? Laughed at every stupid barb, did petty things, was a sycophant for his leader — Lu at the time, actually.”

Harry looked surprised. “Really? I can’t even imagine… Merlin, good thing you got into Slytherin, Lys.”

I laughed into his back. “Right?”

A breeze flew by, jolting the broom, and I went rigid. The white noise and the breeze and the cool air up here was nice, but then everyone looked like little ants and I remembered how damn high I was from the ground. Harry evidently saw my creeping panic.

“Er… I better take you to the stands, then. Sorry for the… kidnapping,” he muttered.

Oh, this kid. Hard to stay mad at someone who wanted the best for you so obviously, really. I chuckled, pushing my bravado to the forefront and Occlumencing my nervousness away best I could. “Nah, no apologies. This was… nice. A nice break. Despite everything. Thanks, Harry.”
He chuckled. “Think you’ll be accepting Seeker’s duels, then?”

“Don’t push it, Potter.”

(Worth it. I just had to remember that, when I was clutching at my head and going cross-eyed from the effort of translation, bleeding from my nose and mouth with how strenuous Legilimency was, feeling my throat and lungs burn from too much magic usage in the night. It was *worth it*. This was to protect both of us, to protect my friends, my family, my secrets, to protect everything. Everything would fall into place as soon as the year was over.)

(I had to believe that.)
Chapter 33

Chapter Summary

Welp. Here's a chapter for y'all as I die slowly from finals. :'D But! Good news! Once finals are done and I have legit time to write, I should be getting this fic on a proper schedule. So. There's that. :)

As always, thank you to all who follow/kudos/comment/etc. this fic -- it means a lot! -- and thanks again for being patient about the schedule conflict. :) You have no idea how much I yell at myself for not finishing up this damn arc already, good lord it's going on forever. XD I've got some baby notes at the end of the chapter, too, but they're not as pressing.

Enjoy!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

...  

I groaned into the couch cushion, the knitted blanket thrown over the dark leather smelling more of the sharp, perfumed Slytherin common room than of my mother’s warm, flour-covered hands now. There were Headache Relief vials — empty — scattered on the coffee table, around Sollertia Augurium and all the parchment and ink Nate and I were using. Nate himself was across me, in Jay’s favorite armchair, his glasses pushed up onto his head so he could rub at his eyes. He didn’t do anything as undignified as groaning, but he looked tired.

“I hate her,” I mumbled, “Why does she invent so many technical terms? Why is her wording so fucking weird? Sometimes it’s almost modern, sometimes she goes into poetic nonsense, and sometimes she’s holding information back or referring to past chapters we haven’t translated…”

Nate heaved a sigh. “I wouldn’t say I read a lot of Middle English, but this is very badly done. It was originally in Italian, was it not? Whoever translated it into English didn’t seem to know what they were doing.”

I rolled over, glaring at the innocent little book of hell. “I’m pretty sure it’s just her writing, Nate. The c- Er- the one who sold this book to me said it’s quite true to her own pen. She was a Clairvoyant, wasn’t she? She probably saw how much we’d suffer and wrote it this weirdly for the hell of it.”

Nate hummed to himself. We were both in school uniforms, but we were the messiest we’ve ever been. It was much more apparent in Nate, who usually looked pretty immaculate; his dark hair was wild with his fingers running through it so much (in frustration), glasses skewed, sleeves rolled up
like mine, tie missing, normal smirk twisted into a grimace. Hours of Slytherins passing through
dotted and sneered at our rumpled countenances; we looked as bad as seventh-years, really.

And I felt like it. Hadn’t left the common room for the entire fucking Saturday, holed up in here
from seven in the morning to whatever time it was now. The place emptied out a few hours past,
probably to watch the second-to-last Quidditch game of the season; I’d wanted to go, to support
Harry and his new Firebolt and whatnot — didn’t feel like only two days ago that he’d taken me up
on his death contraption and I’d gotten to relax, felt like it’d been seven years since, honestly —
but Sollertia Augurium had been waiting and Nate offered…

I’d had to force Dietrich to go chaperone the loudly-complaining and very excited Lu and Harper,
along with a exasperatedly tolerant Jay, because they deserved a break. And they couldn’t help
anyway. And the happier two were reserve players, so Flint needed them. And a whole host of
other things that I couldn’t think of at the moment.

“Sorry to keep you in all day, though,” I murmured into the blankets, scrunching my eyes shut and
seeing my own handwriting and the book’s spidery text dancing across my vision, “I know you
like brooms as much as me, but I really think you’re going to be blinder than you already are, at
this rate. Working this hard and whatnot.”

Nate brushed my sheepish apologies away carelessly. “I’m never opposed to historical primary
sources like this one.” He gave me an amused look, letting his glasses fall back onto his nose. “You
are setting a demanding pace, though, dear leader.”

I sighed, sitting up in my blankets properly now, smoothing the patchwork quilts. There was a burn
mark on this one, from when some little fucks decided it’d be a laugh to mess with my potesta
seat. I didn’t even have to do anything; Dietrich and Lu made them cry. (Those two were oddly attached
to our potesta seat’s messy, comfy things.)

“I’m sorry,” was all I could say. I really did feel bad about it… “You don’t have to lock yourself up
in the castle with me and work — I’m sure you’d rather be annoying the hell out of Dietrich or Lu
or something…”

Nate rolled his eyes. “My dear Lys, if I didn’t want to help, do you really think I’d still be here?”

A smile tugged on my lips. That was very true. Nate was like a… cat. Not the fluffy, very friendly
ones, but those bitch-ass diva cats that clawed you just because they liked hearing you yelp. The
ones you didn’t just pet — you had to wait for them to come to you. Those were the types that
didn’t do anything they didn’t want to do; Nate was exactly like that, honestly.

Similar to Tom Riddle my actual ass.

I studied Nate, who was leaning over the coffee table precariously to review our translation and fix
the stray marks, the finicky little bastard. My heart wilted a little at how tired and pale he looked.
Nate was an indoor night-owl, as much as I used to be in my first life, but this couldn’t be healthy. I
was a damn leader, wasn’t I? Nate looked like death was warming over, and that was absolutely
not allowed when it came to mine. (Better to get irritated at myself than feel guilty, I think. Anger
fueled action better.)

“Nope,” I announced, standing abruptly and yanking Sollertia Augurium from him decisively,
“You’re going out to the game. Go annoy Dietrich and Lu. You need sunlight and inane chatter,
you’re only twelve.”

“I’m thirteen,” he said, raising a very judgmental brow. “You’re only twelve.”
“Go. Get.” I shooed him away. “You’re one of mine, and I won’t have mine looking like a stressed N.E.W.T. student four years too early.”

“You always look like a stressed N.E.W.T. student-” Nate began to protest.

“I’m _regina potestae parvae_, that’s a requirement. You, my friend, are only a month into calling me Lys, and you’ve already done so much. I’m ordering you to go on a break. In fact, if you don’t go right now, I’m going to tell Harper and Lu about how you tormented those Gryffindors who were harassing them yesterday.”

He threw me a dirty look. “Traitor.”

I grinned at him. “Secret softie. Go on.”

Nate swatted me off him; I’d gotten him to stand and almost leave the couch set we favored. He straightened his rumpled robes, recovering his smug air. “Well, well, if you insist. I know when I’m not wanted.”

Rolling my eyes, I told him to tell me how the game went as he left.

I relaxed as he left, glad that he wasn’t like Dietrich or Harper, who’d insist on suffering as I did, needlessly. Nate was too Slytherin for that; he took what he could get, no matter what was going on. Lucas and Jay were a toss-up, really, but Nate was consistent in this, at least.

And with Nate gone, I could properly collapse into a pile with my blankets and pillows and squeeze my eyes shut. The Headache Relief had been used up, and I didn’t want to draw attention by asking Madam Pomfrey for more. Maybe I should get Dietrich to learn how to brew it? Snape wouldn’t mind us dipping into his stores a little, since we were being very good Slytherins and the _potesta_ was all taken care of…

I looked around lazily. I was surrounded by nice-smelling, warm blankets and pillows, my trainers abandoned on the floor along with my propriety, apparently. I estimated the game to last a few hours, which was more than enough time for me to catch a nap. My boys were taking a well-deserved break, and I would catch a bit of sleep to make this headache, creeping in quietly, back off for a little bit.

Nodding to myself, I started drawing lines in the air, vaguely around the borders of the common room — long and high-ceilinged, very basilica-like, but dungeons and gothic windows — flicking my Mage Sight on to make sure the wards were taking properly. My indigo’s electric threads wove themselves into thin films of wards, lacing together more strongly as I whispered the words under my breath. They settled inside of the golden air of Hogwarts, soft sighs compared to the rumbling hum, and my Mage Sight slipped back under the ritual-Occlumency-spell combo from _The Magick of Man-Hunters_, revealing the dark walls and silver chandeliers and soft, green glow.

The wards were crystalized, ready. I was warm and sleepy and my headache wasn’t so bad that I couldn’t ignore it. Just until the game was over, I think. It’d be something to boast about, at least; Dietrich would be so proud that I took a nap.

…”

Canonly, Sirius Black was supposed to have attacked Gryffindor Tower the day of the Quidditch
game, which was a week or so back ago. (Lu and Harper and Harry were pretty put out I hadn’t shown up even when Nate did, and I had to go to a celebratory four-House-Quidditch outing again to make up for it, though thankfully I avoided Harry cajoling me into flying again.) Of course, canonly, Sirius Black’s mental health was even crappier than it was already, and he didn’t have the grand support system that I was, so. Thankfully, he didn’t attack and traumatize my poor brother — I’m pretty sure all this pain from Legilimency and shit was my payment for that bonus — and therefore there was no increased security.

Less security equated to a lack of dementors right up on my Occlumency barriers, and that was important because I was messing with them as I learned Legilimency and tried to help Sirius Black reform his own Occlumency barriers (without him losing his head to dementor-PTSD) and yeah. The cambion would be feeding well this summer, because I needed this shit fixed… I really should get on that contract-writing…

Well. Maybe after I did all the million and one things I had to do first.

The common room was filled with milling Slytherins; definitely not as rowdy as Gryffindors, but also not as quiet as Ravenclaws. Josephine was holding court, lounging around her sleek, almost spartan potesta gathering area with a few of her main camp, doing homework and discreetly keeping an eye on everyone. There was a gaggle of fifth-year girls by the windows, tapping at the glass with their wands and spelling out letters as they spoke to the merpeople — something that was not as recurring as I thought it would be, but surprisingly cool, though it was an activity reserved for magnus members — and I spotted Silvester Cornfoot hunched over one of the studying desks with Elena Chambers, his new magnus mentor, along with Lily Moon. A lot of the mentor-mentee pairings were scattered around, which was nice to see.

I myself was trying to finish off some paperwork — there was a dispute between some first-years, reported to me by my main firstie go-to, Adaline Mercer, and I had to read the girl’s reports and figure out how to keep Nicolette Beaumont and Ariadne Lynwood from declaring a blood feud between their Houses — while Nate read Sollertia Augurium and Lu, Dietrich, Jay, and Harper attempted the Patronus again. I’d gone to Lupin and Harry’s Patronus lessons yesterday night, so I opted out to catch up on work.

“Is that the Beaumont-Lynwood report?” Nate called from his place across from me.

I nodded distractedly. “Started with a prank and just snowballed from there, I think. Doesn’t help that Beaumont’s cousin, from a branch family, seems to have stolen Lynwood’s brother’s heart mysteriously quickly. Lynwood’s accusing Beaumont’s cousin of using Amortentia, Beaumont is quite attached to her cousin, she’s accusing the Lynwoods of being pansies who should be so lucky to have Veronique Beaumont in their family…”

Nate chuckled. “A regular drama. Let me guess… Lynwood’s brother is the Heir.”

I smirked a little. “Oh, yes. Creus Lynwood, you know.”

Dietrich scoffed from his place beside me, brow furrowed with effort from the Patronus. He’d gotten maybe a flicker of light once so far, and was taking periodic breaks to help with paperwork. I eyed his magic rather carefully; he had the smallest core of all of us, and always had.

“Beaumont and Lynwood will calm,” he muttered, “They like to follow in their idol’s footsteps, whose dueling skills are shown off every other week. You duel too much, Lys.”

“Hah? I’m their idol?”
“Just as much as Zabini is yours,” sang Nate easily, still reading his book.

Huh. Well that would imply both girls had a crush on me, so I rather doubted that.

“I’ll probably have to take both of them aside at some point — their division is stressing the other firsties, and that makes escort groups rather shaky, and I know those ‘Claws are pissed about losing last week’s game and I know they’ll take it out on ours if they ca-”

“LYSSIE! LYSSIE, LOOK!”

I snapped my head to face Harper, panicked that he’d set the common room on fire, but-

A shield of white vapor.

I’m sure my gobsmacked expression was reflected in my boys’ faces and all the faces of the Slytherins lounging about the common room, because Tristan Harper just successfully cast a goddamn Patronus. Not corporeal or very strong, but a flick to my Mage Sight showed his teals and turquoises and golds woven in the right pattern, behaving the way Alby’s demonstration Patronus behaved, and oh my god. Harper just cast a Patronus.

The common room was silent. Everyone was looking at Harper’s shield, Harper’s first success at the Patronus, startled by his outburst and then quiet in amazement.

Harper just cast a Patronus.

His wand arm was trembling and he looked cheerfully exhausted, my chest swelled with pride. When the white part-dome fizzled out, dispersing into fading, pale mist, I was the first to move in the stunned silence. Harper was usually the one who did the tackling hugs, the excitable child, but that was my role this time; I surged up and threw my arms around him, my chest squeezing with so much fucking pride that it was ridiculous.

“Oh my god, Harper, you did it, you did- You cast a PATRONUS, Harper, do you know- Harper, that’s amazing, you were the first of all of us, Harper, it’s an Auror-grade spell and you cast it!” I was half-laughing.

Harper was hugging me back, giggling like mad, talking over me. “I did it, Lyssie, I did- I was- The Patronus! It’s not complete but I did it! Did you see? Did you see it? That was mine, I held it for twenty seconds, Lys, my magic did that-”

“HOLY MERLIN, HARPER YOU DID IT!” came Lu’s loud, shocked, happy voice.

Dietrich was close by, too aloof to hug, but near enough to share the celebration. “Je ne peux pas le croire. Bien joué mon ami.”

“Hm… well, that was unexpected, to say the least. It seems I’ll have to actually try to cast one now…” Nate’s voice sighed, opposite side of Dietrich.

“I know you could do it, Harper,” said Jay. Because, of course, Jay was the nicest.

Harper. Harper had successfully cast a Patronus. The first of all of us. The boy with ADHD, the boy who no one had thought would ever amount to anything last year — he’d just performed one of the most complex Light spells in the country, a twelve-year-old. It might’ve only lasted a bit, and it might’ve been weak, and a dementor would’ve probably broken the fuck through it, but… But this was Harper, my left hand, and I was so damn happy for him.
I pulled back from the hug a little, looking at Harper’s face and probably matching his grin tooth for tooth.

“I am so damn proud of you, Tristan,” I said excitedly, knowing he could hear me even as the Slytherin common room descended into loud noises and exclamations and the others were all jabbering behind me.

Harper’s grin looked even wider than it was already, which I’d thought was impossible.

“I did it,” he said, his voice oddly soft and meant just for me, “Lys, I’m- I’m just as strong as you and Dietrich, now, aren’t I? I can…” He swallowed. “I’m your left hand properly now, aren’t I?”

I hugged him hard again, burying my face in his shoulder. “You were always our equal. Don’t doubt that. What you lacked in power, you’ve always made up for it.”

“You called me Tristan,” he whispered, sounding amazed.

“Only for special occasions,” I laughed, pulling back in full this time, beaming at him. I stepped back, put my hands on my hips, raised a brow. “Now. Practice makes perfect, you know. Think you can do it again?”

Harper’s blue eyes were glittering with excitement. “Of course!”

I believed him. And by the cocky grin on Lu’s face, his arm slung around Harper’s shoulders, the wide smile on Jay’s, standing on Harper’s other side, and Dietrich’s accepting nod and Nate’s considering look at his wand, I’m sure we were all in agreement there.

There. Sollertia Augurium was getting finished, I was learning Legilimency, Sirius Black was getting a bit better mentally, my potesta seemed to be doing well, and Harper had just cast a Patronus successfully for the first time. Not bad for mid-February.

... 

“You can call me Lys, you know.”

Sirius Black stared at me owlishly. He was sitting cross-legged on the rug, which was filthy because the stupid git was trekking in the mud today as a Grimm, his hands paused just as he was about to tear open the basket of food I brought him. The small drawing room was just the same as ever, though I think he cleaned up a little — the bloodstained rags for my face were gone. That was a good sign, I think? Cleaning. Organization. That stuff.

Goddammit, there was a reason I didn’t become a Psych major.

(Even reading people’s cores for their emotions, even that was guesswork. It wasn’t certain. I wasn’t an Empath or an Assessor, I could only guess what patterns meant, could only know for sure that there was a change at all. And even then, I didn’t have my Mage Sight on all the time because Hogwarts — all concentrated forms of magic, really — was blinding.)

“Guinevere?” he asked, looking a bit dazed.

I flipped my fingers at the pile of chocolate, let a bar zoom into my fingers, shoving it right at
Sirius as soon as I felt its weight in my hands. Hanging around Sirius Black’s person and mind these few weeks, I was getting good at knowing when he would get lost in his head. There would be this sort of glazed look in his eyes right before, he would start shaking, and his normally rather confident speech would shrink in on itself, become stuttered. Chocolate helped him.

He took it absently, trusting me to know he’d need it.

“Lys,” I corrected, casting a Scourgify on the rug and flopping down on it bonelessly, “Also, I know why you’re friends with Lupin. You’re both bloody slave-drivers.”

It was just a few days after Ron’s birthday — he was delighted at my gift, despite it being a lazy thing I’d had to ask Lu and Harper for advice for (some very lovely almanac of famous Quidditch games that I’d begged Dagby and Effas to fetch from the Room of Lost Things) — and a Thursday. To be fair, though, Lupin was just as mild-mannered and helpful as ever; I was just exhausted and sleep-deprived and frustrated, a really poor learning mate for Harry. I was getting closer to something substantial, especially with Harper’s breakthrough and me being able to watch his magic itself learn how to cast a Patronus, but still.

Lupin was a fair, but expectant teacher.

And I’d forgotten that Sirius Black and him were sort of on the outs. Being framed for the murder of two mutual friends — best friends — would really put a damper on any sort of relationship. Shit, he was going to relapse or something-

“Moony was always a slave-driver, yep,” Sirius Black laughed.

Oh. What a pleasant surprise — he was okay! Nice! This meant his Occlumency was improving! Or something else. Which would also be good, because Sirius Black not being as insane as usual was always good. I had my Occlumency to suppress instinctive fear from when he went a bit madder than usual, and I also spent quite a bit of time in his head and knew he’d never try to hurt me knowingly, but. Well. The keyword was ‘knowingly’.

I smiled encouragingly at the man. “Did he go into lecture-mode for you, too?”

“All the time,” Sirius sighed, “Always… got us out of trouble… Always- He was- He-”

Damn, he was so close. “Occlude, Sirius.”

“Er- Yes. Yes, I- Yeah. I’m okay. Just- It was a bit shaky there, but. I’m alright.”

“Chocolate?”

“No, I’m… better. I can’t depend too heavily on that stuff, you know. Besides. Chocolate would make me fat.”

I laughed as Sirius grinned at me. “You need all the fattening you can get!” I chuckled.

“Chocolate is bad for dogs, you know, Guinevere.”

“Good thing you’re magical, then. And didn’t I say? Call me Lys. Honestly, you know more secrets of mine than anyone else at this point. Which is a bit sad, because you’re literally twice my age.” I blinked to myself. “I go out almost every night, losing sleep, to meet with an old man in an abandoned shack outside of Hogwarts grounds. Dear Merlin, Dad’s going to kill me.”

Sirius barked out a laugh. “If I know Arthur Weasley, he’ll kill me!” he laughed. Then he grinned
at me fondly. “I appreciate it, you know. Lys. All this. Not just- Well, yes, the food and the blankets and things, but also… Occlumency. Legilimency. Pettigrew.”

I scowled at the mentioned of Pettigrew. “Oh, believe me, you don’t have to thank me for that. I would’ve taken anything less than death to deal with him. And I will. I’ve made enough Choices, you know. I’m locked into a path now; the only thing I can do is keep going, since I’ve affected too much to go back to the original path-” To canon. “-so Pettigrew, one way or another, was going to be dealt with.”

Sirius had finished eating. He was just facing me now, elbows resting on his knees and hunching over them. He was still worryingly thin, but there was color to his skin and his eyes weren’t so sunken and he was washed. His robes were drab and worn, but there were pops of neon thread from my terrible stitching. The man looked a far cry from the emaciated ex-con I’d stumbled upon nearly a month and a half ago.

He leaned forward a little. “Lys?”

“Yes?”

“Will you… Will you, er… Will you tell me about… about Harry?”

I stilled in surprise, looking up at him. His eyes were earnest. “You… Can you handle it?”

Sirius huffed, looking parts sheepish and wistful, breaking eye-contact. “I know I… I almost blanked there, again, but…” He looked up at me hopefully. “He’s- He’s my godson, you know? I… After Jamie and Lily-flower, I was- I was there to hold him when he was born. He’s my godson, and I- I left him. I couldn’t even… All I knew was to kill Pettigrew to protect him, but I’ve never- I never tried to know him, who he was, who he grew up to be…”

My heart twinged. His eyes were growing wet, and he looked away again, flushing with shame.

“He likes flying.” I offered quietly.

Sirius’ eyes were still wet — growing more so — but he smiled. “I- Yeah. I know. I try to watch his games, I was there for the- when the dementors attacked, last year. And I watched the last game, the ‘Claws and… He’s a natural. Genius Quidditch Seeker.”

I smiled. “Not Quidditch, I mean. Harry loves flying. I think- From what he’s alluded to, I think it calms him down. He’s… He’s used to being alone, you know, and as much as I know he loves Ron and Hermione — his best friends, Ron is my brother — he’s always so crowded about, Boy-Who-Lived and such, so I think… I think he likes being able to breathe up there. He thought- Ah, this is hilarious- He thought I’d like that too, so he put me on a broom and… Well.”

“What else?” asked my friend — friend…? Yeah, friend… — eagerly.

“He’s the sweetest kid. A git, sometimes, but really… genuinely kind. The… The first conversation I ever really had with him, he’d just overheard me worrying about being the first Weasley Slytherin, and he said… He told me that it’d be alright, that he was sure I’d make Slytherin better. Than Malfoy, which isn’t hard, but still.”

“That’s- He gets that from… from Lily. I’m sure. She was like that, too.”

“…He’s clever. And he thinks things through. Sees things from your point of view. Did you know—Well, you heard of the Chamber incident? No? I’ll explain later, but suffice to say… Well, a friend of mine died. He- He wasn’t a good person. My friend. He deserved to die, he had to die, but… Harry was the only one who didn’t care. My friend did horrible, horrible things to people, to him,
but Harry told me… He said that he was sorry I’d lost a friend.”

I didn’t look over at Sirius. I was staring at my lap, my hands. If I looked at him, I’d see him crying, and I know he didn’t want me to see. We didn’t practice Legilimency or Occlumency that night, so there were no headaches when I stumbled back to Hogwarts, but my voice ached from speaking and I’m sure Sirius’ eyes ached from all the tears.

(“Thank you, Lys,” whispered Sirius Black, “Thank you.”)

... 

Silver light behind the clouds, dark sky like ink — “THEN YOU SHOULD HAVE DIED-!” — a howl, echoing and vibrating, nails like claws. — ?? — elongating, morphing, skin growing with coarse brown and eyes wide like amber? — hair like rose petals, a dark hand covered in its strands, plaiting it down her back. “Are you sure you know what you’re doing, Josie?” she asked, laughing — flashing eyes, amused, vampiric smile. “I’m sure, I’m sure-.”

Stop.

Blood dripping out of her nose, into her mouth, taste like copper and salt? — “Don’t push yourself, girl. You’re young, yet-” “Meaning my core can take a bit more punishment than yours. We have to do this-” — candles floating in the air, dripping wax into nothing, cloth over the walls. He curled in the corner, a black dog with odd patches fur just starting to grow in — ?? — “Thank you. I feel so much better… so much better. It’s been- It’s been so long…” She smiled, shrugging, writing with ink-splattered hands. “I couldn’t let you-”

Stop.

THE ONE WITH THE POWER TO VANQUISH THE DARK LORD APPROACHES-

Stop.

He smiled, warm and odd on his face. He pushed up his glasses, pushed the bangs from his forehead. “Let’s get to work, then, shall we, Lys?” — ?? — the moon rose and the rat ran, dewy grass beneath her feet, her fingers blackened in the night’s poor light, throbbing pain.

She stumbled, her wand pointed, “Lignarovogentrum!” and dark, dry black crackled into silver, faded, glinted — Josephine turned and grinned, the Black Lake up to her calves and a hand held out. “Well?”

Stop.

Red, red hair — the graveyard stood, dark and empty and misting, a figure hunched over — ?? — Josephine Zabini opened the letter, hands trembling — ? — turned her back, all their backs, they left. She stood alone, letter in hand, sat elegantly in her place, waited.

She passed, curious expression on her face, should she? — ?? — swirling colors, orchestral music, a crooked grin and a familiar laugh. “Now, Krum, this time there’ll be no stepping on my feet, will there? Poor Hermione!” He blushed, trying to remain stoic. “Do not tease so-” — ?? — Jay and Lu and Harper stood, Dietrich was running away desperately?
The rat scrambled in the boy’s hands, he grinned. “Lyssie, look what I foun- Merlin, I won’t bring him near you, please stop screaming ohmyMerlinwhyareyoucrying??!!???” — the boy zipped through the air, wind nearly blinding him, he smiled, the crowd roared. Red and gold and — ??? — the Fat Lady screamed — “Don’t you dare attack Gryffindor Tower. All will be fine.”

He laughed. “Why would I, if you’re telling me not to?”

She smiled faintly. “I have to follow this choice. I locked myself into it. You understand don’t you?”

Sirius Black bared his teeth. “The rat dies.” — Sirius Black had a cloth in his hand, dabbing at her face gently, it came away blotted with red. “Don’t push yourself, girl. You’re young, yet. You’ll learn. I learned, I- Uncle Sevens taught... He taught me. I’ll teach you. He Saw you and I found you and- I- for my pup- Yes. It’s alright.” — She opened her eyes.

I opened my eyes.

“I have to follow this choice. I locked myself into it. You understand don’t you?”

Stop.

The Head Girl was sitting in my potesta area, stretching out comfortably in Jay’s favorite armchair. It looked like she’d been waiting for me to stop zoning out; that was my favorite excuse when visions decided they wanted to be known. Slytherin seemed to accept that sometimes their parvus potesta leader’s brain just shut off every now and then from overwork; apparently that was a normal thing. Huh.

“Just woke up, did you, Guinevere?” she asked, looking amused. There was a book in her hands—Oh. Shit, she was reading Sollertia Augurium.

What the fuck, that had been in my lap! She just plucked it from my lap! Dammit, Josephine!

She followed my disturbed gaze to the book in her hands. “Ah. Right. Apologies, but... Well, can’t blame a girl for being curious, hm? You and Wilkes work on this thing day and night, and it’s such an interesting spell you made...”

I narrowed my eyes at her. “Invading my privacy, Zabini?”

Josephine only twitched slightly at my use of her surname. “Ah. Alright, alright, it was wrong of me- You’ve never gone through my things, so I suppose... Yes, I’m sorry, Guinevere. I’ll owe you something, I promise.”

She looked contrite enough that I just sighed wearily. She closed Sollertia Augurium softly and set it on the coffee table, flicking her wand to sent it sliding to me gently. I placed it in my lap once again, working through my annoyance. Slytherins knew how to keep secrets. Josephine knew to keep mine, I think. And, really, it was more of an open-secret that I was working on something slightly illegal and very interesting with Nate.

“What if I want you to run naked through the Quidditch pitch or something?” I asked, trying to let
her know I wasn’t too pissed off about the breach of privacy.

Josephine, wonderful Slytherin she was, understood immediately and smiled regally. “Oh, I’m sure I could spin it in my favor somehow. If not, I take careful consideration into my appearance, you know, Guinevere.”

“I don’t know how you manage to look perfect every day when you’re Head Girl, a NEWT student, magnus potesta reigning, and a pureblood.”

Josephine flashed a sharp smile. “Why, Guinevere. You think I’m pretty?”

I rolled my eyes. “I think you’re competent, which is much more attractive.”

“Why, Guinevere!” she repeated, “You think I’m attractive?”

Duh.

“The entire school thinks you’re attractive,” I replied dismissively. “You and your younger cousin have miracle genes. I’m sure if I asked you to streak around Hogwarts, you’d just be doing everyone a favor.”

Josephine laughed. She looked consideringly at the coffee table, eyes lingering on the disguised Sollertia Augurium. “You don’t seem to rest, either, miss parvus reigning. That’s not The Monster Book of Monsters, of course. No need for translation pages. What spell is that, anyway? An Undetectable Extension?”

“Somewhat. It’s complicated. A very annoying process, too.”

She leaned forward. “Hm. Mashed a few spells together, then? Making yourself to be quite the little Spell Craftsman, then, aren’t you? A respectable position, to be sure. Not many women in that field.” Her eyes… well, they didn’t soften, but they became… distant. “Not many pureblood women at all.”

I blinked, sensing a change in the air. My fingers twitched, and the Soothsayer in me poked its head out, gazing at Josephine’s magic. Her fiery reds and oranges were usually quite playful, sliding in and out of sight, curling at the ends with confidence and pride. They seemed… subdued, now. But frustrated. Trembling with tension, but I didn’t know why. My Soothsayer status gave me a certain insight to changes in core, and I used face-reading and deduction to be able to understand emotions. I didn’t know what was going on, the exact emotions of someone I didn’t know all that well.

Josephine was… not me and mine. Not that close. But she was a friend and a mentor, and she had helped me quite a lot, even if I helped her right back. I admired her, though. Beyond the little crush — it was not fair she was so pretty and competent, she was only seventeen dammit! — I respected her very much.

“Are… Are you alright, Josephine?” I asked cautiously.

She smiled again, but I could tell it was a bit more strained. “Don’t worry yourself over me, Guinevere. I’ll be fine.”

I continued to frown. “I find that when people say ‘I’ll be fine’, they don’t really mean it.”

Josephine’s brown eyes flickered to mine, and she stared intensely for a while. Studying me. Slytherins liked to do that, the dramatic staring-into-your-soul bit. And then they’d usually sigh,
like Josephine just sighed, and decided that whatever they’d been looking for, they’d found it. Well, that was how it worked with me, I guess.

“You know how my family works, I suppose, Guinevere?” she asked wearily.

“Matriarchal main family based in Italy, patriarchal branch family settled in Britain. You and Blaise Zabini are from the branch family.” I answered vaguely.

“Sounds just about right. Thing is, Guinevere, I’ve always been a bit more Italian than I should be. You know?”

This sounded familiar.

“Ah,” I muttered, looking at her in a new light. “You’re betrothed, aren’t you?”

“Aloysius Derrick,” Josephine huffed, looking both resigned and disgusted, “His idiotic little brother is in my potesta.”

“Peregrine Derrick. Pain in my arse.” I sighed, remembering that handsome but very snobby, horrible teenager who kept challenging me and mine. Little git pissed Percy off, too, though they were different years — I could hate someone on principle for messing with my siblings, the petty Slytherin I was.

Josephine nodded. “Yes. And, of course, since dramatics run in our blood, I received this recently.”

Her hand slipped into her robes, and a letter was held out to me. It had a broken Ministry seal. I asked for permission with a raised brow (she replied with a regal nod) and opened the letter, skimming the official-looking document with surprise.

“An acceptance of employment…” I murmured with wonder, “You’d be the Undersecretary of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement. Second to Amelia Bones, the bloody DMLE legend. This is incredible, Josephine.”

The Head Girl smiled tightly. “Proper pureblood wives do not work.”

Her voice was flat. It wasn’t supposed to be; Josephine was playful and teasing and sharp. Sleek. Not resigned.

“You’re going to marry Derrick’s older brother and reject a chance to work underneath Amelia Bones,” I stated, eyes narrowed.

Josephine took back the letter I handed to her. Her knuckles were pale as she gripped at it. So this was why… She’d been frazzled when she came in. Her colors were odd. This was the reason — she thought and acted like a Matriarch, like a Materfamilias, when they — her family and the Derricks, no doubt — wanted her to be a proper, subordinate wife. How infuriating.

She mistook my irritation, I think.

“Think I’m pathetic, Weasley?” she spat out, shoving the letter back into a pocket, “Pining for a position that doesn’t belong to me? Wanting to work underneath a Hufflepuff, some washed out Auror’s widow?”

“I think,” I said coolly, really not wanting to fight the magnus potesta reigning, “that you seem to have forgotten that I’m a bloodtraitor, and I think if I had to make the choice between marrying some arsehole my dad told me to and becoming a Spell Craftsman, you’d be seeing my work in the
Spell Registry.”

Josephine blinked. She snapped her gaze to me quickly. “I…” She looked away. “Apologies, Guinevere. I’ve had some… trying conversations with others. My dorm mates, my circle.” She laughed breathlessly. “Merlin, and you’re a brat, and here I am… Ignore me, Guinevere.”

I crossed my arms, smoothing my irritable look over. Lots of emotional outbursts around me this year. It’s like I triggered them or something. “The rare sight of Josephine’s frazzled nerves. Incredible.” I joked lightly, trying to cheer her up.

She snorted. “I’ll buy you Honeydukes if you swear not to mention this.”

“I wouldn’t have anyways.” I said, shrugging and standing to leave. My wand was out, organizing the space and folding the blankets up; I think a nap in my room would help with the exhaustion creeping in once again, though I’d have Sollertia Augurium close by. “For what it’s worth, though, the owner of that signature, there, would say that the position does belong to you. What’s your dorm mates’ opinion compared to the legendary Amelia Bones’, hm?”

Josephine’s smile was slow to come, just like spring. But it was very pretty. And warm.

“You don’t act like a twelve-year-old, Guinevere, you know that?”

I grinned a little. “I don’t feel like one. But I do need a nap. Good luck on your NEWTS. I’m sure I won’t be seeing much of you until they’re over — final exams are approaching, aren’t they, Josephine?”

“Josie, please.”

“Er- What?”

“Josie. Only Blaise and his mum call me that,” she explained.

Only family called her that.

I blinked a little. Then I smiled. “Josie, then. See you around.”

She nodded to me, and I turned to leave-

Then I glanced back. “About my favor.”

Josephine- No, wait… Josie looked at me expectantly. Waiting.

“You magnus students are the only ones allowed to interact with the merpeople.” I began.

Josie nodded. “Because we know how not to offend them. If you little ones went around talking to them… Well, do imagine what it would be like if snotty Malfoy decided to deign to speak to one of them for some reason.”

I grimaced. “He’s been a lot better since I took over.”

“Still a little brat.” Josephi- Josie shrugged. “So? You want to talk to the merpeople?”

“Of a sort? See, Harper’s always got this wide-eyed look when we pass by the lake and see the Giant Squid, and I figured… Well, he’s getting really skilled at the Patronus, I need to reward him somehow, you know, and I don’t suppose you can arrange it so I can ask the merpeople how to befriend it more easily?”
Josie laughed. “That, I can do.”

Chapter End Notes

Baby notes: I know there's misspellings and typos. I don't have a Beta and I basically edit as I write... So yeah, there's mistakes. I know they're annoying. But if it's particularly bothersome, please just *politely* let me know. It's a bit disheartening when I get comments that are rude about it. :( 

Some people correct me often (on language especially) and they're super nice about it -- you know who you are -- so there's proof.

Also, side note, fuck the word 'cast', honestly. Like. Is its past tense 'cast' or 'casted'? I have no goddamn clue.
Yaaaas new chapter! My thanks to MikoMouse for beta work! :) Seriously, thanks, I've never had a beta before, I'm like super nervous about how to deal with that. XD
And of course, thank you to all who kudos/bookmark/subscribe/comment, because honestly, you guys keep me going — I know, the most cliche fanfic author line ever, but there it is. XD

Summer is here and I am loving it! I'm trying to write more and build up my stock, so hopefully we won't have any baby hiatus fiascos as we did before. :P Thanks for sticking with me, guys. Let me know how y'all liked the chapter... I'm wrapping this goddamn arc up soon so I hope the pace isn't too messed up for it. Enjoy! :)
spread all around us in the grass and roots, I helped yet another kid with their essays and Ginny scribbled at her parchment furiously. She even managed to get me to hand over some of my essays to look over, get ideas from, as long as I swore her into a strictly no plagiarism contract.

(I say contract but it’s just a pinky promise.)

“Oh no... my Herbology topic’s different from yours!”

“You did fluxweed? Why would you do fluxweed?” I asked incredulously, skimming over her paper with raised eyebrows.

Ginny groaned. “Morag said she’d do fluxweed and we could work together, but she hasn’t done her essay yet and it’s due tomorrow! I’m already pants at Herbology, Professor Sprout’s going to fail me.”

I rolled my eyes. “We could go to the library, I obviously don’t have any reference materials on me right now. Or... no, I have a better idea.”

I pointed my wand at a spare bit of parchment.

“Quaternarius Diffindo.”

The sheet cut itself into a perfect square. I picked it from the ground and scribbled on it, then set to folding it: half-fold, corners down, flip and fold, meet the corners again, etc. Before long I had in my palm a parchment crane. That was something I remembered how to do from my last life, no research needed.


The duplicated crimson cranes fluttered their paper wings and then lifted gently off the ground, towards the castle. Another spell I bastardized the shit out of, of course, since this wasn’t quite the paper plane spell.

Ginny laughed in delight, as she always did when I did wandless magic for her — and pretty magic at that — and we shifted to her History essay while we waited for living reference materials to arrive. Percy would know everything, the demon twins would have some sort of trivial knowledge as they loved Potion-making — and thus knew too many things about ingredients — and Ron was actually a good writer when someone forced him to be (Hermione did not often succeed, my lazy brother only picked up the pace when it was Mum or Percy or me yelling at him).

Besides, it had been a while since I saw all of them in one place.

“So, Gin... Do you still have a crush on Harry?”

The flush of her cheeks was enough of an answer. I laughed.

“I think you should talk to him more, big sister,” I advised; I did want to be in-laws with Harry one day, after all, and I was worried my interference with the Chamber might’ve slowed the progress somehow, “Like how I do. Just treat him like anyone else, really. He doesn’t like the whole hero-worship thing or ogling.”

“But he is a hero. He saved that prat Malfoy and your friend Dietrich!” she squeaked.
She was my big sister, I know. Her crush was ridiculous, I knew that too. But Ginny was adorable and innocent, and I felt a little wistful, looking at her furiously blushing face and averted eyes, hands playing with copper-orange hair. I had preserved that bit of her, that schoolgirl aspect of my sister. I had proof of it threaded through my magic, crimson folds like velvet dusting my indigo core, shifting about languidly even as the rest of my magic was younger and wilder. Ginny was like this — safe — for the price of my guilt, my best friend, and the constant reminder, seared into my core.

Worth it. Definitely worth it. Anything — anything — for mine.

“Lys! Are you having a…?”

I snapped back to the present, trying to remember what was going on, and then went with the good old eye-roll. “Nah, I’m fine. Also… Harry’s pretty particular about fame and fortune. He doesn’t much like it.”

Ginny looked away again, the worried-older-sister slipping back behind that kid who saw how Harry Potter was our family’s miracle and loved him for it. “Wouldn’t it be nice, though? You’re doing so well in Slytherin, you’re practically famous yourself. I wish…”

My smile slipped away. Another unfortunate butterfly effect of my birth. Since Ginny was no longer the only daughter of the family, she became less special. Since she was also not a Seer or a Slytherin or as mature as I was, she became easily jealous. Not bitterly, but she longed for... well, for something that would make her special.

It was a bit like Ron, actually, which actually made them closer than I think they would’ve been if I weren’t here. But I had slowly been trying to show these idiotic siblings of mine their own virtues: Ron was a damn good strategist, applicable to anything he wanted to do if he’d just stop being lazy, and Ginny was a fierce girl that would be an incredible Quidditch Chaser one day, and she wrote very well for her age — she was just overshadowed and wallowed in it too much.

This was why last year, separating the way we did, had been good for her. On some level, Ginny realized it, too; that’s why she didn’t seek me out as much as she could’ve. My little-big sister was growing up the proper way, slow and steady; no jolting realizations from soul-stealing Dark artifacts possessing her, none of that. She would become something better than canon, allowed to grow without trauma like that.

“So do we all, sister,” I said with a small smile, “We’ll get there one day.”

“Have you Seen it?”

Ginny flying in a Hollyhead Harpies uniform, waving to the crowd. She smiled as she scored the winning goal — her teammates ran forward to bury her in hugs — “Weasley, you did it! You did it, dammit!” — Playful grin as always, crinkled blue eyes. “Congrats, big sister.” she laughed — there, grown as she was, laughing as she held up a trophy...

Stop.

I smiled. “I have. So don’t worry about it, and finish your damn essay!”

She giggled. “Don’t swear too much, Lyssie, Mum’ll kill you. She’s already upset that you wear all of Ron’s old things and still let Fred cut your hair like that — she wrote me that she hid all the scissors at home.”

I sighed. “I’ll have to steal some from someone. Or you could, none of the pureblood snots in my
House’ll have ‘such a useless Muggle device’ or something.”

“What’ll I get in return?”

“Pardon? You’re a Gryffindor! You get the satisfaction of helping someone!”

She gave a devious grin and I wondered if I hadn’t rubbed off on her too much. Bloody Slythindors. Everywhere now, because of me. I was infecting Harper and Lu with Gryffie impulsiveness and recklessness, and my brothers/sister with Slyth cunning and sense of insults. Well. Actually, that was already done.

Whoops.

“Lyssie? Ginny? What’d you sent this note for?”

I turned to beam at Percy. He had the unfolded red crane in his hand, which detailed where Gin and I were and that they should come meet us if they weren’t busy or I’d prank the hell out of them. Percy looked a little ruffled; he might’ve thought it was some sort of emergency for a moment, running, and then slowed when he realized that if it were an actual emergency I would’ve written in a more... desperate manner. Possibly just ‘GET OVER HERE NOW’ or something. I could see Percy definitely doing that.

“Hi, Perce,” I chirped, pleased to see him as usual, “Gin needs help on fluxweed.”

He gave us both a look. “That’s all?”

Ginny pouted, just a bit. “Yeeeeeess?”

Percy deadpanned, “Ginny, you could’ve found me in the tower.”

I smirked. “She came to me first, but I didn’t write on fluxweed, I did mandrakes.”

Percy shook his head, evidently giving up on us. “I’ve had enough of mandrakes. Ginny, here, I’ll assist you with your schoolwork — I’m glad to see that you’re taking it seriously now, as it will be important in your future—”

Ginny rolled her eyes at me, but she listened to Percy as he lectured on fluxweed and the uses of Herbology in many careers, etc. I made a point of writing down the more interesting things he said, wondering if Dietrich or Harper knew this stuff about this particular ingredient, the sorta Potions nerds they were. Percy was apparently only halfway through his impromptu lecture on the vices of becoming a magical gardener or a Potions Master when Ron showed up, looking distinctly more naturally ruffled than Percy.

“Lyssie, what?” he asked bluntly.

“Oh, you brought your homework? Good, you need help.”

He scowled. “Who said I needed help?”

“Harry.”

“That traitor-!”

“I lied. That was a guess, and look at that, it was right. C’mon, Percy’s tutoring us.”

“As if you need tutoring, Lys. You could probably Slytherin someone into doing all your
homework for you at this point.”

“You flatter me, Ronniekins.”

“Oh, shut up… Help with this Charms essay, would you?”

When the twins showed up about a half an hour later, they readily agreed to help Percy lecture — interjecting random tidbits of information that I scrambled to write down — and even looked over all our essays, congratulating us too enthusiastically for being good students for once. But I knew, of course, that they were happy to get away from whatever they’d been doing, if it was for family. I didn’t know if in the books the Weasley’s got together like this often or at all, but I thought it was nice... and hopefully it would enable me to protect them all better, if they were more together than before.

It was rare, and I loved it, when I managed to hang around my family. Sometimes, it seemed like all my time was eaten away by Slytherin things and Seer-business — I barely spoke to Luna, I barely spoke to my twin sister. And with how close Fred and George were, it made me a bit sad... shouldn’t Gin and I be closer?

Then again, Padma and Pavarti Patil didn’t seem to be seen together at all and they were actually identical... so many twins, all over the place. Was it just more commonplace in Britain? ‘Cos I never saw any bloody twins when I was an American Muggle.

Fred was suddenly poking around in my bag.

I made an indignant sound and slapped his hands away. “Stay out! I ward my things, you idiot, you might get hurt!”

Fred grinned sheepishly and brought up bruised fingers. “Too late, Lyssiekins.”

I rolled my eyes and did a few Aresco Contusa’s — bruise-healing spells, worked only for very light and generally harmless bruises on the skin — for my stupid brother. “Honestly, there’s nothing that important to you in there. Just a bit of... notes. Among other things.”

George waggled his eyebrows. “Other things?”

“Slytherin things,” I said defensively.

(Sollertia Augurium was in there. Along with a file folder for some paperwork. I was still trying, after all these weeks, to calm down the Beaumont-Lynwood situation. And, of course, another notebook on Legilimency and Occlumency with direct references to Sirius Black and Helvynya Prevett and Peter Pettigrew. Good god, I needed to up my wards with that sort of delicate information being carried around with me.)

“So toast is a strictly Slytherin thing, then?” Fred asked, bringing up a few pieces of toast that I’d stuck in there under a Stasis Charm this morning. I had a certain obsession with plain, buttered toast, so that was for me, but Harper had given me an idea earlier in Potions...

I laughed. “That’s for Squiddy.”

Even Percy looked up from what he was doing (marking Gin’s essay). “Squiddy?” he asked skeptically.

“Harper named him that,” I answered.
Ginny looked wounded. "Why?"

Ron snickered. "Because Harper, Gin, what else?"

Rolling my eyes again, I plucked the cold toast from my bag and peeled my shoes and socks off. The demon twins followed after me curiously, but stopped just at the edge of the water of the Black Lake. I waded in, the water up to my knees — cold as fuck, of course, fucking late springs — when I finally stopped.

"SQUIDDY! I’VE GOT SOME TOAST FOR YOU, BUDDY!" I shouted.

(Yes. That is exactly how Harper called him, in the dorm windows.)

(I didn’t know if it liked toast. I certainly liked toast, so… Hopefully the Squid would love me. I wasn’t a Care of Magical Creatures connoisseur the way Charlie was, but I really, really liked animals; that was something that didn’t change from last life to this one. Also, Giant Squid. Giant Squid.)

Fred and George were absolutely delighted when the Giant Squid docilely let me pet his tentacles in exchange for toast and a story about Harper coming to visit him soon. The thing loved Harper. Loved him. And obviously Harper loved it back. I was quite pleased that I used my favor from Josie for meeting the Giant Squid.

It must’ve made a strange picture, when all six of us Weasley’s went into the shallows of the lake — because Ron absolutely refused to go any further; he still held a deep-seated fear of large bodies of water, after all, and the fact that he pushed himself just to hang about us was testament enough to his attachment to his siblings — bare-foot and with rolled up pants (for the boys), tossing pieces of toast at Squiddy and laughing as George was “accidentally” tripped and came out soaked.

I’m rather sure Squiddy was going to be visited by the demon twins a lot from now on.

It was... nice. Rare moments. It reminded me why I was going through all this stupid shit in the first place. To defend and do what was best for me and mine, and what was fair for everyone else. My siblings were the first ones I ever claimed as mine, the catalysts of almost everything I do. I might’ve distanced myself slightly, buried in work, but I wouldn’t forget this.

Spring was slow to come, but it was coming. And once it passed, I had a rat to catch and a future war hero to provide for. My path was set.

... 

“I think I’m actually going to cry.”

Nate scoffed, but there was an amused glint to his eyes. “Don’t be melodramatic, Lys.”

I stared at him. He looked perfectly smug and relaxed, lounging in Jay’s armchair. The Slytherin commons were sparse for Slytherins, and evidently it relaxed him enough to burrow into my pillows — that he stole from my couch! — And blankets; something he avoided, citing “clashing imagery” or some rot. Or maybe he was just as relieved as I was; his dark, reddish colors were swirlier than normal, which I equated with extremely pleased, a little bit excited.
“Nate,” I said, “We finished the entire Memory Ward chapter. It took us two months.”

He squinted at me. “You act as if that’s slow. By the progress we had before, we were almost seven times faster to translate this section, which is considerably more difficult than her childhood diaries.”

I threw my hands up. “I get that! I was the one who set us that demanding pace, after all. But we’re finally done. That’s one less thing for us to focus on — maybe we’ll make some progress with the Patronus?”

Nate grunted, and it sounded like he was a bit too late to hold back a groan. “My core is not the largest, and it is as Dark as it can get…I rather think you, Jay, and I won’t quite be able to master it at the moment.”

“Or you’re embarrassed that Dietrich’s made more progress than you.”

“Hush, Lys.”

“With reason,” I continued, ignoring Nate and taking one of the few chances we all had to tease him, “He practices harder than anyone, the protective git. His core’s smaller than yours, a Grey edging on Dark, but he’s got wisps of Patronus white already. I know for a fact that the only reason he’s not bothering me about sneaking out at night is because he’s doing the same thing, practicing in the abandoned classroom.”

Nate gave me an odd look. “You admitted that rather easily.”

I leaned back into my quilts, rubbing at my eyes. (I had a headache building, but what else was new?) “You of all of us would know,” I reasoned, shrugging, “I have no clue what you use to get your creepily accurate information, that you later use to break brains and cause chaos, but I figured you’d be perfectly aware how little sleep I get.”

“That’s quite the compliment, from you,” Nate said.

“Also you’ve been letting me sleep in History of Magic, which you never do, so I figure you felt bad for me.”

He faltered. As he always did when someone accused him of being nice. “Ah. Well, we all go to bed by eleven, but I know you leave at twelve and tend not to come back until two or three in the morning. Feel free to imagine Lucas teasing you for your height and implying your poor health will lessen it.”

“Did you just…? You should’ve just said, ‘Insert short joke from Lu.’ or something… You didn’t even want to say it yourself…”

He scoffed again. ‘Lucas’ brand of humor is far too childish for my tastes.”

“You definitely laughed yesterday when Lu threw his shoe at Malfoy’s face.”

Nate smirked at the memory, and I did the same. That had been a beautiful sight. “Oh, I was laughing at the look on Malfoy’s face, believe me. It’s always a pleasure to see my first leader physically attack my second leader, as I watch sitting beside my third and final leader.”

I looked at Nate thoughtfully. “It actually really disturbs me that you’ve switched sides that much. Disturbs, but doesn’t surprise,” I told him mildly.
He pushed up his glasses carelessly, leaning his head into the armchair back. “Ah, not to worry, Lys. You’ll be the last I follow, I think.”

I hope, it almost sounded like.

Awwwww, Nate.

He glared at me suspiciously. “I don’t like that sappy smile on your face, Lyssie.”

“It’s nothing — you’re just being adorable.”

“As if you can describe Nathaniel as such,” scoffed a voice behind me.

I twisted around and grinned upside-down at my Second. He was trailing into the common room with Lu and Harper and Jay following, looking tired. Dietrich always looked tired these days, though, since as I said before, Dietrich was training his dueling as much as I was studying Legilimency. Tired and irritable, since he’d been relegated to fetching Lu and Harper back from Quidditch practice so we could hold court properly. Students were starting to filter into the commons anyways, getting out of clubs and such just about now.

“Don’t worry, you’re all adorable,” I replied, as Dietrich slumped into his couch corner on my right, Harper taking the left, Jay pouting at the fact that his favorite armchair was taken, and Lu taking a seat across.

“Why does everyone always steal my chair?” Jay sighed.

“I think the question is: Why do you like that chair so much?” Lu countered, kicking his feet up on the coffee table — Nate threw him a vicious glare and Levitated Solleritia Augurium and its now-hidden notes pages out of the way — “It honestly looks like something an evil git would sit in.”

Harper frowned at Jay’s chair. “It sort of does, Jay…”

(The chair was black leather and dark wood, tall and imposing, baroque-like decoration. It was also deceivingly comfortable; it looked like it’d be hard and cold, but it was really quite nice, and big enough for Jay to curl up in it to nap if he wanted — definitely large enough so he could draw.)

“Perfect for Nathaniel, then,” Dietrich murmured quietly.

Not quietly enough. Nate raised a brow. “So hostile, Dietrich. I thought we were friends.”

“If my reluctant tolerance of your irritating person is considered friends, then I suppose we are, Nathaniel.”

“Everyone else calls me Nate,” the boy in question complained, “Why do you call me that?”

“It is your name,” Dietrich replied flatly.

“I don’t like it!”

“I do not like you.”

Jay had quietly fumbled around Harper, bouncing in his seat and ranting about Quidditch practice with Lu animatedly, so that he could sit down in front of me, on the floor. It was the perfect height so I could lean over and reach his hair, and he could use the low-set coffee table as a surface to draw on. Which he did, and I did; his braid had gotten mussed over the course of the day, so I started combing it out gently. Jay acted like this was routine, which it was, and that was quite a far
cry from the first time I ever did his hair in the common room — little Jay had been so dreadfully embarrassed, it was adorable.

All my boys were adorable, dammit!

Then, a thought occurred to me out of nowhere. My boys… What would have become of them in canon? Would that have really just followed Malfoy and become junior Death Eaters? Would Dietrich really have left England, disappeared into Germany or France forever? Did canon Harper know how to cast a Patronus? Did canon Jay braid his hair back the way mine did? …Did my boys even exist in canon at all?

A world without my boys…

Well. It was a damn good thing I was born into this version of this world. Without any of them… I wouldn’t want to imagine it.

“And what’s got our leader smiling about?” Lu asked, breaking from his ranting with Harper.

My fond smile widened into a grin. “I’m just happy you’re all here.”

“In the common room? Where else would we be?” Harper asked.

Lu’s face was a bit pink when he chucked a pillow at Harper’s face. “Shut up, Harper! You idiot. Lyssie’s being all sentimental and girly.” He turned to me, grimacing. “Saying things like that in public, you bloody Gryff.”

I raised a brow. “It’s not like I confessed my undying love for you, Lu.”

“Better not say that, Lyssie. Dietrich might duel me for your hand or something.”

“-can’t shorten my name- Wait. Lucas! *Ta gueule!* I DO NOT fancy Lys, when will you *understand* this?!” Dietrich hissed.

Nate’s face lit up like a Christmas tree. “Oh? Our Second fancied Lyssie?”

Harper laughed. “Yeah! He-”

“Say anything and I’ll kill you, Harper.”

“-definitely fancied her in first year for a bit. Got all moon-eyed whenever she taught us new spells and had to guide his wand movements, you know? Lu paid that Creevey bloke to lend his camera and develop a picture for it-”

“YOU DID WHAT?”

“Shut up, Harper! You gave it away! Idiot!”

Nate was laughing his ass off. “HA! THAT’S PATHETIC!”

“You are dead, Wilkes.”

“Ow, Lu, stop hitting me! Dietrich, hide me!”

“You as well, Harper.”

Meanwhile, Lu and I — for some reason, we were exempt from Dietrich’s irritation — were
cracking up, and though Jay was being calm and blissfully ignorant of our shenanigans as usual, I knew he was smiling. His usual timid colors, deep and dark and heavy, were trilling with amusement; it was an echo of the vibrant amusement of Lu’s bold, dare I say Gryffindor-ish colors, and my own overwhelming indigo-crimson, but it was there. All our colors were swirling around, the humming music harmonizing oddly but familiarly.

I gazed at the chaos of colors thoughtfully.

When I first saw Sirius Black, as a Grimm, his colors were all dulled and blackened, glassy with madness, wilting. I hadn’t really looked at them since; he was much better, mentally and physically, now. I wondered if his core was better now, nourished with Hogwarts meals and proper Occlumencic meditation and actual conversation — even if it was with a little girl — on a daily basis. I wondered how his happiness would be reflected in his magic when I told him we could finally begin the Memory Lock technique.

(I wondered when I’d unconsciously sorted Sirius Black into the “me and mine category”.)

(What is it with me and harboring enemies of Harry Potter?)

... 

“Conjoined is too difficult-”

“Yes, I agree, Conjoined Memory Wards wouldn’t work.”

“Because our skill levels and minds have to be in sync, and I’m not sure how well that’ll go…”

“Yes, a 12-year-old, mentally sound, amateur Legilimens performing a Conjoined Memory Ward with a 34-year-old, half-mad Azkaban-escapee… Brilliant assessment, Lyssie.”

“Don’t take that tone with me, Black. I’ll have Tilly put peppers in your next meal.”

“Oh god, no.”

We both took a moment to pause, assessing the papers and notes strewn around us, lit by floating candles. It was nearing Easter, and we’d already determined that one of our Legilimencic wards was out of the running. Conjoined Memory Wards were much more difficult to mess with, though that wasn’t the best option — I was too unskilled and Sirius was too unstable to go at Memory Wards alone right now. But, again, it required minds on a matching “frequency” as Prevett put it, and we weren’t going to take the very large chance that we were not of the same frequency. Prevett tested it — quite an advocate of the Imperius, along with gruesome threats towards loved ones and such — and found the least severe effect of mismatching frequencies was a coma.

I didn’t really want to think about the most severe effect. I wasn’t really sure that such a result was isolated, since Prevett was not only an Imperius fan, but a Cruciatius fan as well. Might’ve been a mix of lots of horrible things.

So with Conjoined out of the way, that left us to our little race again… Who would do the honors? Would Sirius get his head on straight before the time came, or would I get skilled enough to make the ward myself? It was uncertain, and one thing Slytherins and Slytherin-raised learned, Important Plans should never be laid out uncertainly. One may have several versions, to account for different
variables, but uncertainty was just an invitation for Murphy’s Law.

I glanced at my partner in crime.

Sirius’ headspace was much better now. After I told him things about Harry, he got a lot better with Occlumency. He’d blank out sometimes, start getting confused and distracted and rambling, but I could pull him out of it through *Legilimency* now, which was much more efficient than giving him chocolate and waiting for him to sort through it himself. He was much healthier now, and I was glad of it. His colors were brighter, too; the maroons weren’t as fragile, as glassy, and there was a hint of gold in his crackling strings.

Sirius startled suddenly, diving to one of the papers on his right.

“What? What is it?”

He looked up at me, pointing at the notes. “An anchor! You—You need an anchor to your mind, right?”

I nodded, seeking out more copied pages from that section of the ward. (These copies would disappear soon, as was the nature of *Geminio* without a permanency or stasis ritual.)

“Depending on how deep you go into the target mind’s memories, you’ll need an anchor to your own mind so you don’t get lost. Apparently that can happen, and then there’s some creepy Multiple Personality Disorder thing that’ll go on if you do.”

“Stuck in Pettigrew’s body…”

I shivered. “Ergh. Yeah. Depending on the target mind’s strength, or if they are an Occlumens, or if they are particularly creative, etc., the anchor might take form. If you’re able to form yourself in their head, you might carry a totem with you, or you might have a distinguishing mark, or maybe it’ll be a very obvious door… It’s all very subjective. Whatever. Something to lead you back.”

“And that’s the effect of the runic circles we have to carve into your solar plexus and forehead, yes? Sanctify a branch of sage, crush it into powder, mix with fairy eggs, add snapdragons and peach leaves to dye it, draw the runes in those places. Add a bit of your physical object, your anchor, and it’s stronger…”

“Yeah. Helvynya Prevette usually made her prisoners add a bit of metal from their shackles or something of theirs they treasured, just so they’d recall themselves. The ritual objects… Yes, those are easily obtainable. There’s a breakdown of the runic circles, too, somewhere around. Let me tell you, Sirius, it was a bitch to translate that — I don’t even *take* Ancient Runes yet…”

“What about this part here?”

I peered at the paper he was waving in front of my face. “Spillage effect? Your anchor connects to you, and you to your anchor. Prevette says that the caster felt closer to their anchor after that; the bloke who used his wand had stronger magic for a while, and the lady who used a tree said something about being able to feel her roots and such, wouldn’t eat for weeks, saying the sunlight was enough. Said it was sort of like magic transference — temporary, but very strong. Which is why she liked using the shackles, the sadistic bitch—”

“What if we mixed the dye with our blood or hair?”

I froze.
What if I was your anchor, or you were mine?

That…

Prevett detailed that there was a caster who used their favorite hunting hound as his anchor. Mixed one of the dog’s fangs, ground to powder, into the dye. Stated that when the prisoner was in the target mind, he felt feral and aggressive and unsure. The effect followed him out even when he followed his anchor out and the dye was rubbed away, though it seemed to have faded within a few weeks. Prevett didn’t recommend it because the man had been quite confused, unable to draw lines between his thoughts and the hound’s instincts.

The man wasn’t an Occlumens. Sirius and I both were, even if one of us was a little spotty and the other only had barriers thanks to a cambion. Point is, we knew how to block things out if we put in a bit (a lot) of effort. And we dove into each other’s heads so often, I knew Sirius’ mind pretty damn well, and vice versa. A few weeks with a (mostly) human friend, and…

He could help me do the Memory Lock from far away. Or I could make sure he didn’t lose his shit.

“There’s a lot that can go wrong. We have to test it first,” I muttered.

“On who?”

My first thought was my boys. That was dismissed easily enough — I promised myself I would never invade their privacy as grossly and insensitively as I had before. That hadn’t turned out well, after all. My brothers were out. Ginny, too. I’d rather not subject Luna to that. The House Elves were too kind and I didn’t really want staff loyal to Alby to know about Sirius just yet. I wasn’t sure if animals would be the same… Who was available to us? Who was willing? Who would be the safest, both to do this to and to trust with Sirius Black?

There was… one person. Sort of. Kinda. Maybe.

“You remember if Legilimency works on ghosts?” I asked Sirius.

He frowned — he always had a tough time remembering things, but as we weren’t speaking of happy things really, Sirius wasn’t so bad. “I… I think so. All it needs is a mind and eye-contact. Magic should… Magic should supply the rest, even if the nervous system is just an echo of a real one…”

I grimaced to myself. “Well… I think I have a sort of… ally. Who I can ask. No- No guarantees.”

Sirius frowned. “As long as it’s not… the ghost who put a bucket on Remus’ head, yes…? No, no, sorry, I- I lost myself a bit there. The ghost. Peeves. I think I can… You’re friends with a ghost? Wait. No. Why. Why are you friends with your House ghost?”


Entertainment enough to fill a century.

“He’s a Slytherin, isn’t he…? He’ll ask for something in return. Slytherins- You- They always do. They always get something in return-” His eyes started to go hazy and dark, and I instinctively knew a bad memory had surfaced.

I put my hand on his arm gently. “Occlude, Sirius.”
He swallowed visibly, eyes focusing again and training themselves on my hand, and seemed to bring himself back. “Right, sorry about that.”

I shook my head. “Never mind that, Sirius. Let’s make sure we have everything we need, everything planned. I’ll worry about our ghost test subject.”

“Lys… The Bloody Baron, I ask you…”

“Hush. Don’t judge my allies. Your only one is a girl half your age and size.”

“…I resent that.”

I snorted. “No, you don’t.”

Sirius laughed. “You’re right! I don’t.”

He blinked into the middle-distance. I warily sat straighter; that was the sign of his memories taking him over… The good sort. There was dementor relapses, like Sirius self-triggering himself back into Azkaban like earlier, and there was remembering relapses, where a flood of good memories assaulted him trying to combat possible dementor relapses. Sirius’ head was all sorts of unbalanced when he wasn’t ready for it; and he essentially went through intense exposure therapy with me, insisting that dancing around subjects for the sake of his sanity wasn’t the important thing right now. He had to learn how to snap himself out of it sooner or later, so I waited and watched first.

“…Uncle Sevens… he… She- She’s very nice, I think. Uncle Sevens didn’t know- he didn’t- All he knew was that you were a Clairvoyant who’d help… not her, not the Mind Eater, she’s not- she’s not- she’s… Lys… Uncle Sevens would be very- Ergh- He’s- He’d be very pleased that his- his great-granddaughter… took after him. You- Lys is- Yes. That’s it- I’m alright, don’t move, Lys, I’m- I remembered, in the end.”

I sighed in relief. Sirius got lost there, but he got himself back.

“Huh. I wonder if we couldn’t make some variation of the anchor for you, to keep you from falling into your own memories so often.” I mused aloud, deciding to let Sirius quietly revel in his success.

He looked up intriguingly. (He would be interested in that.) “Maybe when we’re done with the Memory Wards,” he said hopefully.

I grinned. “And you’re free, and Harry invites Ron and me to your house. They can go and play Quidditch, while we can go and break our brains.”

Sirius looked shocked and awed and elated. “You really think… You think he’ll want to… with me- he’ll- You think Harry will live with me?”

I smiled at my… friend? (Merlin, it was so weird to have a friend who was just a slight younger than my actual father.) “Ask him and you’ll see, won’t you?”

_You’re going to speak to your godson, Sirius._

“Oh. Right, I- I could… ask him.”

_I never thought I’d be able to. I never thought I’d be able to remember him._

“Yes, well. C’mon, then. Let’s get to work.”
So you can speak to him sooner.

It should’ve probably been alarming that I could communicate with Sirius Black like this; two conversations, only one spoken aloud. Dietrich and I did that, but he was *Dietrich* — my best mate. Ginny and I used to do that, but we were sort of… on vastly different frequencies, now. Sirius Black and I were just Mind Arts buddies.

…At least this was a step up from the cambion, right?

…”

“So the *regina potestae parvae* deigns to speak with me at last.”

The Bloody Baron looked as he always had. Pale chains, silvery blood, tattered robes, a solemn face. There was a certain glimmer of amusement in his eyes, sometimes, which was a stark contrast to the usual emptiness or bitterness, but it was shallow. He wasn’t quite as towering this time, though I suppose that was because I was just a bit taller than our last meeting. It had nearly been a year since I’d spoken to the ghost.

“So apologies,” I began formally, “It was a difficult transition.”

“Oh, I know this. I watched… *Duabus ex tribus*.”

“Feels like it was a long time ago, actually,” I mused.

An echoey chuckle. “A feeling I — and all of my fellows who haunt these halls — know well, young reincarnation.”

The Bloody Baron studied me. It was ironic, but we were standing in the second floor hallway where Tom Riddle had once used Draco Malfoy’s body to paint red on the walls. Moaning Myrtle was background noise, her sobbing punctuated by short shrieks, which was the reason the hallway was so empty, even being the middle afternoon. Sunlight streamed through the windows, but the Bloody Baron’s proximity to me made it cold.

(Not dementor-cold, but… cool. Quiet.)

“I never thanked you,” I said softly, “for keeping my secrets. For silencing Myrtle.”

He looked unimpressed, gliding an inch or so backwards. “You do not thank another for a business transaction. You have more than fulfilled your part of our silent bargain. My word is all I have now, in this unlife… I have kept it.”

I gave a curt nod. “It’s only polite. I appreciate it.”

“Hm. And what, young reincarnation, have you approached the Bloody Baron for? Do not think I have not noticed… You have avoided speaking to me. A rather poor practice, when facing those who have much to offer.”

Ugh. That was very true. I was a very bad Slytherin, avoiding our House ghost. “I tend to get nervous when you know my greatest secret and I don’t quite know if I’m entertaining enough to keep it that way.”
“Ah, but young Slytherin, you have.” The Bloody Baron smiled. It was not a kind smile. “It has been a long time indeed, since I’ve seen a collector like you are.”

“How long ago it seems… We called your type of soul, nīðdraca hwa déoreþ sé byrstigne hord — dragon who loves the broken hoard.” The Bloody Baron chuckled a little. “Sometimes… þæs eordcynn ymbhammen be forsuncenan heofoncandel. The earth surrounded by faded stars. Collector of shattered, unwanted things. Shattered, unwanted souls.”

How dare this-

I felt my jaw clench. “Do not call those I call mine… shattered or unwanted.”

Because you have remade them, and want them, young reincarnation… they love you for it, and will never leave because of it, and thus you have created for yourself a broken hoard that will always stay with its dragon.” He glanced at me. “Oh? I do not mean offense, young snake.”

“It sure doesn’t seem like it,” I said behind gritted teeth.

The Bloody Baron drifted closer, raising his hand to my face, fingers just skimming my cheekbone. It was cold and odd to feel, but I let the ghost do as he wanted; the Bloody Baron was studying me again, more closely, and I was about to ask a favor. No matter how irritated I was at his insults towards mine, I had to think of them first. A Memory Lock on Pettigrew benefited me, yes, but it was mostly for Harry and Sirius’ sake.

(If they weren’t mine, I would kill the little fuck and be done with it. I’d make it work. I think I’d made enough choices to balance out my death, to sooth Fate and guide her into that sort of direction. Alas… I made things harder for myself.)

Worth it.)

“So, girl? What is it you desire from the dead?”

I straightened, raising my chin proudly. I wasn’t speaking to one of mine, or a parvus, or just a year mate. I was asking something from a soul older than Helvynya Prevett, possibly older than Hogwarts, if only by a little bit. The Bloody Baron had no reason to comply with my request other than his own entertainment — I’d have to take advantage of that one thing.

“Would I be able to buy your silence with a story? And once you’ve heard the story, I think you’ll know what I want from you.”

Draw him in. He’s a bored ghost. He’s a bored ghost I want something from.

“Oh? A story, you say…?”

“The story of a man who was framed for murder, who has known two Clairvoyants in his lifetime well enough to receive aid twice over. I want a sort of underdog on top ending to this one, and it all rather depends on you.”

“Hm… Infuriatingly intriguing, young reincarnation. You know this.”

I smiled. He was humoring me for now. “It gets better. Your silence, first, if you please.”

The Blood Baron’s silvery eyes were calculating. “My silence and my word of it, then. Tell your
tale, then, girl. Ah… And it would please you to know, that my judgement of you has not been proven wrong. So young, to hold such power and political prowess… and how you manipulate others. Yes, niðdraca hwa déoreþ sé byrstigne hord… My silence.”

And his silence I had, as I spoke about Sirius Black and Peter Pettigrew and the technique from Helvynya Prevett. Of Septimus Weasley leading his favorite great-nephew to his great-granddaughter. Of Legilimency and Occlumency and an anchor drawn into our foreheads and chests mixed with the other’s blood. Of how my choices this year had slowly been leading to the option of incarcerating Pettigrew, and how that option necessitated a Memory Lock. Of all these things, of how I’d had to meditate with Sirius to the point where I’d been strangling myself and seeing spots in my vision from blood loss, just to make sure Fate was content with the path I’d shifted her on.

The Bloody Baron listened in silence, and thought in it, too. The light was slanting and the shadows were growing and Myrtle still crying by the time I’d finished speaking, and the Baron left his thoughts. He blinked at me slowly, reminding me of a snake assessing the mouse before it.

“You will know my life story, young reincarnation,” he said emotionlessly.

“I already sort of do,” I answered, gazing at the bloodstains and quietly shifting chains.

The Bloody Baron wasn’t an idiot. “I had suspected. A vision, then.” He nodded in acceptance.

I didn’t break my eyes from his. “Your answer?”

“I’m inclined to give it. I simply desire payment, in return.”

No relief yet — I stayed tense. “And that would take the form of…?”

He leaned closer. “Nothing difficult. An answer to my own question, young Seer… You know of my crime, of my sin. Of her. Tell me… in the strands of Fate you See, is there a thread I might follow… a choice I might make… where I…”

“Does she forgive you in any version of the future?” I finished quietly.

He stared at me. Waiting.

I slowly shut my eyes, centering myself, drawing my magic in. It was tired and cranky, overused and thin, but I coaxed it into my core and tried to smooth its edges best I could; blended the indigo and blues of the center, let them flow gently into the dark borders, into the black, tinged with red. The silver threads were like spider strings, faded, but I wound them around softly, touching at the crimson fondly, the color pulsing with life even as the rest of my magic sighed.

Once more, I whispered, and then we can rest.

My magic, its strands knitted tightly into my soul, obliged.

“I stole the diadem. I sought to make myself cleverer, more important than my mother. I ran away with it. My mother, they say, never admitted that the diadem was gone, but pretended that she had it still. She concealed her loss, my dreadful betrayal, even from the other founders of Hogwarts.”

Stop.

Fingers brushing through dark hair, loving smile, crinkled eyes — “Helena, Helena, mín hyldemség dóchter,” sang the woman with a crown on her brow — grey eyes endlessly watching.
He looked and looked, and she turned away each time, her hand touching the bloodstain on her chest where he’d — “You will never be forgiven. In this life and the next.” — “-ðú dædbana!” She was screaming, crying, his hands were grabbing, scrabbling for hair and cloth and slick with blood, it sunk into her breast and red came out like water — She turned away from him again.

Stop.

“Not yet. If ever.”

“Ah. I did not think otherwise.”

“…Your answer?”

“I will be waiting at the house of false ghosts, little reincarnation.”

I wiped blood from my mouth, cringing as my throat felt tight and my breath came less easily. I didn’t open my eyes. I’d be too tempted to See his colors, pale and faded as they were, and I didn’t want to look at heartbreak just yet. That was something I could do without seeing; it’s much harder to detach from someone when you see them break, you know. And this was my triumph — I’d gotten the ally we needed — even if it didn’t quite feel like it.

When my eyes opened, he was, predictably, gone. I sighed to myself, cringing as I coughed blood into my elbow. This was another reason I avoided the Bloody Baron. There was a permanent veil of misery and bitterness surrounding him, and no matter how I spoke to him, he always left that behind with him. Like a dementor, on a lesser scale, and without deriving nourishment or enjoyment from it.

I clicked my tongue. “Great. Now I need to go find Harper and Lu or Harry or the demon twins.”

And those fuckers would make me go fly or something. The twins and Lu had been so pouty since they witnessed me in the air with Harry. I wasn’t sure if they were upset about me riding a Firebolt or if they were pissed I finally decided flying was okay but it wasn’t through their direct efforts. Probably the first one, the idiots.

I smiled a little to myself. Cheered me up already, even thinking about seeing them all. I’d need that, diving into the Bloody Baron’s head alongside Sirius Black. Good lord.
Chapter 35

Chapter Summary

Welp, this is a tad bit late for the time of day (in my area of the world, at least) but here it is! I'm almost done with chapter 36 and I've got a hazy plan for the rest of the year, so hopefully this'll be one of the last few filler-ish chapters. XD Unfortunately not beta'ed except by yours truly, but I hope it's clean enough. :)

As always, thank you to everyone who follows this fic. It honestly astounds me how much support I get for it, and how much the plot and worldbuilding and characters are loved. ′) And I hate to be one of those authors, but I assure you, comments really get me off my ass to write, which is increasingly difficult these days, so I appreciate any and all comments. XD Thank you guys so much for the love, though, whatever you can spare.

With that, enjoy the chapter! :)

... 

To my shame, there were a lot of things I had to neglect in order to do everything I needed this year.

My choice, working towards any crueler Fate for Peter Pettigrew, it guided me towards my boys and my Slytherins. The parvus potentia was all I could handle for the first half of the year, trying to get my Slytherins under control and carve a seat of power. And as I was doing that, my Occlumency shields were deteriorating without my notice, and I had been on the verge of being as imbalanced and half-mad as I’d been when I was a child and nightmares were all I knew, besides the soothing voices and soft hands of my family.

So then Occlumency over winter Hols took my time, and when I came back with a much calmer and stronger mind, Sirius Black was suddenly there. So now my time was eaten by Legilimency, tearing down my Occlumency shields again, and keeping an eye on Fate and how she was reacting to all the work I’d done over the year… It was a tangled mess and I neglected a lot of things, a lot of issues, and a lot of people to get what I needed done.

My letters to Bill and Charlie were… Yeah. No, Percy took those over, and it was all I could do to drop by the Gryffindor table to sign off on those, and letters to Mum and Dad that he more often wrote. Luna hadn’t seen me in weeks; I’d send “presents” to her tormentors once in a while to remind them of who I was, but I hadn’t managed to speak to her — the only reason I knew she was alright was Josie keeping tabs through her Ravenclaw contacts, and Nate having the ‘Claw firsties report to him on my behalf. I honestly don’t think I’ve done tutoring in weeks — everyone else banded together to take care of that. Healing? I still sucked at it. Ward schemes? A few doodles here and there, but nothing compared to the studying I’d down last year. Drawing? A joke.
Oh, and I can’t forget the last one I neglected:

Draco Malfoy.

Once I steamrolled over him for the parvus, he sort of fell to the wayside. Him and all his camp; they weren’t bullied or anything, but I kept them away from my first circle and the younger, more impressionable kids, and I kept assigning them separate escort groups and tutoring sessions and mentors. Keep them apart, keep them from plotting, was the idea. Hadn’t heard anything from Malfoy or his followers since I beat him, really.

Which is why I was rather surprised when I ran into him.

I blinked at Malfoy, who blinked back.

“Who had the gall to hit you?” I blurted out, too surprised and uncaring of the audience to really slip into the regina persona.

We were just passing each other in the corridors, but I couldn’t help but notice the bruise on his face and the dried blood he was rubbing from his nose. He had Crabbe and Goyle with him, as usual, and I happened to be alone, trying to get to History of Magic before Nate had my head. Boy loved his history, he did.

Malfoy sneered at me. “Move along, Weasley, I’ve had to suffer looking at too many of you already.”

“Weak, Malfoy. Weakest you’ve ever given me.” I tutted, shaking my head.

(Because, obviously, if I could annoy Malfoy, I would. It was just a rule. Dad would be ashamed if I did anything less.)

A glare. “You ought to get to class, Weasley. Merlin knows your family needs all the workers it gets. D’your brothers even keep half their pay, supporting the hovel you live in?”

I ignored the insult and smiled brightly, channeling my inner Harper and telling my pissier side to shut up. “There you are! But really, who hit you? Was it a girl? Is that why you won’t say? You wizards and your patriarchal ideals and pride, really.”

Malfoy sneered again. “I don’t have the breath to waste on you. Piss off!”

I crossed my arms, grinning. “Is it because you used that breath running away from the girl who hit you? You might need to start exercising, Malfoy, I think I see her behind you now.”

He almost turned, but caught himself and narrowed his eyes at me. “Malfoy’s aren’t afraid of anyone, including little girls who can’t keep their fat mouths shut. Move along Weasley.”

“Proud of that one, are you, Malfoy?” I taunted, “Do you write your snipes in your diary, hide them away ‘til the day we...”

I trailed off. Malfoy had gone very, very pale — the bruise on his face was vivid because of it. His eyes seemed to glaze over, just a little bit. I jolted at the sight, because I really recognized that look in his eyes; Sirius Black used to have that same look. Distant eyes, struggling to return to the present, pale skin and shaking hands. Crabbe and Goyle shifted uncomfortably behind him, looking nervous as I stared at Malfoy. Why had he-

Wait.
I’d said… ‘diary.’

Fuck.

(I blame Sirius entirely for what happened next.)

A smooth, fluid movement had me near Malfoy, but not near enough for him to be able to lash out. My hand reached out and gently pushed his hand up, turning it over so the palm was facing me, shaking and clammy. I made sure not to encircle or trap him in any way, and pushed chocolate into his hands. Crabbe and Goyle were giving me very odd looks, much more baffled-looking than they normally were, but I pushed Malfoy's filled hands to his throat, being very careful not to startle him.

“Eat that, alright? It’ll make you feel better. Not poisoned, I promise. It’s chocolate. Just let it melt in your mouth, you’ll feel better, promise.” I murmured lowly, eyes darting from his hands to his face.

What I didn’t expect was for Malfoy to instantly come back. Sirius’ case, he had to be coaxed out; the cloudiness of being trapped in the past took sometimes up to half an hour to clear. Malfoy snapped back to reality as soon as I spoke to him, grey eyes clearing and widening and meeting mine. We blinked at each other again, and I felt myself flush a little as I jerked back and got out of his space, looking at my traitorous hands.

Why… The little shit was *parvus*, sure, but he was a git and not Sirius Black — why did I treat him like he was???

When I looked up, he was gazing determinedly to the left with his hands at his sides. There was something in his mouth, and I would bet anything it was chocolate. The chocolate I gave him, because I thought he was very much like Sirius Black for a nanosecond of my time. Ergh. A Malfoy being one of mine…

Fuck, I was *losing* it.

“What are you playing at?” he demanded, still not meeting my eyes.

I felt the embarrassment hard. Oh my god, I’d just been nice to *Git Lord* here.

“I said the… It’s not like I was a huge prat on purpose, you know! I never mention that sort of thing around Dietrich, and you were the one who was actually… Anyways. It was crappy for me to say so I made up for it without thinking, Malfoy. Don’t mention it. Ever.”

He finally looked at me, snapping, “I don’t want your pity!”

This little… “It’s not bloody pity, you stupid bastard, it’s common decency! Don’t you snap at me!”

“Then don’t pity me, cow! I’m not your pathetic gargoyle of a Second, needing coddling to feel better about myself! Unlike you and your entirely too codependent camp, I am strong enough to see past my challenges alone.”

“Doesn’t mean I’m allowed to just walk all over your issues as I like! If we were dueling or in front of my *potesta* members that’d be different, but I was literally about to pass you in the hall — Sorry I have bloody morals, Malfoy! Shut up and stop talking about it!” I hissed, feeling paranoid all of a sudden that someone would pass through this hallway and see me being *nice* to Malfoy.
Forget the Sirius Black or the cambion thing, Dad would murder me in my sleep if he knew about this.

“You’re an idiot, Weasley.”

“Want a matching set of bruises, Malfoy? I’m not left-handed, but I could manage something.”

“As if you could muster the strength. Slytherin knows how often you’re in the Hospital Wing.”

…I knew how to throw a punch. That’s one of the first things Bill made sure I knew how to do. Me and Ginny both knew how to punch someone, because we were pretty cute kids back then. All sorts of bad things happened to cute kids who had a tendency to run around amuck. I could do it. Punch him. I was weak and sickly in this life, but I’m sure I could spare a little energy to deck Draco Malfoy. If Hermione could do it — because I know it was her who did this, what a girl, that Hermione, I really should be better friends with her — then so could I…

“Bloody barbarian, of course you’d actually want to.” Malfoy muttered, probably to himself.

I frowned at him.

Honestly, I’d really forgotten about him. Not entirely, of course, but I’d delegated since I’d stepped up as parvus potesta reigning, and if I wasn’t incorrect, Jay was the one I asked to keep an eye on him and his camp, since Jay wouldn’t take advantage of power over Malfoy like I know Dietrich or Lu would. Or Harper, on behalf of the other two. Nate was no question, obviously, he messed with anything that could feel irritation. So basically, Malfoy was someone else’s responsibility since I’d dueled and defeated him.

He was… quieter. I mean, since the beginning of this entire year, he’d been quieter than in my first year; but he owed me a pseudo-Life Debt and he been honoring that. Kinda. Is what Zabini the younger told me. And I’d sort of trampled over it in my quest to take his throne, but Malfoy hadn’t made any fuss. Jay assured me that he was simply licking his wounds, and Nate confirmed the same, but I really expected… more? Sure, he pissed my brother off on a daily, but honestly, a Malfoy in close proximity with a Weasley was just going to do that. The odd thing was, Malfoy had done nothing to me.

(…I wondered if he remembered what it was like, if it hurt, if he realized, to feel his magic and control being ripped away from him by the same, calm voice who sympathized with all his trials and congratulated his triumphs.)

I grabbed my wand from its holster at my side and flicked it at Malfoy before he realized. Crabbe and Goyle flinched at the movement, and one of them growled as soon as my spells were whispered, stepping forward. Malfoy himself had winced backward, hands covering his face.

The spells I’d said were, Aresco Contusa, Episkey, and Scourgify.

“Wait!” Malfoy said sharply.

Crabbe-or-Goyle paused, all of us looking at him. His hands lowered. The bruise on his face withered, if there had been a bleeding injury it healed, and the blood was cleaned off. No proof at all that Hermione Granger decked him.

He glowered at me. “What are you doing.”

Brava, I thought to myself. He’d probably trained with Snape over the summer, right? Occlumency? He had that same ‘I’m asking a question without any inflection and I demand an
answer’ sort of vibe, though I wasn’t intimidated at Malfoy of all people.

(...I wondered what exactly the diary whispered to him, how desperate and angry and aching he must have been, to have trust the barest touch of his soul to it, a touch that became controlling fingers, fistfuls of magic that was his but was taken anyways, taken and taken and taken and only empty words in given in return — what did it feel like, knowing suddenly, seeing the hands gripping his soul and the nothing behind the friendly smiles?)

“Don’t mention the apology, and I don’t mention this.” I said matter-of-factly.

Malfoy looked supremely annoyed. “And neither of us mention that an actual civil conversation went on between us. Merlin knows the world will end if anyone believes it, anyways.”

I nodded. “I’ll agree, but only because I don’t want to cause any heart attacks.”

He sniggered, and then we both went very still, looking at each other.

“Oh Merlin, I actually laughed at something from your own mouth. What sort of Calming Charm did you put on me, Weasley?” muttered Malfoy.

I shook my head. “We never mention this. Bye, Malfoy, I’ll piss off now.”

“About time. I don’t know how long I’d’ve been able to stand the stench.”

“Not nearly as long as I’ve had to stand looking at your ugly face.” I called, trotting to class, knowing this would really piss Nate and Lu and Dietrich off once I told them. They were the ones who despised Malfoy the most of mine, after all.

(...I wondered if it was as heart-wrenching and horrifying as the panic and betrayal I felt, if he grieved for his lost friend, if he was furious that he left in the first place, if he was bewildered by all of these things, festering in his head and held back by string-thin Occlumency.)

... 

“It is not going to work, you know.”

I looked at Dietrich. He was looking at Bole, who was about to walk up to us. Just getting up the courage, I suppose, all surrounded by his friends and puffing his chest up as they spoke to him loudly. The din of the common room meant I couldn’t hear them, but I didn’t need to. He’d been looking twitchy for a while now, Bole.

“His bid for power? Of course not, a troll thinks faster than he does,” scoffed Lu offhandedly. He was lazing about on the couches to my right.

“True,” Dietrich agreed with an incline of his head, “But I was speaking of the Quidditch team. Trying to disable Potter before the next game. It will not work. I cannot believe Zabini is allowing her potesta to try. Wood is too cautious; Potter will have a guard.”

Ah, yes. The Slytherin Quidditch team was getting desperate and ridiculous, trying to injure Harry before the final. The only reason I wasn’t doing anything about it was that I knew it wouldn’t work, and I’d Seen Harry playing well enough without any interference.
I laughed. “Damn right he will. Wood’s insane.”

Lu sniffed indignantly. “Loving Quidditch doesn’t mean you’re insane.”

Harper grinned. “But you’re insane, so your opinion doesn’t count, Lulu!”

“STOP CALLING ME THAT, HARPER!”

Just as an inane argument was about to break out, Bole strode up to us proudly. We raised our heads as one; Dietrich and I looked cold, Lu and Nate smug, and Harper and Jay condescendingly smiling. Our normal roles, of course. Bole walked until he was standing right in front of where I was sitting, towering over me, those of his support standing off a ways — waiting. The seventh challenge this month by his camp, and finally I was getting the ringleader… how nice.

(Josie offered to put him down for me, but I had dismissed her. Had to fight my own battles. That, and owing Josie favors was the worst because she was a cunning little bastard, and I admired her all the more for it.)

“Leaves a sour taste in my mouth,” Bole started faux-casually, “to have a bloodtraitor at the top of the lesser control.”

I smiled sweetly. “Perhaps if I cursed out your tongue, you wouldn’t have any problems.”

(There was a spell for that. And the demon twins were just about to invent their Ton-Tongue Toffees, I’m sure Harper and I could modify the potion-base to suit our needs.)

Bole sneered. “Step down, Weasley. You’re no better than a Mudblood.”

Dietrich snarled in retaliation, “Which is still better than you, Bole. What position have you held in our House, that you believe you are better than us? You cannot take our control, not now; or can you not count?”

Harper snickered. “See, Bole, the lesser control is firsts through thirds. You’re a sixth, you can’t control us. 6 doesn’t go in between 1 and 3, see.”

“You do not deserve the power you hold, Weasley,” he seethed, throwing a nasty glare at a giggling Harper, “And you taint purebloods with your thoughts. Filth! You don’t even know what you’re doing!”

My eyes flashed. I didn’t like the implication that I was messing around, being the parvus potesta reigning. I worked my goddamn ass off all the time, keeping it together — we all did. And even if I didn’t know what I was doing, I put on a damn fine show of looking like I did, and I didn’t appreciate someone trying to sow seeds of doubt into my parvus.

“You’re just nervous for the Slytherin match,” Harper said before I could hiss something insulting, shaking his head, “It’s not healthy for you to be that obsessed, Bole. We were just talking about it here, how it’s rude that you tried to break up the inter-House Quidditch games we’ve been having recently.”

(The ones Harry kickstarted and Lu and Harper continued to arrange. Something to keep them busy and flying.)

“And I suppose you all, traitors you are, will support Gryffindor?” he hissed.

“I’m on the Quidditch team reserves,” Lu muttered incredulously, “I’m one of the Chasers, how
has he not remembered this?"

Harper snorted at him, covering his grin with his hands.

“We support our friends and allies,” Nate intoned more loudly, lips curling into his smirk that said something along the lines of ‘I’m-going-to-kill-you-slowly-so-just-wait-for-it’, “If you can’t tell, Bole, you’re on neither list. Besides... if you made it on the team, I can’t imagine our House winning.”

Bole rose up to his full height. It would’ve been intimidating if I were alone, since he was built like a Beater and a gorilla’s lovechild. “When the magnus potesta celebrates the Cup, I will watch you all fall out of power and into the filth you deserve.”

“I’m fairly certain I’m watching you make a fool of yourself, Bole,” I said coolly, “I’ll be supporting mine. Lucas Vaisey, Tristan Harper, and Harry Potter are mine.” I smiled at him again.

“Those two are Vaisey and Harper, by the way. Slytherins. Oh, and Harry Potter is a Gryffindor. That’s both teams, Bole. Understand? Both.”

“Puttana!” he spat at me.

I twitched a little. “Was that Italian? Funny, I can say things in other languages, too. Va te faire foutre, idiot sans talent.”

Harper gasped. “Lyssie, where did you learn to swear like that?!”

“Dietrich.” I replied with a shrug.

Bole growled as someone whispered the translation into his ear. (‘Go fuck yourself, you talentless idiot.’ or something. I only knew bits and pieces of French.) He stepped forward, his wand in his hand but not drawn up yet. It was in bad taste to start a duel in the middle of the common room, where there were first years and stressed N.E.W.T. and O.W.L. students.

“You think you’re funny, do you?” he snarled, “Little whore. I’ll be the one laughing when everyone figures out that you got to power the same way Zabini did: empty promises and your pretty face.”

“Aw, he thinks you’re pretty!” Harper laughed.

“Shut up, Harper.” Bole bit out. The words were harsher, different, when it wasn’t one of us saying them. Harper grinned in response to them, but it was a touch more feral this time, too many teeth.

I arched a brow. “Oh, laughing, are we? Well, then. Nate, just as we practiced?”

Nate grinned, wide and shark-like. “My pleasure, Lys. Rictumsempra.”

Bole burst into a fit of hysterical laughter as Nate’s overpowered Tickling Charm hit him, and Dietrich was a dear and Silencio’d him for us all. Nate didn’t let the Charm off, though, and we all watched with faces of boredom — though I noticed much of the room shrank back as they watched the scene — as Bole retreated backwards, stumbling all over his camp, collapsing and looking pained even as he laughed.

“Laughing that much isn’t good for you,” Jay commented airily, “You might suffocate, Bole.”

(Bravo, Jay, I thought to myself. He looked quite evil there, finally suiting his favorite chair. Very smug, but smiling prettily.)
Bole’s face began to redden. I nodded to Nate, who let off the charm and did well in concealing how much that had tired him — overpowering such a weak spell like that took quite a bit, after all. And Nate’s core wasn’t the largest; second smallest of all of us, actually. Dietrich took away the Silencing Charm, and the common room was filled with Bole’s gasping breaths.

“Don’t call me a whore again, Bole,” I said pleasantly.

Bole scurried off to his own friends, and it was a peaceful afternoon in the Slytherin dorms after that. The first-years couldn’t even look at me without flinching; I guess watching their supposed leader almost kill someone with a charm even *they* knew was a bit frightening. I didn’t think I’d get any challenges from them anymore, even as Astoria Greengrass sniffed indignantly at the display. I did notice some eyes flicker towards Adaline Mercer, my favorite firstie — considering grooming her for *parvus potesta* once I moved up to the *magnus*, actually — consideringly. Seems her closeness to my first circle was being thought about more positively, with all our displays of superiority these last few weeks.

(Every time someone tried to debase us, it only made us look better. I was so glad I had a mouth quick to insult and a clever mind this time around, honestly. And *dear Merlin*, I owed Nate and Dietrich a lot for keeping our camp so well while I was busy.)

Lu muttered, “You’re too bloodthirsty sometimes, Lys. Scare all the fun away.”

Jay laughed softly. “It stopped being fun the third challenge, Lu. I’m happy to concentrate on my studies, now that Lys has driven the first-years into submission and the third-years into caution.”

That set off a debate between Jay and Nate and Dietrich, the brainiest of my boys, and Lu and Harper groaned, chucking quills at each other in boredom. Those two didn’t care much for the power struggle analyzation, really, they just liked fighting with others. It was Nate who enjoyed playing mental chess the most, though Dietrich and Jay would certainly step in if I needed them to.

...  

*Stand before her. No, not stand. You do not stand anymore. There is nothing around you, you are swimming in magic. Your chest aches and the chains have rubbed the skin away, but you can only feel it faintly. There is blood everywhere but you do not need it. Stand before her. She is the same.  
You do not ask. You do not need to ask.  

Her gaze passes over you. It is colder than anything in this world, and that dull ache in your chest sharpens. It is the only feeling now, the ache, and the longing when she passes. Her dresses used to rustle and drag on stone and that’s how you marked her footsteps, her bright eyes, her smile. She does not stand anymore.  
You are swimming in magic, both of you, forever and eternity, and it aches.  
You do not ask.  
You do not ask.  
You will not be forgiven.*
Move on, Lys. You’re getting stuck. Go on-

The woods are young now, saplings and smooth bark. Sunlight streams through the leaves and casts green shadows on the earth. The air is fresh. Your wand is in your hand, sparking in your fingers, warm and proud, the scar on the handle from two years ago is still there. Your brother has always laughed at that story, but you cannot think of that now.

You hunt.

Call her name. She is hidden from you. Her mother was crying when she sent you. Her mother was soft and hunched with age, with weariness, with grief. She looks like her mother but softer and gentler and so much more fragile. You just want to bring her back, Lady Ravenclaw said if you did she would finally finally finally be yours; she, who was once out of your reach, could finally be yours. No more midnight meetings and lowered eyes and coy smiles and-

Oh, gag me.

Reaching for the light. Mother is making it dance in circles around you just the way you like, bright and fuzzy and warm. You chase, but you can’t grab, why, how, it’s pretty and you want it! Take it into your hands and Mother laughs. It morphs, darkens, solidifies, and is a moth, fluttering dull wings against your palms, fuzzy legs tickling your fingers. Laugh.

Shut up, Sirius! These are memories, he can’t control what he feels.

I did not want to know this much about the Bloody Baron, Lyssie. Not now, not ever.

The Great Hall is resplendent. You have never seen so many other wizards and witches before. Someone reaches for you and you flinch. They have called you Devil Child before, and you’ve strangled their livestock wandlessly out of anger for it. Prove them right. It’s what they want. Someone reaches for you and you flinch, but they wince, and you laugh at each other. She’s lovely, dark hair and tanned skin and big, grey eyes.

She asks if you have had a hard time out with the mundane. You reply you have.

She smiles soft and sure. “þes bæcern sy gebeterung.”

This place is better.

She reaches for you again, and you do not flinch. Her hand folds over yours comfortably. The Hat is singing. Four figures in red and green and blue and yellow are standing behind it, waiting. The candles are dripping but the wax isn’t falling down. It’s resplendent. Her hand is warm and yours is shaking, but she says not to be afraid. See? That woman there. That’s her mother, and Lady Ravenclaw is kind. They’re all kind, in their own ways.

Yeah, but guess what?

What?

“þes bæcern sy gebeterung,” she says again, reassuring you.

You do not flinch. You wait, hand in hand.

I’m talking back to you. Know what that means?

“SLYTERIN!”
The man in silver and green, calm-eyed and regal, smirks at the one in red and gold. The other scowls good-naturedly, flicks his wand, a spell that is blocked. Amazing, you think. Magic so casually used, no fear of mundane and their love of fire, no watchful eyes or hushing Mother or terrified little sisters being dragged off by men dressed in crosses.

Devil Child, Devil Child, they call you. You hate those words.

They called her that, too, but she was killed for it. You strangled their livestock in anger and watched them starve the same way they watched her burn. The same way everyone watched Father be stoned to death in the last village, too, though he had no magic. He said he did so your older brother wouldn’t be taken. Your older brother was taken anyways. They watched him hang from a tree, the same way. You watched, they called you all Devil Child, you hate those words, you curled your fingers around their trusting throats, you watched them starve the same way.

With a smile.

Merlin, we did it. You’re talking back- You’re fully cognizant! You can completely separate from the memories!

And it only took a few weeks.

You say- Wait. You think that like that’s bad progress, but this is utterly unfair, Lys. Seers and their inclination towards the Mind Arts is ridiculous. And you’re Dark, so your Legilimency is natural. Unbelievable.

She meets you in the Astronomy Tower, grinning. Lord Gryffindor likes to say that your impulsiveness should have placed you in his House. Surely her boldness would’ve done the same.

But she is like her mother, in looks and thirst for knowledge, so she wears the blue and bronze as surely as you wear the silver and green. She calls Lord Gryffindor her Uncle Gryff, and your own House Head Uncle Laz. Their children are her cousins.

You long to be one of them. Not for closeness, because you are closer to her than any other, but because their status is greater and they might ask for her one day. You are not noble enough. You used to hide in barns and outhouses with Mother — weak, weaker, her will to live draining as your brother and Father and your sister do not ever come home — just to stay away from the fires. You have grown up called Devil Child. You hate those words. You were not born into this world of magic, you cannot navigate it as easily as a salmon the river.

You do not swim in magic like they do.

Well, then. I really don’t want to see more, now that we’ve gotten the dye mix right and you’ve got practice. I suppose you sacrificed some control in the target mind to be able to connect to your anchor…

We’ll have to fix that. If I can’t find Pettigrew’s memories while also conferring with you, it’s moot point. And with that much blood… I’m not sure I can give that much blood and be a stable anchor, Sirius.

Don’t take me back there, she begs.

But you belong there, with your uncles and aunt and mother. With your cousins. Please.

She refuses. You don’t understand what it’s like, she screams, you don’t understand what it is to
always be compared to a woman without equal! Mother is peerless and everyone expects me to be better, but I’m only ME!

You want to tell her that she is enough.

(She sobs and screams about such things while Mother is wasting away in nothingness, while your sister is ashes and blackened bones buried in nowhere, while Father’s blood has rusted into the stones they buried him under, while your brother is rotted meat hanging from an old oak alongside the silvery moss, twisting and turning as the wind blows.)

(You say that you do not understand.)

Agreed, but we’ll take care of it on the outside. Discuss. Recollect. Care to follow me out, Lys?

With pleasure. I don’t like intruding this much. And I think my head hurts, but I can’t really tell.

Hm. Less connected to your home mind, too. That’s a bit troubling.

You don’t understand.

She will not go back. Why? You cannot fail this. You cannot understand. You just want one thing and she wants a thousand. Why does she do this? You are angry, because she refuses for selfish reasons. You take her hands in yours and say that her home is a better place, even if the forest is young and lovely, and she belongs there. Doesn’t she? If he brings her back, he can ask for her hand, and they will be home and together, and isn’t that what they’ve always wanted?

What you always wanted, she spits, Not me.

Why not her? Why?

I will not go back, she says.

You will drag her back if you have to. She will forgive in time, but she must go home. It’s dangerous. Women are burned and men are stoned here, and she cannot die, you will not let her. You will drag her back.

She’s angry. She’s furious. She says if you loved her and understood, you would let her go.

You don’t understand, but you love. You will bring her back. Whatever it takes.

Monster, she calls you.

Devil Child.

You love her. You don’t understand.

YoU hAtE ThOSe woRdS.

Ah fuck, fuck, fuck, get us out, I don’t really want to see another murder-

Alright, alright, come on, then.
I opened my eyes.

The Blood Baron blood chains oh that’s why—looked uncharacteristically dazed, though he seemed to recover admirably well once I took a step back and broke eye contact properly. My temples decided to throb right then, and I winced at the (unfortunately) familiar feeling. She stepped back grimacing was she okay? She looked uncharacteristically dazed, though he seemed to recover admirably well once I took a step back and broke eye contact properly. My temples decided to throb right then, and I winced at the (unfortunately) familiar feeling.

Sirius was sitting on the rug to my right, his hair pulled back into a scraggly tail uncomfortable pulls hurts so the runic matrix was visible, drawn onto his forehead. His robes were open, too, showing the one on his chest a little, too. The interlocking circles and triangles and the sharp curves so bloody intricate these ritual runes of the runes were dried already, rust-brown on his pale skin. Same runes on you drew your own, rather impressive. He was looking at me in concern.

“I’m okay,” I told him.

He nodded knowingly. “Headache.” Then he frowned. “You’re having trouble breathing.”

My throat felt full not good she used too much magic but it was bearable. My lungs felt fine. I cast a Tempus wait should she be using that much magic? and scowled. We’d been in the Baron’s mind for nearly two hours. And I’d been practicing Patronuses dog protector mine with the boys earlier today, so my reserves were a little thin…

“Your Patronus is your Animagus form?” I asked incredulously, blinking at the hazy memories of a Patronus running about, just like Padfoot but made of blinding white and trailing pale wisps of smoke behind.

that’s my Patronus yes

“You don’t need your breathing potion, do you?” Sirius asked.

No, I was quite sure no attacks were incoming. I just strained a little, probably hyperventilated a bit while we were in the target mind.

Sirius nodded. right yes fine warn next time

Speaking of the target mind…

I looked at the Bloody Baron. Not kindly, because that might indicate pityingly, and Slytherins hated being pitied. so difficult you snakes I would know Mother was like that they all were He was a Slytherin, this one, even if some thought — once upon a time — that he should have been a Gryffindor.

“You alright, Baron?” I asked him.

The ghost nodded slowly. Still disoriented, I think. stuck in memories just like me “It is a rare thing, indeed, for a ghost to undergo Legilimency. So few people know that Mind Magics are the only magics the dead are capable of.”

Prevett discovered that

I barely blinked at the information Sirius’ mind was unconsciously supplying. ‘Because Hevlyn...
Prevett’s research was all blacklisted?”

The Baron nodded again. Less hazy-eyed, this time. “The Mind Eater was a witch to be feared, little snake. That so much of her life’s work is burned out of that fear… It is a tragedy. She was brilliant. I remember her as a child.”

“What?”

“What?” “Really?”

Sirius and I glanced at each other, but then turned to the Bloody Baron expectantly. The ghost looked slightly amused. “Two weeks, I have watched your minds weld together, both in my mind and out of it, and it is still…”

“Disconcerting?” Sirius and I answered together.

The Bloody Baron looked even more amused, which I didn’t think was possible without a smile at this point. “Yes.”

“Thank you again,” I sighed, rubbing my temples and trying to alleviate the pain. “I’m amazed at how patient you are, Baron. I thought we’d never get to this point after our first bumbling attempt at this anchor business.”

“Enough thanks, little snake. I find myself… tired. You are the same, I am sure,” the Bloody Baron said quietly, no doubt remembering all the memories we’d sifted through today. “I will take my leave. Until tomorrow night.”

I had the feeling he was going to go sulk after we charged through all the things he didn’t want anyone to see. Which. Well. Understandable, of course. I learned quite a bit about the Bloody Baryon and the Grey Lady’s backstory these two weeks. Too much, really. I wondered why he was letting us do this to him, not for the first time, and probably not for the last, as his pale form phased through the walls and away.

“What did he want in return for this, Lys?” Sirius asked.

I looked at him in surprise. He scowled.

“I was Slytherin-raised, you know. Don’t act so surprised.”

I snorted. “Well, pardon me for being shocked that you can think so clearly after that first disaster of a conjoined Legilimency session. Cleaned out our entire stock of chocolate, the two of us, and if the Bloody Baron could eat, I’d have given him some, too-”

“Is she alright this time around?” I started to wipe at my face, knowing I was smearing it all over my face and not really cleaning at all. Stupid nosebleeds. Wasn’t so bad, though, a very… mild warning from my body about my magic usage today. Sirius hovered like a concerned and well-meaning but incompetent parent.
“Hey! I resent that,” he muttered, mockingly affronted. *so rude*

A little smile crept out onto my lips. That was… comforting. Three months ago, Sirius Black hadn’t even been able to support the weight of his own skeleton, let alone spend energy casting magic all over the place. Two months ago, he got more lost in his head than he didn’t, and I had to coax his mind into stillness and shove chocolate in his mouth to make sure he was lucid for the limited time we had. A month ago, he was still unsure, unsteady, wondering if it was alright to be casual in such a tense environment.

Now? Well. I’m sure he was a far cry from the man he’d been before Azkaban, but I could really see it in him sometimes.

“Hm. I think I understand your little snake friends a bit better now,” Sirius muttered.

My nose stopped bleeding already, and I glanced at my core to see if it was up to an *Aguamenti* or gentle *Scourgify* at the moment. *it’s not please don’t stress your core dammit Lys* “What do you mean? And my core’s fine.” I asked distractedly.

Sirius settled back onto the floor, elbows leaning on his knees casually, grinning up at me. “The anchor connection is still pretty strong, you know. I’ve been getting bits and pieces even if you’re Occluding, because of your semi-permeable barriers. You really care about your people, don’t you?”

I scowled at him. “Are you making fun of me?”

“Me? Make fun of you? Never. Let’s go over that, shall we?”

I sat down across from him. *her runes are smudged and she’s tired looking but much better than before good* “I am better than a few weeks back — thank Nate for that, I think we both owe him — but let’s try and be quick about it. I’ve been averaging six hours of sleep a night and that’s a bloody record for me. I’d like to keep it up if I can.”

*they’re getting suspicious aren’t they*

My boys were. Nate was faithfully keeping my secret, and I think that Jay was aware but not saying anything or asking questions about why I was sneaking away so much this year, but Lu and Harper were getting annoyed at how tired I was all the time. We were all used to exhaustion for a few weeks, since we were the *parvus potesta* reigning, but three months was a little… And once Lu and Harper got suspicious, it was only right that Dietrich — as busy as he was with his own things — would notice something off, too. Not to mention, I was getting antsier as the year was drawing to a close and I hadn’t perfected this yet. They were watching, and I didn’t want…

Well. I didn’t want them involved in this. Peter Pettigrew was… well, he was Harry’s and Sirius’ and my family’s, and if I could keep the boys from this choice, I would. This was family business, the boys were all doing so well (Harper learned the *Patronus* for fuck’s sake! *not bad for a kid good form*) and I wouldn’t condemn them to the price I was paying, or drag them into my family’s — Gryffindor — problems.

The last time I tried to snoop into their things or allowed them to snoop into mine, Dietrich was dragged into the Chamber of Secrets. Dietrich can’t hear the word ‘diary’ and always gets a dark look on his face when I show my colors’ rendition and the crimson sits there, enfolded with the indigos and silvers and blues. Dietrich has been sneaking away just as often as I have, dueling and practicing and becoming strong because he hates that he was weak.
(As if that matters. He was eleven. He was my best friend. He shouldn’t have been fighting the basilisk or Tom Riddle in the first place.)

“Lys,” Sirius called quietly, “It’s alright. You’re not going at this alone. I might be a bit broken, but we’re doing this together. It’s not… the same.”

ey don’t hate that you’re alone when you fight but you’re not so it’s okay don’t be guilty

“Correction,” I replied with a lightness I didn’t feel, “Everyone who scolds me hates that I go off on my own without them. But I’m not bringing my friends into this, Sirius. I’ve already put targets on their back with rising to parvus potesta reigning, being a bloodtraitor, all that. It’s hard enough for them, and they deserve to be normal.”

“I should be the one guilty, you know,” Sirius pointed out wryly, “I’m using a twelve-year-old girl to get my revenge and clear my name. You’re the youngest of them, aren’t you? I should be the one lamenting your lost innocence, or something.”

I smiled sardonically. “One of the first nightmares I ever had was my mother finding the remains of her brothers, Sirius. I was five years old. I’ve been fighting to protect the rest of mine from that sort of grief since. I won’t let mine ever make the sounds my mother made when she saw my uncles hanging like… like they were… I won’t let it happen again.” I grinned, teeth gritted and bared. “That’s why Pettigrew’s going to suffer before I leave his head.”

Sirius smiled just as ruthlessly as I was. “I should be the one guilty. But all I feel is anticipation, Lys. I want this over with. I’ve waited your entire lifetime for this.”

“Soon,” I promised.

soon, came the echo.
Chapter Summary

...I am so sorry this is so damn late. I'm the worst, I know, but just know that all you guys talking to me about the characters and the plot through your comments is SUPER inspiring and the lateness is my own problem. Motivation is hard in the summer, even for something I like doing, who knew?

This. THIS is the last chapter before the climax of the arc, thank fuck. Please enjoy (despite the choppiness, good god, I rewrote this chapter seven times), and I'm sorry again, and thank you all for your support. :3

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

... 

_Once more_, I promised.

(My head throbbed. I felt a jolt of worry that didn’t belong to me, but we were disconnected enough now that Occlumency barriers were okay. I ignored it. My head throbbed.)

_Once more, today._

(There was an icy feeling on my forehead, then, soothing it. Didn’t stop the pain in my head traveling down my neck, pricking my chest, the center within my rib cage. My magic was resisting, pleading with me to stop, but I couldn’t, didn’t it understand?)

_Once... more..._

(It was dark, and there were clouds of color glowing through that darkness. Deep, deep indigo, strings like glinting silver, blackening edges that rippled with deep, deep red. The indigo, the blues, the gentle grey-dark-teal and flickers of gold were shying away. The magic was smaller than it should be, tired, spent. I reached forward.)

_Just once more. I’m so close. Please._

(The deep crimson answered. It curled around me, deeper and darker than blood.)

_Once upon a time, she read to them — flick of her wrist, the wand twisted and the ribbon of water — catching the light oddly. She swung her arm, the water followed, steam a hissing trail, finding its mark. — “OW!” he cried, laughing, since she was laughing too — “Josie, please.” “Er-What?” “Josie. Only Blaise and his mum call me that,” “…Josie, then.” — letter in her pocket, burning a hole into her robes, she glanced at it. The boy across gave her a cold look and a sneer and she imagined that face, that expression, that condescension, every day of the rest of her life._
Sirius Black reached over, hand landing on a head of deep red hair, messing with it as he laughed and she protested, but blue eyes were as bright with amusement as grey, so — “Thank you, Lys,” he whispered, palms of his hands rubbing into his eyes, “Thank you.” — “You’ve become one of mine, Black, so I suppose I couldn’t do anything less.” — aren’t going to kill the rat, need to cage him. He didn’t have a wand, though, he was powerless-

“Don’t push yourself, Lys. You’re young, yet.”

“Meaning my core can take a bit more punishment than yours. We have to do this, Sirius. You know why. They’re waiting.”

“I know- I know. We… We have to hurry.”

Blood splattered — her hand clutched her chest, nails digging into skin — red on white, black by moonlight — “LYS! Get back, get back-” he screamed, pushing her back — ??? — couldn’t breathe, blood was dripping down her nose, the taste of copper on her lips as she grimaced but tried to grin. He touched her shoulder, questioning, and she — “Last day of exams, isn’t it? Divination is one of the last exams for your year, I think-” she questioned, watching the boy with flaming red hair. They looked similar, but he was bigger — ? — taller and she was slight, but? — “THEN YOU SHOULD’VE DIED!” screamed her friend, his eyes crazed, hands trembling with anger. She reached out to touch his arm, reminding him, looking understanding and angry and — ??? — the moon rose above. The brightest nights of the sky were — “Jay, I have to go. It’s- I have to go.”

It will happen tonight ??? — “Goodbye,” he mouthed.

“…Just come back. You can come back with a concussion again if you need to, just come back.” — smiled. A hand halted her progress, she gripped at her skirt and shifted from foot to foot uncomfortably, breathing hard. — ??? — Josephine reached for the girl with red hair and cool eyes, shaking her hand agreeably. — ??? — “Are you weak?” — It will happen — happen — ??? — “Mercer’s father works for the DMLE, too, you know. And she’s one of my favorites. So… Maybe I could ask if he won’t look after you a bit, Josie?” — Dietrich rolled his eyes as Harper laughed. “Of course you looked after Head Girl Zabini. Slytherin is practically yours.” Lu snickered.

“He will return by the full moon. The Dark Lord lies alone and friendless, abandoned by his followers. His servant has been chained these long years. The full moon, the wolf’s moon… the servant will break free and set out to rejoin his master. The Dark Lord will rise again with his servant’s aid, greater and more terrible than ever he was. The wolf’s moon calls… Fate
intervenes... the servant... will set out... to rejoin... his master..."

Stop.

*Kindly brown eyes flashed with gold. Muscles rippled, flesh tore, clothing hung in rags with dark fur, and teeth gleamed.— “LYSSIE RUN!”— white fang sunk into bloody skin and she screamed and screamed and screamed — ??? — She smiled faintly. “I have to follow this choice. I locked myself into it. You understand don’t you?” — the moon rose and the wolf howled with it.*

*The rat sat in his cage, and the girl with runes drawn into her forehead shrieked.*

Stop.

*wake up dammit Lys no!*

“LYS!”

I gasped, feeling blood pooling in my mouth. Sirius was pawing at my face, sleeves stained with red *have to stop the bleeding have to help oh god what have I done to this child* and the Bloody Baron was watching with a mildly interested expression, his hand halfway through my forehead and the reason behind the icy coldness soothing the headache.

*Occlude, Sirius,* I projected in my head as strongly as possible.

*sorry sorry sorry I will I’m sorry Lys*

He was so guilty and worried and that it almost *hurt.* And thinking about the headache, my chest *burned* and I twisted over from my meditation position to spit the blood out on the floor, gagging as my throat decided to swallow the rest. The Bloody Baron’s hand was gone now, and he’d floated over a ways, watching the two mortals in the room flail with an expressionless face. Which was fine, I couldn’t worry about the man right now… I felt light-headed and dizzy and achey and good *god* this was almost as bad as when I lifted the fucking river a mile or so down from my house and went into a coma. Meanwhile, Sirius was still fretting and looking a little sick and a lot worried.

“Sirius, get off, I’m okay-” I croaked.

“No, no, no, no, no! Not okay! I just bloody- I just- I was watching, and- and even if you were Occluding the link away, I could feel the pain, dammit, Lys!”

“The link’s that strong? I was meditating… and… we got out of the Baron’s mind hours ago…”

“Yes, well, I’m pretty sure it just gets stronger every time we have a go at Conjoined Memory Ward application, so it’s probably going to take a day at least for the anchor link to fade, even with Occlumency, and- No! Lys! Dammit, you said you just wanted to meditate and let your Clairvoyance express itself, encourage our minds to separate, not whatever *this* was! What were you doing? Do you need a Blood Replenishment?”

“Calm, Heir Black-” the Baron said boredly.

“That’s Lord Black, you know-” Sirius mumbled, only to be ignored.

“-the young Seer retreated to Clairvoyance because neither you nor the little snake wish to encourage a permanent mind link. She likely needs to sort through whatever visions she asked for, for that purpose. She is halfway Sovereign, and that comes with a price,” he finished smoothly.
I nodded, wiping my mouth and probably only managing to smear blood all over my face. “I was… I was trying to see when we’d get our chance. For Pettigrew. I mean, to get him — Fate changed when you sought me out, you know, Sirius… before- before me… you would’ve grabbed him and all sorts of things would’ve happened that would lead to him getting away. Then I came into the picture… I wasn’t sure if it’d be the same.”

Sirius darkened at the implication that he would’ve failed his revenge — Pettigrew’s death or capture, both were the same in the end, really — if he hadn’t sought me out. “So we’ll succeed, now, then? Because you and I are working together… We’ll catch him? Is that what you saw?”

I coughed violently, trying to steady my breathing and my lungs. My head and heart both were protesting that much abuse of magic; I dug too deep into Fate’s possibilities, and it paid me in kind by making my lungs bleed. It was difficult to steady myself, my heart beating wildly and my head throbbing, memories of disjointed visions flashing through my head. The moon was prominent, a silver disc in the sky. Blood splattering walls with torn wallpaper and scratches gouged into the panels was prominent, too. And the screaming, the girl screaming, the girl who looked like…

“Rat in a cage, s’what I saw,” I murmured, “I saw more of the price, too.”

Sirius stiffened. “Lys…”

I shook my head again. “It’s fine, it’s fine. I’ve paid a lot of it already. Apparently my takeover of Slytherin was a key factor, something to do with all the kids in the parvus who had parents in the DMLE. Plus Josie. Maybe that’s got something to do with his capture…”

A warm, large hand encompassed my shoulder. Sirius met my eyes solemnly. “Lys. Listen, you don’t have to tell me — or anyone — anything. You know I wouldn’t blame you if you had to hide things to keep the balance. S- My- My Uncle Sevens had to do that. Aunt Cedrella understood…”

He shook his head, dislodging the beginnings of getting lost in his head, an odd feeling of something latching onto my thoughts, memories brought up without my say-so, washing over me. (Harper grinning as I hugged him, the Patronus on his wand; Dietrich smiling, a hand on my shoulder; Ginny tugging on my sleeve and plopping a poorly-wrapped present on my lap; Bill reading to me with a soft voice, me in his lap and the book in mine; Charlie pointing at the pictures in his magical creatures magazine; Mum and Dad; Luna with a crown of flowers on her head—

) sorry Lys I’ll Occlude but I just had to use you as my anchor for a moment “Clairvoyance isn’t bound by time, Lyssie. You might pay for this later. I’d understand if you chose to keep quiet.”

“No,” I murmured, “it’s fine. Nothing I say will change anything at this point.” I smiled a bit, remembering what I’d Seen. “I have to follow this choice. I locked myself into it. You understand don’t you?”

Sirius nodded, giving my shoulder a light squeeze. “I do. But I wanted to be sure. You- You’ve done a lot for me, Lys. I wish the Clairvoyant didn’t have to pay the price… I wish you weren’t the only one suffering for helping me.”

“I don’t always pay the price,” I reminded him gently.

Dietrich’s pale face in the Chamber came to mind. Malfoy’s white-knuckled grip on his robes when we spoke last, as well. A crumbling bust and a last laugh that I could barely hear past my own pain was remembered, too.

You are ridiculous, Guinevere.

“But you always suffer. That’s what it means, to be a Clairvoyant.” Sirius said.
I blinked. That was positively profound. “Did…?”

He nodded, smiling a little and probably having heard an echo of my flippant thoughts in his head. “Uncle… Uncle Sevens said that. To me… once. A long time ago, but… I’ve always remembered.”

I looked at my hands, streaked with drying red. The digits were tiny, dwarfed by the fingers resting reassuringly on my shoulder. “To be a Clairvoyant is to suffer, huh?” I chuckled a little, flexing my fingers. “Yeah. That sounds about right.”

Sirius squeezed my shoulder again. “Hey. It’ll be okay. That’s what you Saw, right?”

I blinked, looking up at him. “Yeah.”


“It’ll be okay.” I said.

*Remember, Lyssie? This is worth it,* something said quietly in my head.

I grit my teeth, forcing that voice away. “I’m dead on my feet, though Sirius… I’ll tell you everything tomorrow, if that’s alright.”

Sirius leapt up, nodding furiously. “Of course, Lyssie. You need to bloody rest.”

Yes, I needed to bloody rest. I needed to rest and contemplate and prepare for this shitfest of an end of the year disaster. My mind was whirling as Sirius transformed and walked me out of the Shrieking Shack in Padfoot form. A werewolf bite… it was a singular moment, just like Pettigrew escaping. Pettigrew escaping had been an inevitability until I got here, and I changed it. Perhaps I could… Maybe I could…

Well. It was hard to think with my head hurting me, but I might be able to haggle with Fate a little. Once I rested a bit.

*What's best for me and mine, and what's fair for everyone else. What's a werewolf bite or two, Lyssie?* asked that damn voice again.

*I can’t let it come to that.*

*But…?*

My fingers tightened where they were clamped around my robes and Sirius' fur. He didn't complain, and neither did my robes. *But if it comes to that, then I’ll just have to live with it.*

*…*

In Arithmancy, the number 3 was known as the canine’s number.

Three heads to the dog, for it to become a Cerberus. Three tails to the kitsune, for it to be able to take on human form. Three worlds to the coyote, for its spirit to become a trickster god. Three
forms to the jackal, jackal and man-jackal and man. Three nights to the Grim, buried bones seeping into new grave soil and a graveyard guardian born anew. Three moons to the wolf, for the moon is full three nights per lunar cycle and a wolf rises from man for each.

Three nights of full moon.

Not one.

Three.

“FUCK!”

Dietrich visibly jolted, along with Nate, though they were silent otherwise. Lu slammed his chin against the desk his elbow’d been leaning on, sleeping in his hand, while Harper yelped and dropped his wand, which started spitting out spiraling sparks. Only Jay seemed undisturbed, nearly leaning against me as he looked over my book. I winced when they all turned their eyes to me.

“Sorry.” I whispered in the abandoned classroom.

“I think I give up on your filthy language,” Dietrich sighed, shaking his head.

“The world has given up on yours, Dietrich, so that is only fitting,” Nate commented.

“I did not ask you.”

“Why the hostilities, Dietrich? We’re friends!”

“I do not recall ever calling you as such.”

“That’s right, Nate! Dietrich has never liked you and probably will never!” Harper piped up.

Nate blinked lazily, smiling slowly. “Harper, has anyone ever told you that you’re quite rude?”

“We do all the time,” Lu answered, “It goes, ‘Shut up, Harper.’”

“Ah. Well, then. Shut up, Harper.”

“Question!”

Dietrich looked done with all of this. “Answer,” he sighed, pinching the bridge of his nose.

Harper grinned and started speaking, but my attention was taken away by Jay tugging on my robe sleeve. The boys started their usual antics, squabbling at each other, but Jay broke into a shy, tiny smile.

“Braid my hair, Lyssie?” he asked, voice soft, eyes knowing.

There are little things that calm me down from the stress, from my more-frequent-than-not moods that leave me snappish and tense and overthinking. Little things that my boys have obviously picked up on.

Harper likes to hold my hand, just like Luna. He chatters and his happy tone soothes whatever irritation I’m feeling because you just can’t be angry with Harper, not for long and not when he’s trying so hard to keep you calm. Lu likes bringing me things — buttered toast is his go-to — or encouraging me to take a walk alone, center myself in the quiet. He’s odd, because he can usually tell which one I need more, being crowded or being isolated. Nate tends to use distraction, pissing
off one of the others and starting huge arguments and smirking wider when I start laughing at their idiotic antics. Dietrich sits by me and talks me through it if he can, or simply offers quiet and peaceful company when I refuse to speak.

Jay, though?

Jay drags me away from the others and has me braid his hair. It’s familiar, to me, because even if the shade isn’t the same, Jay’s hair is reddish enough that I’m reminded of Ginny and when she used to beg me to do her hair. We talk about the books we’ve read or the dueling practice yesterday or whatever interests we have in common in quiet tones as my hands work through rosewood locks and my stressed mind calms by repetitive, familiar actions and a gentle voice.

The abandoned classroom was our place of choice these days, since everyone was panicking about finals and more interested in their mentor/mentee pairs than us potesta leaders. It used to be much messier, since we didn’t have the common room as a base when Malfoy was still dicking around, but had since our rise to power become a bit less crowded. I watched, unsurprised, as the boys’ arguments somehow turned into an agreement to start magical practice — Patronus practice, of course — and they pushed all the desks to one side of the room, clearing the floor for practice.

I watched them set up mindlessly, absently working on touching up my Occlumency. It was best that I managed it a bit at a time, with how tattered they were from me always letting Sirius come and go as he pleased, along with badly/hastily-learned Legilimency. It was soothing, seeing my boys all try their hands at Patronuses, generating a feeling of peace and contentedness in the room with all of their attempts.

Nate was sitting on a desk lazily, Harper and Lu and Dietrich standing with their sleeves rolled up and ties loosened, gritting their teeth in frustration. Compared to the fingertip wisps they got when we first started casting, they were doing really well, honestly. Lu managed to throw around fist-sized globs of light on a good day. Nate was having the most trouble but saying the least about it. Dietrich was near to Harper’s level of competence — wobbly shield — and Harper was already trying to coax his into an animal, which wasn’t going too well.

“Harper! You cannot skip steps! Your shield must be second nature before the Patronus recognizes your magic and incorporates more of your core into the spell!” Dietrich snapped when yet another one of Harper’s blobby white shields failed to take any form whatsoever — shield or animal both — and poofed away.

Harper’s concentrated expression slipped of his face easily as he grinned. “I’m wondering how much I have to overload the magic until it explodes!”

“Oi! We said you weren’t allowed to make exploding Patronuses! We took the book away from you and everything!” Lu protested, happy to forget his own failure of a Patronus and yell at someone. As always.

“Correction. We simply took the book away, we never bound Harper to a promise of no exploding Patronuses,” pointed out Nate, also happy to distract from his shaky attempt at the spell to irritate someone.

“Nathaniel, I swear to Merlin-”

“GET YOUR PATRONUS OUT OF MY FACE HARPER!”

“Now, now. Don’t be a sore loser, Lulu-”
“WHAT DID YOU CALL ME?”
“He called you Lulu, Lulu!”

“Shut up, Harper!”

I snorted. I don’t know how, but Nate was somehow manipulating them into being as rowdy as possible. Because if Jay noticed that I was jittery and stressed, Nate did too, and here was his own awkward way of trying to make me feel better. Which wouldn't work, not that he knew, because what was stressing me out this time was out of his or their or even my hands.

Three nights of full moon. Three nights of Lupin transforming into a werewolf. Three chances when the prophecy could come true.

Goddamnit.

There had been… a plan. Sort of a plan. Like… I wasn’t going to take being bitten by Lupin and becoming a werewolf, lying down. As if I would take Fate lying down now, after a lifetime of struggling against it. I even had a book, checked out from the library on Snape’s smirking recommendation, _Defenses and Tactics Against the Beast_. My plan had been to basically… push back Fate’s price. If Lupin didn’t bite me, Fate would just try again later, and I might be able to pay that off, avoid the bite entirely.

But the intricacies of manipulating events and people for one night was difficult enough — people were just too dynamic, too unpredictable — but three? No. My plans would fall through, no matter what I tried; the prophecy, the changed one, said ‘The full moon, the wolf’s moon’ which gave Fate a lot of time to work with. Nothing I did would change anything else; like I’d told Sirius, I was locked into this path. There was no going back, no taking back, and it seemed no way around, either.

Goddamn number 3.

Here was another little kick in the ass from this universe, I suppose. One might assume a werewolf turned only once a month, yes? If one had been a Muggle in their past life. And little old me never listened to Dad’s and the twins’ teasing horror stories because I had other things to do, other things to study and prepare for. Because, you know, why would I expect a werewolf to turn three times a month? Even studying astronomy, I didn’t make the connection, because it was so hardwired into my brain that it was once a month that I just… Ugh. But then again, in the HP books/movies, maybe werewolves totally turned three times a month and I was just an idiot that made assumptions? I couldn’t remember anymore-

And I was rambling to myself. Again.

…

_I have to tell Sirius_, I thought, jaw clenching, _I have to tell him everything I know about it. We have to be ready for the mess of events surrounding Pettigrew’s capture. What if I’m bitten before the ritual?_

A human, when bitten by a werewolf initially, had a 30-70 chance of transforming that night. Not many did, but sometimes you had two werewolves running about after biting. And Sirius and Snape would have a hell of a time protecting four Gryffindors — including a sneaky little rat-bastard — from two werewolves. Assuming events were going to follow canon loosely.

Oh god, we had to do the ritual first thing. Pettigrew’s memories had to be warded.
“Lys… Are you alright?”

I snapped out of my thoughts and realized I hadn’t been brushing Jay’s hair for the past minute or so; my fingers were just tangled in his half-undone braid uselessly.

“Sorry! Thoughts got away from me and all that,” I said.

“…Your hands are shaking, Lys.”

“Maybe my magic is exhausted. Patronus casting is hard work, you know,” I deflected.

Jay just hummed in response.

I ran my fingers through his hair. Ginny would kill to have Jay’s hair, she’d told me many a time. When we were in earshot of Jay, he’d get all blushy and everything. I think Ginny liked Jay best of my friends just because of that.

His voice was close to a whisper when he spoke again. “I know something’s happening, Lyssie. I have trouble sleeping sometimes, and I’ve seen you slip out. I wouldn’t have said anything if Nate hadn’t spoken to me. He… doesn’t want to talk to you about it.” Jay turned his head a little, just enough so I could see the end of his small smile. “I don’t think he’d like it much if I say, but he’s still nervous about being first circle, Lyssie. He knows what he’s done to us before, and now that he also knows us better, he understands how it affected us, too.”

Ah, good. This was just about the sneaking out at night. Or, at least, I’d be able to make this about the sneaking out.

I glanced at Nate. He was polishing his glasses, perched on a desk near Harper, who was horsing around with Lu.

“He’s like you and Dietrich,” I said quietly, “So hesitant to… I didn’t… I didn’t know that he still had doubts about being one of me and mine, though. Should- er- Should I talk to him?”

Jay shook his head, small movements that made sure I didn’t pull on his hair. “No. In time… I think Nate will be alright in time. My point was… is… Nate doesn’t want to ask you about what you’re hiding. He doesn’t want to pry. And- And neither do I, but… But I wanted to offer you the chance to talk about it?”

I worked out some tangles, thinking slowly.

“You… You said, once, that family matters were private.”

Jay turned again, more fully, leaving me with a profile view, his raised brows obvious. “You’re still having family issues? And… And this is what causes you to sneak out every night?” he asked skeptically.

I sighed. “It’s not whatever you’re thinking. In fact, you wouldn’t be able to guess what ridiculousness I’m in this time even if you tried. But it’s… I don’t want to involve you. Any of you. It’s barely any of my business, really, and I just… I don’t want you all dragged into my problems.”

Jay blinked slowly at me. “Are you going to be in danger?”

Is this the Chamber incident all over again? is what Dietrich would ask. I could imagine him, eyes hard, back straight, wand in his hand, a demand to come with me on his tongue; a demand to help, to really help.
Dietrich sprawled across the black stone, ash hair nearly white against the dark of the Chamber, eyes closed, face too peaceful — blood splattering, a high-pitched screaming, and then shifting bones and muscles as the moon rose. Fingers tore into dirt desperately — “But you... you, Lys, needed an incentive. You are a Slytherin, after all.” — took him because of her, because he wanted her, her fault her fault her fault — “My friend,” said the boy with crinkled grey eyes, a rare smile on his face, that trustful gaze.

Stop.

I froze for a second. Then I shook my head. “Not to the extend of legendary magical creatures.”

He looked at me, eyes roaming across my face, studying. “You’re sure... You’re sure it’s family business? You’re sure we can’t help?”

All I did was smile shakily. “I’ve been preparing for a way to finish this piece of business up for a while. If it... If it helps, I’m not alone. And it’s not because I don’t trust you all, that I asked someone else to help, but because... well, they’re involved, and... I just- I- None of you should have to clean up messes left in my family’s wake. It’s not fair.”

“I suppose you’re right.”

“I can handle it. If I couldn’t handle it, I’d ask for help, but as it is... It’s okay. I don’t want you all to be distracted or hurt or anything else because of something I can... not easily, but can take care of on my own. I promise.”

I can’t worry all of you. And I can’t bring any of you into this. I can’t think about your actions, can’t bring more players into the game that’s already so, so unstable. And if any of you got between me and a werewolf...

He seemed reluctant, but he dipped his head shallowly. “The fact that you’re protecting us like that... It means whatever business you have is dangerous.”

I began to braid his hair properly, this time. “I won’t lie and say it isn’t. But I’ve done what I can to avoid the worst.”

Liar, a voice laughed in my head, Ridiculous, ridiculous liar.

I don’t care, I thought fiercely, telling that voice to go ahead and fuck off.

“...Just- Just... please, Lyssie,” Jay said, distracting me from my mental bullshit, “...Just come back. You can come back with a concussion again if you need to, just come back. You adore keeping us safe, and you’ve really passed that to us. We also want to keep you safe. You just... make it much harder on us.”

“Which is why I’m very glad that it’s you and Nate who know, and not the others. Those three aren’t nearly as considerate to me.”

“TO your obsession with protecting everyone else?” Jay asked wryly.

I snorted. “Sure.” I combed through his hair, tightening a bit of the braid. “Let me be selfish, okay? When you’re all taller and stronger than me, I won’t be able to stop you boys from muscling in on my problems, so for now, I’m going to do what I can to let you all relax.”

“That implies your problems will continue until we’re all grown.”
Smart boy, Jay. It wasn’t his fault that he didn’t know ‘continue’ should’ve been replaced by ‘multiply and intensify exponentially’.

I laughed, finishing off the braid simply. My hands weren’t shaking anymore, thankfully. “The way I’ve been going? Jay, I’d hardly know what to do with myself if there weren’t any problems.”

He joined my chuckles with his own. “I think you’re right.”

I felt better, watching my boys fool around and Jay smile, his braid finished in my hands. Yes, I had to tell Sirius. Keeping secrets from me and mine sucked, and I had to shove down guilt every time they looked at me in concern, asked me to sleep more, looked relieved when I took naps in the day and piled work onto them instead. I knew for a fact that Ron and Percy were nearly up the wall with concern, held back only by their more sensible friends (*cough cough Hermione cough*) and the demon twins. I had to at least trust Sirius with this. He’d know how to proceed, how to go from here…

He'd know how to make it so I could come back with, rather than a concussion, a werewolf bite. But at least I'd come back at all.

…

Of course, Sirius did deserve to be a little panicked beforehand. I just… sort of hoped that he would've reacted more like I had, with a burning desire to avoid it, and once that was proven impossible, with a grim, horrified sort of determination to meet it as well as possible.

(But could you blame him, the ex-Azkaban convict with a guilt complex spanning my new lifespan?)

The color that Tilly (unknowingly) and I (knowingly and with much panic) had finally gotten into Sirius’ face, along with some actual fat and muscle, had drained in an instant. I was uncomfortably reminded of the first time I saw Sirius, skeletal and hunched, sunken eyes, filthy robes and stringy hair, raving mad — a step away from foaming at the mouth in anger, really, with unfocused, cloudy eyes. I didn’t enjoy that picture of Sirius Black, if only because I very much enjoyed the slow-to-come grins and gentle ribbing and comfortable mind that he'd become.

“No. No no… Moony’s going to…” he gasped, “No, no, no, no, not him- No- Moony doesn’t want to- No! He never wanted to bite anyone, Lys! He never wanted to- I know, I know, I’m sorry, Moony, I know you don’t- I didn’t mean to put him in danger, I just wanted to scare- Snivellous deserves it-”

Shit fuck. I lost him.

I leaned forward as I started to get chocolate out of my pocket, and put a hand on Sirius’ shoulder, very gently and carefully. “Hey, Sirius, it’s okay…”

His eyes were wide and unseeing, expressions flitting across his face as quick as his memories. He was swaying where he sat, rigid and shaking, turning and looking at people and things that I couldn’t see.

“Lysie! He doesn’t want to bite anyone, he doesn’t, I know he doesn’t, it’s his… worst… fear… Oh Merlin, no, no, no, no, not here again- Moony, I didn’t do it, I didn’t- James, Lily, I didn’t
mean to do it! Don’t make me go, don’t make me go, I don’t want to go back to Azkaban, Moony… It’s my fault… I’m sorry… Lys… Uncle Sevens… Reggie hates me and so do you, I know it, I know it, I-"

My chest felt like something had crushed it, the childlike fear in Sirius' eyes. I hadn't seen that for... for a while, now. He'd been getting better... Goddammit. Why couldn't I have broken the new more carefully? Idiot. I had to grip his wrist, keep at least one of his hands from clawing at his face. “Sirius! Breathe, Sirius, breathe! Breathe, and then eat this, Sirius. It’s me, Lys-” I flinched when he turned wide eyes on me, unseeing and not remembering. But I was a big girl and I wasn't going to bloody cry at this stark reminder that my friend was far from being healed from those dementor fuckheads. I swallowed, and started,“Septimus told you to find me and we’ve been thick as thieves all these months, haven’t we? Eat the chocolate Sirius.”

“NO! You can’t, you can’t- Lys, Moony doesn’t want to be a sire, he can’t bite you! I won't let him! Lys, you'd hate it, you- You always say it's okay, but I know it isn't, Moony, the least I can do is- the least I can-” He snarled, and I winced, retreating a half an inch backwards, but he didn't seem aggressive to anyone but himself. “I keep doing this to my friends, why do I keep doing this to my friends? Lyssie, he- you-”

A mix of memory influx and time placement confusion and this moment; I felt like he was regressing as we spoke, and painstakingly Occluded myself into as much calm as I could muster, putting everything but my friend's wellbeing away for now. “I know, Sirius, I know… Come here, now, here you go.”

He was shaking, but I managed to shove some chocolate into his mouth. As usual, he didn’t seem to register it at all for a moment, but he stopped raving. My grip on his shoulder went from barely-touching to something I was sure bordered on painful; I didn't like it, but it was the last thing I had to anchor him to reality outside of a Legilimencic link. When it was this bad, when it was 100% a fear-driven bout of memory surges, then sometimes I had to do this.

Because that's what dementors did to you. They made you need suffering.

I watched him breath for a while, his heaving hyperventilating steadying into normal, slightly shallow breaths. The room grew silent once again, just wind blowing at creaky wood and shingles, Sirius trying to grip onto reality once again, and foil being peeled from chocolate by my fingers. It must've been at least half an hour before he took a deep breath and sighed it out, turning grey eyes on me; I tried not to let it bother me that he always, always looked ashamed after an episode. If he knew I was bothered by his being bothered, it'd just exacerbate the issue, so I ignored his shaking hands and fear-tinged eyes and smiled.

“Hey. You back yet, doggie?” My voice didn't give away my concern overly-much, which was good.

Sirius cleared his throat. “Ah... yes, I... I told you not to call me that, you brat.”

“I’ll stop calling you that when it stops applying.” I replied lightly.

He outwardly relaxed at my casual tone; if it made him feel better that I didn't baby him too much, that was probably good, right? A sense of pride or something. At least for now, since this was a callback to the fact that Sirius wasn't completely better yet and we'd really have to rethink some issues once this Pettigrew mess was cleared up.

“Animaguses don’t just stop being Animaguses, you know.” Sirius said matter-of-factly. Then he frowned.“Well. Unless crazy shit happens.”
“Language, bratling pup of an Heir.”

I nearly jumped at the reminder that the Bloody Baron was still there. He was... kind enough to pretend nothing was wrong with Sirius' episodes. Or maybe he just didn't care enough. One never knew with the Baron; the ghost just wanted to be entertained properly, to watch my struggle with Fate.

Sirius knew this, and accordingly didn't like the Baron. “You know I slip up when I’ve just had a bloody attack, you undead prat—”

“Merlin, now I know you’re back.” I muttered, shaking my head.

Sirius smirked, about to reply, mouth open-

Then his face paled again, eyes widening, and I was worried we’d have another episode on our hands, riding on the back of the other one. He surged forward, grabbing my shoulders roughly with his large hands, looking panicked. "Lys. Is what you said- You're going to be- WHAT DO YOU MEAN, MOONY’S GOING TO BITE YOU?" He roared in my face, starting to shake my shoulders like I was a kid in need of discipline.

“DON’T SHAKE ME AROUND, SIRIUS, I'M FRAGILE!” Goddammit, I’d been worried about this prat and he was about to rip my head off!

“Mortals,” I thought I heard the Bloody Baron scoff.

Sirius let go just as I thought the ringing of my goddamn brain being rattled in my skull would never end. He stood up, pacing around with more energy than I thought he even possessed at this point, grumbling and growling to himself. He whirled around at me suddenly, looking hysterical. I winced at his expression, because it was completely sane and free of memory surges — this hysterical panic was all Sirius.

“You just told me that my best friend — the only one left, in fact — whose greatest fear is to become someone’s wolf sire, is going to bite you and become your wolf sire. And this is because you- you- Because we messed with Destiny, I’m dooming both my fucking only friends!”

I struggled for something to say that would calm Sirius down. Struggled... and failed. “I thought you didn’t have anything against werewolves!?” I asked, scandalized at the idea that he did.

“What, why would I- No- That’s not the point!” Sirius hissed, pointing at me accusingly. “You’re a bloody child! Being a werewolf hurts, Lyssie, in every conceivable way — you think your bones and muscles shifting from human to wolf is painless? It’s not a bleeding Animagus transformation-and for a child, who’s still growing- For Merlin’s sake—”

“You think I don’t understand that!? You think I haven’t spent the last four days reading everything about werewolves?” I snarled, my usual long-fuse temper being set off at the thought that Sirius thought I was some ignorant child, had shaken me like I was a toddler to be scolded. “This is the price I pay! This is the price and bloody hell, Sirius, I didn’t tell you to- to bloody argue, I told you because I need help, dammit!”

My voice had hitched up at the end there and I lost my hold on my Occlumency out of my sudden jump from concern to fear to irritation to whatever the hell this was, born of the fact that Sirius wasn't helping. I'd be on my bloody own for this one, with him pacing around like the madman everyone thought he was. The madman he half was, actually. Fuck. Fuck fuck fuck, I was going to be a werewolf, wasn’t I? Fucks. I needed to perform a highly magically intense Legilimency ritual.
in order to wipe some fuckface’s memories of my abilities, before which and during which I could not be bitten, and thus I needed to stay unbitten while fending off Snape and the Golden Trio... Oh my fucking god, Ron was going to be there while I was bitten, wasn’t he? And my Head of House, shit fuck, what if I couldn’t do the ritual? It was too complicated, everything was coming together too soon-

“Lys.”

I jerked, startled from my downwardly spiraling thoughts. Sirius was staring at me intently, looking calmer, looking… apologetic?

“Lys. Lys- Just- I’m sorry. Alright, I… I lost it, I shouldn’t have- I- I’m the adult here, no matter what. I’m helping you. I’ll help you. You helped me, so I’ll do the same- Partners, right? You and me.”

I took a breath, noted my shit Occlumency and mourned my old barriers, and did my best to settle. Breathed. Calmed myself down, kept the hysteria and panic away best I could. The roles were reversed now, Sirius watching over my breathing, making sure I was alright. It was… Nice. It was nice not to worry on my own, which was exactly why I’d come clean to Sirius in the first place. Right.

“Right. Partners, you and me.” I murmured, “I have to tell you what I Saw. I have to… You have to know the prophecy, you have to know what it means.”

“Alright,” Sirius said, nodding.

“It still happens, all that I said already — Ron and Harry and Hermione are going to be there, and if Lupin’s showing up to bite me then I’m pretty sure Snape is gonna be there, too. All that happens, only we have to somehow- we- we gotta do the ritual before I’m bitten but after we calm everyone down.”

“Me, Snivellous, Remus, my godson, your brother, and their friend... sounds like a crazy mess. Add you to that... Yeah, I see why we’re going to need a lot of planning and plans. Backup plans and all that, too.”

Crazy mess… Yes, that’s what Sirius would call canon events.

“Yeah. We’re gonna need to have the ritual prepared at a moment’s notice.”

“This room, then. Easier on our minds if it’s a familiar place, right? We’ll have to take the Trio somewhere else to convince them. Upstairs, maybe. So... Y’know, so Harry doesn’t knock Snape into anything important, bless my godson’s bloody soul.”

I snorted. “With everything changed, that might not happen this time around.”

“Dammit. James’ son decking Snivellous is something I need to see...”

“Later,” I dismissed, rolling my eyes. “First, we plan. Three days to prepare for, Sirius.”

“Right.” He paused. “Lys... I’m sorry this is the price you had to pay. I’m sorry, and... thank you. Thank you.”

The sincerity in his voice calmed me down faster than my shit-Occlumency did, that was for sure. “So you won’t think any less of me...?”
“I’ll set up a wolf chamber in my own bloody basement for you if I need to, Lys. Once I’m free, I’ll have access to the Black Family fortune, so I’ll be able to do that. And bribe whoever I need to, to make sure you’ll be okay. Werewolves aren't treated very… well. But… Everyone speaks Galleons, and I'll have a hell of a lot of those, so that's no big deal.”

There was a familiar burn of a blush on my face. Sirius would have to support me because my family wasn’t comfortable enough, money-wise, to do so. Mum and Dad would cry when it happened, oh god. “You don’t have to-”

“I do have to.” Sirius interrupted firmly.

“My family doesn’t like charity-”

(We were Weasleys, dammit. We had been a noble house once, and we still remembered that, in little ways. I was a Slytherin, for god's sake.)

“This isn’t charity. This is a partner taking care of his littler partner. Also, I’m probably going to adopt you as my goddaughter for all you’ve done for me anyways, so it’s not an imposition or whatever. You’re practically family.”

Family. Me and mine.

(Those very words soothed me immediately.)

I smiled. “Yes, alright. I suppose you’re my favorite, insane uncle or something. We’d better get to planning so you can get your fortune and make good on your-” I blinked, remembering suddenly, and then turned around. “Baron! You don’t have to stay for this part — in fact, you didn’t have to walk me here at all. We’ve got to take care of logistics. You can stay or you can go, whatever you’d like.”

The Bloody Baron tilted his head to one side. “Hm. I think I’ll stay, if only to observe. Worry not, I won’t interfere. Remember, young snake? Entertainment of the century.”

We held gazes, my blue — it was still odd, that after all these years, it still delighted me that my eyes were blue this time around? — and the Baron’s milky silver. He didn’t smile, didn’t even raise his brow a tic, but I understood. I tilted my chin, and he blinked.

“Right.” I turned back to Sirius. “Let’s get ready for this clusterfuck.”

“You have your exam schedule already, Lys? We’ll have to plan around those.”

I took on a vaguely disgusted face. “I’m almost certain that I’ll still pass my classes even if I skip…” Dietrich and Jay would kill me, and Harper and Lu would complain that they should’ve been allowed to skip, too, and Nate would just be annoying and curious about it, but sacrifices must be made…

“No, no, no! Uncle Sirius won’t allow that-” Sirius shook his head.

“Ergh. I hope you don’t want me to call you that…”

“You said I was an uncle to you!”

“Well you probably are, somehow. Purebloods are all mixed up, it’s ridiculous. I’m probably related to most everyone in the school. Including Malfoy, ew.”
Sirius rolled his eyes. “You think you have it bad? His mother’s my cousin. Narcissa Malfoy.”

“Muriel Prewett. The witch who totally and secretly revenge-killed all of the Death Eaters who had a hand in my Uncle Fabian and Gideon’s deaths.”

“Bellatrix Lestrange. Was in the cell next to me at Azkaban.”

“Helvynya Prevett. Also known as the Mind Eater, my ancestor.”

“I have so many Dark Lords and such in my ancestry that I think I beat you out. It’s called the Black Family Madness for a reason, Lyssie.”

“Well, I can’t really argue against that, now, can I?”

We grinned at each other, and I was glad we’d gotten past the entire werewolf thing. Accepted that it was going to happen, worked on more… changable things. Sirius would have my back on it, and I’d have his on Pettigrew. We just had to figure out how to do this with as little fuss possible, as little blood shed, as many good outcomes. I was certain that a lot of people would be pissed at me for going this far with my Clairvoyance, touching at Destiny itself… but it was easier to think about, knowing I’d be protecting mine through this choice, and Sirius would be behind me every step of the way.

…

Things to keep in mind:

Sirius’ improved mental and physical state. A huge amount of dementor presence right outside of the Hogwarts wards. Three full moon nights. Different mythologies in regards to werewolves. Ron and Harry were both a little Darker than they would’ve been, due to my influence. Snape would be more violent or more careful (unknown which) due to the presence of one of his more favored snakes during the confrontation. Pettigrew’s mind needed to be wiped before it was high moon. Pettigrew’s mind couldn’t be wiped until Sirius and I were no longer threatened.

These were the changes that I’d noted. More proof that this universe was a far cry from the one I remembered. If it wasn’t evident by the look of the characters — not movie-replicas, not book-perfect, but a mix between them, along with their own flair — or by the utter depth of magic, or by the people I’d met with no mention in the canon I knew… Well, I really had to hammer this into my head soon. Depending on false information was habitual and dangerous, I found.

“Weasley?”

I looked up from my werewolf book. “Yes, Lynwood?”

My boys were quiet as the pale-haired, dark-eyed firstie stepped forward. She had a solemn, aristocratic face, tall for her age. One of Mercer’s rivals for my position, though I kept an eye on them to make sure their rivalry didn’t get too vicious; political opponents sometimes became very good allies, as Nate taught us all. Even so, it was rarer that Ariadne Lynwood brought something up to me during my sparse periods of holding court, these days.

“Our House ghost asked me to come fetch you. He’s waiting outside the mirror.” Lynwood said primly, straightening and standing taller as my eyes narrowed.
I looked to Dietrich, half-sitting on the arm-rest I was nearest to, grabbed at his wrist to look at his watch (he rolled his eyes at me). My jaw clenched at the time: seven o’clock, or just about. Early evening, the moon wasn’t even close to being up this cycle, but it would be full for the first time this month.

“Thank you, Lynwood,” I said quickly, dismissing her and flicking my eyes to Nate. “Oi. Forget something?”

Nate frowned. I had asked him to keep an eye on my brother and Harry and Hermione, for reasons I wouldn’t say and he’d never asked about. (Worrying, that Nate was, under all his sass and pomp, still nervous about all of us. Understandable, since Dietrich — my right hand, my Second — didn’t make secret of his persisting distaste for Nate.) “Their Divination exam is tomorrow,” said Nate, narrowing his eyes and looking annoyed.

“But your brother got in an argument with Granger about it and it ended up with his textbook being chucked into the lake.”

I stiffened, turned to Harper, who looked confused but was still smiling.

“Olivia Lloyd and that friend of your sister’s, Bennett, were talking about it,” Harper clarified, acquiescing to my silent order to continue, “Your brother’s book was destroyed, and I think I heard something about him and Potter going to go see if bat-shit Trelawney had any more?”

“Language!” hissed Jay.

Ignoring them, I stood and started to rush to my bag, thrown on one of our couches, next to Lu. Passing Dietrich, I touched his shoulder. “You’re up, Second.” I muttered, throwing my bag strap on my shoulder and Summoning my wand into my hand from where it rested on a side table.

Ron and Harry had to go see Trelawny today. Tonight was the first full moon. There was a prophecy supposed to be heard, supposed to warn them. If this dread building in my gut was to be believed, then…

“Lys?” Lu questioned, looking as puzzled as the rest of them.

“Bloody Baron’s waiting for me, Lu.” I sighed, feeling a little guilty to be leaving my boys like this, clueless and probably worried, if the looks on their faces were anything to go by. When I snuck off in the night, I wasn’t really leaving them, since it was my own time, and napping with them nearby to make up for lost sleep still meant I was nearby.

“…You going to be alright?” he asked quietly, eyes trained on my bag.

I glanced back at Jay, who nodded once, just a jerk of his chin, mouth creased into an apologetic frown. So he’d accidentally let something slip to Lu, though probably not everything, if Lu wasn’t ready and rearing to bother me about it and fix whatever was wrong. Small mercies, at least. Lu did look very concerned at me, though, making me have to Occlude that terrible guilty feeling away. I’d neglected so many things in pursuit of this outcome, in pursuit of Destiny, and I hated that my boys’ peace of mind was part of that. Lu was the type, too, to get snarly and loud when it was something he was confident he could fix or get someone else to fix, but quieter when it came to being unsure. A quiet Lu was different from a concentrated Lu, and a quiet Lu was bad.

“Sorry,” is all I said, quietly, walking quickly to the Slytherin exit doorway. Then louder, “Dietrich’s in charge, stay inside the castle.” I met Lynwood and Mercer’s eyes, sitting in their own places but paying close attention to me. “All of you. Keep Slytherin inside, let Josie know, too.”
Mercer immediately stood and went to the girl’s dormitories, passing me, nodding as she did. I exited the portal, knowing the Slytherins were all in a flurry at my abrupt and strange departure. I probably could’ve played that better, been much less suspicious, but my heart was thudding against my chest almost painfully, teeth grinding in my skull. I knew it was coming, but—

Hah. I was usually so cool in the face of danger. Well… not really. I was cool in the face of dangers I was prepared for, in the face of Slytherins dueling and children’s games. When it came to real things, things I couldn't plan for, I became an emotional mess. Case in point, Tom bloody Riddle. I just hoped that this time, with my partner in crime being prepared for bloodshed and injury and illegal, Dark rituals… this time, I wouldn't fall apart like an idiot. This time I was tougher, I was better.

(I was scared. But if I didn't go now, what was the point of everything I'd done already?)

“Young snake,” greeted the Bloody Baron, floating like a misty beacon in the dark of the dungeons.

I nodded, striding past him and heading to the Hogwarts entrance. The Baron floated in step with me. “It’s time, isn’t it?”

“Your kin, the Mudblood, and the Boy-Who-Lived had the rat in their hands when the Myrtle girl came upon them. She came to me, just as I came to you.”

Hearing that, I sped up my pace, enough that my extremely un-athletic legs were burning. “Then I’m late. Thank you for letting me know,” I grit out, worried about Sirius, who was probably facing off against too many people he wasn’t willing to hurt but who were perfectly willing to hurt him.

No. I want to tell you, I need to… I just… I hate him, Lys, I hate him. He killed my parents. It’s his f-fault and I-I… I want him dead.

Harry would especially want him dead. The Harry I knew, who listened with wide and excited eyes as I detailed my duels, who nodded solemnly when I told him that Tom Riddle — my friend — had to die… He wouldn’t hesitate. The Harry I knew was more vicious, more quick to act, more sure of himself, and whether it was my fault or just a reflection of his odd world’s, it was true and that meant less time for Sirius.

“Sirius is stronger than he was,” I whispered to myself, “It balances out.” I looked at the Baron, who seemed to be ignoring me but was likely listening intently. “Will you go or will you stay?” You have no obligation to us, as we all know, was said silently.

The Baron’s lips twitched and pressed into a wretched sort of smile which looked more like a grimace. “Until the Hogwarts doors, young Seer,” he said, “I have had more than enough of watching blood spill down your face.”

I huffed. My legs were burning. How morbid. But true. In many senses, the first of which being the bleeding headaches from my crap Occlumency and shaky Legilimency. Sirius and I hadn’t done a mind link in a while, focused on preparing for right now. And we’d never practiced on a living person. And I’d just taken a few exams; my magic wasn’t low by any means, but Legilimencic rituals and fighting off a werewolf…

I tried to steady my breathing, tearing through the castle, to the entrance.

“Good luck, Guinevere Weasley.”
I slammed into one of the main doors, palm flat against the wood and shoving the heavy wood open. Fresh, cool air blasted my face, the slight warmth of Hogwarts’ halls melting away; it was a cold day, even for Scotland Junes, and that was likely because of the dementors. The sky was pale blue and grey, cloudy and sun ready to set behind them. The moon rise was in about five hours, since it had been twirling around all day, and as the first full moon of the cycle, the werewolf could be held off — unintentionally or intentionally, I didn’t know — until Lupin met pure moonlight, then the transformation would kick in.

Time was of the essence, and Sirius and I had to make it up as we went on account of all the variables thrown in.

First, though, I had to get to the Shrieking Shack.

“Procidascondium Inuisibilita.” I murmured, tapping my wand to my head and shivering as the Disillusion Charm took place. Imperfect, but good enough that I could get to my friend without being stopped by Snape or Lupin or the Golden Trio. That was something we did plan, and it grounded me enough that I wouldn't be paralyzed out of fear. I had to get to Sirius' side and soothe tempers, help explain.

“Wait for me, Sirius.”

Then I started running.

Chapter End Notes

Hello! Some end notes that are completely optional to read!

Firstly, I GOT FAN ART AND I'M SO HELLA EXCITED!! Big thanks to Muyapa for THIS BEAUTIFUL MASTERPIECE!!!!

Secondly, update schedule: Someone asked if I update Saturdays now, and I told them no. I meant to update last week's Tuesday but didn't have the chapter done 'til very early today, so I went ahead and updated so y'all didn't have to wait for another couple days. :) It was my apology update, basically, since I kept saying that I'd go for a 2-week schedule and broke that promise. For now, updates will still be sporadic, but I'll do my best for Tuesday updates.

Thirdly, thanks to all once again! I've got over a thousand kudos and almost four hundred bookmarks and that's SO AWESOME! Your love and support really does help! :D
Chapter 37

Chapter Summary

Ayyyy, this one's on time! Fair warning, I strip some text (dialogue) straight from the books, but I've been doing that, so it's nothing new. Still don't own HP... And tbh, I'm a little unsure about this chapter. It's not as action-y as it should be, but eh.

And, thank you all — as always — for the kudos/bookmarks/comments/love/support! :D It's very inspiring. Enjoy the chapter!

... 

It was darker than I thought it was. Cloud cover always confused my sense of time, but the sun was truly sunk beneath the mountains now, no trace of sunset golds and reds at all. It drizzled earlier today so the grass is wet and I was uncoordinated enough that I was slipping as I stumble-ran, breathing deep enough that some part of my mind was a slight worried.

Only part of my mind, though. The rest was hell bent on getting to the Shrieking Shack, getting to Sirius, what I’d have to say to all of the parties present who weren’t Sirius, and running through all the anti-werewolf defensive spells and tricks I’d hammered into my head with all the desperation of an ex-college student.

The willow was creaking as I clawed my way up to its place on the hill, roots coiling menacingly as it detected me despite the Disillusionment Charm; I flung my arm out, waving my wand and opening the pathway to the Shack, diving inside where it was cold and wet and I was surely streaked with dirt under the magic. By the time I made it to the actual Shack, though, I slowed to a quick trot, trying to keep my breathing down by tilting my head up, straightening my airway — no sense in wasting the magic on a Silencing Charm when I could just do this, right? — but still breathing rather hard; I was not made for running.

The Shack’s lower floors were mostly clean of dust because me and Sirius; we never used the stairs, so they were a mess of dirt and dark stains and trails through thick dust and grime that must’ve been new. There were muffled voices, too, rolling between quiet and just short of roaring, cadences I recognized well. A clumsy crawl up the stairs, and I could make out raised voices coming from the first bedroom on the right, where Sirius and I agreed to bring everyone for the confrontation part of our evening.

“-father, like son, Potter. I have just saved your neck… you should be thanking me on bended knee! You would have been well served if he’d killed you! You’d have died like your father, too arrogant to believe you might be mistaken in Black — already your mistakes have caused your little friends injury, and yet you stand in defense of their attacker? Stupid boy- Get out of the way, or I will make you. GET OUT OF THE WAY, POTTER!”

Shit! This was somewhere around when Harry would attack Snape, wasn’t it? Good god, I’d
missed a lot; Sirius had probably already tried to explain about Pettigrew, with Lupin backing him, but then Snape would’ve shown up… We needed Snape to give credence to our story later, he might’ve hated Sirius but he would give me the benefit of the doubt, the man was bitter and enraged, not stupid. Sirius hated this plan, but I had to get in there-

“Finite Incantatem.” I cast quietly, stepping into the room and pushing the creaking door open.

“STUPEFY!”

I slammed myself to the side, jarring my shoulder to avoid a jet of crimson spellfire, flying close enough to raise the hairs on my skin, heart thundering with surprise as Snape sneered at me, having spun around so quickly that I had only dodged because I was already keyed up and panicky. Harry was standing near the door but had been shoved aside, back to the bed where I saw my brother and Hermione sitting with wide eyes, scrambling up to drag him near them, protect him. Snape was in the center of the room, wand out, a step back from where he’d been before, his back slightly to Sirius, who was nearest to the grimy windows and rigid with tension.

“What the-”

“Blimey!”

“Ah, the accomplice. Another for Azkaban, then… Spicuventius!” my Head of House snarled, flicking his wrist.

The air compressed into four, thin, cone-like projectiles, tiny whirlwinds that shot forward and left splintered holes in the wooden walls and floor right behind me, sending clouds of dirt and dust everywhere. I scrambled forward, giving a little shriek and coughing as I did, trying to avoid Snape’s nonlethal but still probably quite painful spells; my form was reflectively invisible, not quite perfect invisibility — he could see me in close quarters easily, like a odd, shining, mirror-like shape of a person in thin air, which was becoming more obvious with how I’d just canceled my spell and it was fading as we dueled.

(Not really. Dueled, that is. If I was actually dueling Severus Snape, I’d probably be dead by now.)

“Diffindo!”

“Protego!” I screamed, trying to get away from Snape and deflecting a no-doubt overpowered Cutting Curse away, the translucent-blue light slashing into the ceiling instead.

“STOP! SNAPE STOP!”

I suddenly found myself yanked forward, pressed away with Sirius in between me and Snape, who was between Sirius and the Golden Trio. I almost tripped over something on the ground, which turned out to be a tied-up Professor Lupin, looking confused and alarmed at what was going on, struggling on the ground as he was. I clutched at Sirius’ back, dazed at the fact that Snape had been throwing spells around like candy at me, trying to catch my breath but not seeming to be able to; there had been dust everywhere, exploding wood, and I’d been running…

My breath came in short and quick and I dug my fingers into Sirius’ back and arm to warn him, chest heaving and lungs desperate for breath. Fuck- I was having a goddamn asthma attack right now, wasn’t I? Thank you, Fate, this is exactly what I needed right now. Sirius winced at the feeling of my nails biting into his skin and paused from his snarling at Snape (who was demanding to know who Sirius had tricked into helping him) looking back and down at my slowly-revealing face, probably pale with need for oxygen.
“Lys?” he asked, panicked.

He met my eyes, so I think that part of my body was showing up. I nodded frantically.

“WEASLEY!”

“Lyssie?”

“LYS?”

“O! LET GO OF MY SISTER YOU BLOODY MURDERER!”

I could actually see my hands on Sirius’ sleeves, so I think the spell’s chameleon layers had peeled right off. Just as my lungs started to burn, lovely.

“Sirius- Sirius! Miss Weasley is- She’s having an asthma attack!” yelled Lupin from the floor, beginning to flounder against his binds even harder, looking concerned even as he was tied up. I was rather surprised he recognized the symptoms, since wizards generally were clueless about illnesses as fixable (if you had the money) as asthma.

Sirius’ eyes flashed with recognition and determination at those words, and he grabbed the wand I offered him — my wand, I offered him my wand like I always did, and it worked for him rather well, as if it knew that he was one of mine and was trying to help him as I did — which my brother screamed inarticulately at, Snape and Harry darting forward to stop him or wrench it out of his hands or something.

“Anapneo,” Sirius intoned, ignoring the stilling room, tapping his wand to my throat gently. He’d had to do this for me twice before, after some really badly-gone Memory Ward practices, before he’d gotten bored enough to clean the entire first floor of dust and allergens. “Strenudassecaelius. Uklidnisera.”

I felt my throat open, air rushing into my lungs as I gasped for it, finally able to breath. The tears gathered at the corners of my eyes seemed to melt away and I rubbed at my face to get the red out, coughing at the influx of air after my body had denied it. Sirius was patting my back gently, checking me over, and it wasn’t until I looked up that I realized the entire room was staring at us in amazed shock/horror, my Head of House and Ron and Harry very nearly bristling as they were frozen in place.

Sirius and I glanced at each other (Merlin that was terrible timing, what do we do, now? was the look exchanged), and he casually flicked a little, “Aperioristos.” at Lupin to snap the bonds off of him before holding my wand back out; I made a show shaking my head and pushing my wand away, telling him to keep it for now, and we stood with me just slightly behind Sirius (shielded from Snape, who he glared at) and him slightly in-front but beside me.

It was Snape who broke the silence.

“I will tell you once, Black,” growled Snape, black eyes glittering and face pale. I was surprised when he jabbed a hand out and bodily pushed Harry — who’d been a minute away from tackling Sirius to the ground once he’d gotten my wand — back to the shredded bed with the other two. “You will step away from my student, you will tell me what enchantment you have Miss Weasley under that I may undo it, you and the wolf will surrender yourselves to me, and you will quietly return to Azkaban. You will do all these things, Black, or I will kill you where you stand.”

His eyes kept darting to me and back to Sirius, which was how I knew that he was, under his Occlumency and sneering face, rather worried that I — Slytherin second year and a mark of pride
to my House — was behind a convict who he believed was the cause of the death of Lily Potter. … Which sounded much worse and much more understandable the more I thought about it.

I cleared my throat, drawing eyes to me. I was accustomed to attention, parvus potesta reigning that I was, but this was different; made me want to hide behind Sirius and make him take care of everything, like a child. Bury my head in the sand like an ignorant sheep. But that wasn’t how partnerships worked, and Slytherin I might be, I hated to imagine that I was a coward who would do that to Sirius. My fear wasn’t going to control me, and I was already embarrassed under my tension that I’d just suffered a bloody asthma attack because I ran and choked on a bit of dust, dammit.

“Professor. Sirius would never hurt me.” I said, slow for the sake of my still-gathering breath.

(He was already nearly overcome with shame and horror by the fact that his fortune would be derived from my suffering. I knew Sirius a little too well by now; he would die before purposefully and maliciously harming me.)

I punctuated the statement by bringing my hand to Sirius’ wrist, gripping at the pooling fabric of his robe sleeve there. A perfectly innocent, trusting gesture. Unfortunately, no one relaxed at the sight — everyone just stiffened, more suspicious, and Snape looked a second away from throwing a Killing Curse.

“Weasley, I suggest you hold your tongue,” Snape said dismissively. “I doubt you know what you are saying.”

“Are you bloody kidding me, Snape? She’s not under an enchantment.” Sirius snapped.

“You’ll excuse me if I don’t believe that, Black, after I just witnessed one of my less idiotic Slytherin students give you permission to cast with her wand,” replied Snape icily, “and then proceed to refuse its return.”

With the fact that a criminal — a murderer, they thought — used and currently possessed my wand being spoken aloud, my brother snapped. “You SICK BASTARD! What have you done to my sister?” he roared.

“Ron, no-!”

“Get off me, Hermione, I’m gonna kill him! He was bloody lying, can’t you see? That son of a bitch has my sister, bollocks to Pettigrew being alive — he and the werewolf were obviously lying!” Ron snarled, staggering up on his feet and trying to get to me.

“Granger, Potter!” Snape barked, “Restrain Weasley!”

I felt my teeth grinding together as my heart rate calmed and my lungs figured out they were safe. (No doubt I'd have to get Madam Pomfrey to check on them later, because asthma attacks held back by spells were far more likely to continue on than if I’d had one of the dragon-lady's nifty potions on me…) There was a dull ache in my throat and chest, like an echo of just a few minutes prior, so I focused on something else. Ron and Hermione both looked dirty and injured, Ron’s jeans covered in dark stains that were probably blood. Harry had a cut on his temple that was trickling blood down the side of his face, glasses cracked but not managing to hide ferocious, green eyes darting between Sirius and me and Snape and Ron in quick succession. Ron was struggling to stand, pained face alight with a hint of panic, focused on me and arms trying to bat away Hermione’s trembling attempts to make him sit down. The Trio must’ve fought against Sirius harder…
“Ron, your leg is broken and bleeding heavily, I would advise you—”

“PISSED OFF, LUPIN! You bloody traitor! You probably got her when she was- when she was trying to learn how to cast the Patronus, and Harry was next, too, wasn’t he?”

“No, I—”

Determining that no spells would be flying in this delicate situation, I checked on my somewhat-uncle. Sirius was injured, too, though not as badly. There was a smear of blood on his chin and his lip was swollen and cut, and he looked decidedly more rumpled than he usually did when I dropped in, but he wasn’t swaying where he stood. He felt more solid than ever, actually, with his goal so close and someone to protect at his back and his best friend — his last one — next to him. Lupin looked confused but didn’t move from Sirius or question him; he was waiting to see what would happen before saying anything in a situation that was growing more tangled by the second, which was very... Lupin, I suppose. From what I’d gleaned from Patronus lessons and remembered from Sirius.

Tensions in the room were boiling over to another bout of 'cast first, questions later'. Lupin would defend Sirius because of loyalty and whatever guilt he had, I suppose. Sirius would fight against Snape but falter if the Trio attacked, which Harry and Ron looked like they would. Those three looked on the verge of spellfire because of me but also were held back by the same thing, though Snape really looked pissed at Sirius. 'Pissed' was an understatement, of course. Hermione and I seemed to be the only ones cautious and unwilling to start brawling, which just goes to show that men were ridiculous.

We were off to a rather terrible start. As expected of Fate, really; she was probably laughing at me.

“Did you get him?” I asked lowly, directing my question to Sirius.

My eyes were trained on a furious Ron and a cautious Professor, distracted for a moment while Lupin began to implore the bleeding Ron and Hermione — and together with them, Harry — to calm down and stand down, which everyone sans Hermione seemed to take as a 'or else Lys will be harmed’ and reacted explosively to such. They would be busy for a while, arguing amongst themselves; I’d take advantage and check in with my partner for now, then.

“In your brother’s hands,” said Sirius, just as quiet, “They fought hard before Remus came. The girl has a wicked left hook.”

If I weren't coiled so tight, I might've smiled. “Is it him?” I asked instead.

Sirius twitched at my implication.

Did we have the right rat?

“I think so. Would you…?”

I smiled grimly. “I know the bastard’s colors, don’t worry.”

My core sent a pulse of magic to my eyes, threading through the paths of those Brightstalker-based rituals I had to renew every once in a while — I’d have to do that soon, actually — flicking my Mage Sight back on. The colors in the room were swirling, every one of them tense. Sirius’ blackened mauve, flecked with gold and crimson, was writhing and swirling around his form jerkily, its song a low, fluttery buzz; he was very excited, anxious. The colors would sometimes flicker mirror-like, indicating how unhealthy his head was, but it was better than before. Lupin’s colors tentatively prodded at Sirius’, maroon and violet and reddish-blues tinged with grey-blacks, slow and gentle but sharp, shimmering silver. Snape’s night sky was crazed, jolting around him, curling around him and the ones he stood before (grudgingly), sparking with what I assumed was anger.
I squinted past the larger cores of the adults, shoving my own down and telling it to behave, gazing at the Trio. Hermione’s were still those bright yellows and greens, but there were tinges of orange and teal shades blooming all along the edges, the mist curling defensively and entwined with other colors. Harry was like before, peacock colors that shone metallically, stiff in movement and strings winding around his friends, silvers and golds tentatively reaching for me but not quite making it. Ron’s explosion of dawn and dusk colors was the most active in the room, thrashing and roaring and struggling as he did; those were the colors I gazed at, looking for what they were accidentally hiding…

There. Mustard yellows mixing with poisonous greens, rotting beige and fleshy pinks oozing all over like sores. Blackened edges that dripped and bubbled, strings that were weak enough that I almost didn’t believe they were there, like a normal animal’s or a weak familiar’s. There was a rot in those colors, in that soul, and seeing those trembling clouds of discolored ink nestled in my brother’s beautiful magic almost made me lose it.


Sirius’ face stretched into a grin. “Good.” We both glanced at the chaos that was going on, with Snape growling at Lupin and Lupin trying not to provoke anybody. Sirius grimaced. “You’re going to have to clear this one up, Lys.”

I nodded.

“Ron!” I called.

The room went silent, Ron looking at me desperately. “Lyssie?”

I swallowed. I was suddenly very sorry that I couldn’t have told him, warned him about this, spared him the panic. But there was nothing I could’ve done; a warning would’ve changed his behavior, would have set off different actions — if I’d warned him, I might not have ever been able to get Pettigrew. He might not be mangled up and bleeding, but I would’ve failed Harry and Sirius and even myself; I traded my brother’s pain for this.

Worth it, I thought to myself firmly, And Ron would agree, you know he would if he knew everything. Harry’s like his brother, and he’s going to love Sirius, and he’ll hate Pettigrew; it’s worth it, it’s worth it, Lyssie.

I choked down the desire to run to my brother and help his wounds with my meager first aid — doing that meant Sirius and Lupin wouldn’t have a shield, and that wouldn’t do.

“Come on, Ron,” I started, trying to assure him I was in control of my actions, “You really think I wouldn’t have recognized an Animagus from a familiar after all these years? The colors are different, you know. I used to lie to you all about it, and Alby never caught it because they are similar, but I’ve been living with the rat nearly all my life. Ron... I know what humans cores sing. Why do you think I’ve hated him ever since Percy picked him up?”

He winced at that, but looked thoughtful. Harry’s dark scowl uncurled, comprehension dawning — he knew I was a Soothsayer.

Snape, however, didn’t falter. He ignored me, facing Sirius, wand raised and still and ready. “I will not tell you again, Black. Holding one of our most promising students hostage… I would be well within my rights to kill you where you stand. This is more than enough reason. More than enough.”
Snape probably would’ve killed him as soon as I’d recovered from my attack if not for the fact that my wand was in his hand, the hand I was nearly holding. If Sirius were using me as hostage, he had proven to be a quick caster; I might not be dead, but I could be seriously injured, and Snape would be loathe to risk that. Maybe if there weren’t someone here whom Snape knew more personally, who spoke to him genially on a semi-regular and helped him with his House and had taken care of all of the flailing little firsties last year... Maybe Snape would've been more spell-trigger-happy, more impulsive, more emotional. I knew better than anyone, the soothing presence of having a Slytherin subordinate by my side; my boys forced me to be smarter about decisions, coolheaded, careful. Perhaps it was wishful thinking, but maybe Snape worked much the same?

“If I may…” Sirius and I looked to our right, to Lupin. He was gazing at us mildly, hands folded in front of him — I believe Snape had his wand? — and posture relaxed, though I knew from my quick peek into Mage Sight that he was anything but. “Sirius, this is your accomplice? The person who’s been helping you hide, helping you plan for this? Guinevere Weasley?”

Sirius nodded eagerly, glad for the diffusion of tension, the distraction, the chance to explain. “She knew... She knew it was Peter, all along, Remus. She’s been trying to avoid him for years, been watching him for years, she wanted him dead as much as I did... I set out from... from Azkaban to kill him, to protect the pack... But she convinced me to let him live, to turn him in, instead... She helped me...” Sirius turned to the trio, looking at Harry pleadingly. “When I got out of Azkaban, I couldn’t even remember your name, Harry... I could barely remember James. My best friend- James- I could barely... I could barely think—”

Fuck. He was losing it, dammit; we were both going to bloody humiliate ourselves, weren’t we?

My grip on his sleeve slid to his wrist, hold loose, just my fingertips squeezing his pulse point gently. “Sirius,” I called softly.

Sirius blinked rapidly, a shudder going through him before his foggy eyes cleared. “Ah... Yes. Yes, it was- it was Lys who reminded me that... that Pettigrew was better off alive than dead. Even if we both hated him, she... I would never- I would never enchant Lys, I would never hurt Harry, I would never... Both of them are pack. Pettigrew needs to go away for their safety, if... if nothing else. Please. We can prove it. Pettigrew... he’s right there.”

“Professor,” I spoke, “You know my abilities better than almost everyone here. There is no way I would make this monumental of a mistake. That man disguised himself as my family’s pet after murdering James and Lily Potter.”

Slytherin to Slytherin, Snape probably picked up on a lot of things with that. One of which being that I knew his connection to Lily Potter and was appealing to that, another of which was that either I was under a very complex and strong enchantment if Sirius was also aware of my Clairvoyance and the specific details of my visions, which was likely impossible. Snape just saw the man have an episode, after all, and powerful wizard or not, twelve years of dementors did things to you. Snape had to know this. He was bitter but he had to know this.

His eyes narrowed dangerously.

(Then again, he was very, very bitter.)

“So you know about Miss Weasley’s abilities, then.” Snape sneered, wand rising from it’s slightly lowered position slowly. Sirius swallowed as it pointed to his chest. “That is all the reason I need. Avada—”

Oh, hell no-
“Petrificus Totalus!”

Snape’s spell was cut off as his limbs snapped to his body, a look of shock in his slack face. He fell forward and slammed into the floor, a cloud of dust following him, causing Sirius to back us up and keep me away from another asthma attack. My eyes were wide when I looked at Ron behind the wand that did it, who looked just as stunned; perhaps he shouldn’t have been, with Harry and Hermione flanking him with their own wands out, which I suppose meant they were about to do the same thing, my brother was just the fastest.

“Ron!” Hermione called, outraged.

He turned to look at her, scowling. “I learned this spell from you, Hermione!”

“You just attacked a teacher!” she half-shrieked, pointing at the prone form of Snape.

“As if you weren’t about to do the same thing!”

“I would’ve Stunned him and then caught him before he fell! They can still feel pain in their paralysis, Ron!”

Ron rolled his eyes. “Can’t have the bloody bastard unconscious, Hermione. Lyssie thinks Black’s telling he truth? Then we need testament from someone trustworthy, and Snape’s a git, but Dumbledore trusts him. Even he wouldn’t lie to Dumbledore once he knows the truth.”

“You thought all that through?” Hermione asked, looking baffled.

My brother shrugged. (A little thrum of pride went through me. That was my brother, the strategist.)

Harry was the one looking cautious, now, however. Ignoring the other two's levity, he looked at me. “Lys… You’re really not… enchanted?”

I nodded, trying to smile reassuringly. “I’m really not. As if I’d let a Gryffindor enchant me.”

Harry frowned. I tightened my hold on Sirius’ wrist when he leveled his wand at us, striding past Ron and Hermione protectively. His gaze was hard.

Hermione gasped. “Harry, what are you doing?”

He didn’t look at her, eyes trained on the both of us. “Prove you’re really Lys. Prove you’re not enchanted.”

“Harry, you wanted to listen to Black and Lupin, didn’t you? Just- Let’s listen to them, stop drawing your wand on my sister.” Ron insisted.

“If she was enchanted, he’d already have her,” Harry warned quietly, “her and all her memories.”

“Impossible,” Hermione said at once, with Ron giving a short nod to agree, “That sort of enchantment, the entire take-over of a person… That requires a lot more than a stolen wand, Harry. And she’d be much more mechanical, if he’d gone through all her memories, especially if she’s an Occlumens.”

“Mate, that’s my sister-”

“Prove it!” Harry yelled. The two beside him went silent. His voice wavered only a little. “I’m- I’m
not risking anyone else! We only got Snape ‘cos he was about to- Just- Malfoy was possessed last year and we talked to him, and we never realized anything for it!” His voice lowered. "If you’re Lys, you would understand. You know I can’t make the same mistakes we did last year. Not risking it."

Dietrich lying like a doll in the Chamber, white skin and pale hair a splash against dark marble — stands with her fists clenched at her sides, mouth shut and frowning — thinking — “Why do you do this to yourself, alone? Tell me the truth, Guinevere. Help me understand, so I can help. Just... why do you put it above us? What power does it hold over you, what do you fear, that you can’t at least tell me? Your best friend?” — I don't think anyone's ever dared in a long time, Guinevere. Dared what? Laugh at me. It's... not quite as irritating as I imagined. — fingers scrambling at his neck, it felt like ice, there was a fluttering pulse — tears in her eyes — “Dead. I will drain the life from Draco Malfoy, Imperio Lys, and have her cast the curse to kill her little friend. You won’t be alone in death, at least, Potter. Lord Voldemort knows mercy.” — blood dripped down her finger and she watched in dazed fascination as Dietrich's pale skin made it redder...

Stop.

“Even Tom Riddle never managed to absorb all of Malfoy’s memories, Harry,” I said quietly, “He was a very excellent judge of character and actor, though. If he ever wanted to, he could’ve easily possessed and impersonated me.”

“Fine, then. This’ll be easy. Tell me something only you and I would understand.”

“You used one of the things I banned in Slytherin to kidnap me, which you planned to do with Harper and Lu, passing it off as an intervention. I’d just told you you’d never be able to be a git if you tried, but then you proved me wrong. Git.” I fired off quickly.

Thanks, Harry. Even if you had to pretty much blackmail me up here.

It wasn’t blackmail!

You used puppy-eyes. I banned that ages ago in Slytherin.

Harry’s eyes narrowed. Was my hint too obscure?

“Puppy-eyes,” he snorted. He lowered his wand. “Of course you’d go with that, Lys… Right, then.” He turned a dangerous gaze on Sirius and Lupin. “I want answers. You’ve dragged my friends into this, so I want the truth. I-I’m not saying I believe this story, but…”

He glanced at Ron, who nodded again. “I trust my sister,” said Ron, “Either you’re telling the truth or you managed to trick my sister. My sister who is a Seer.”

I could see both Lupin and Sirius relax, shoulders slouching just slightly.

“Thank you,” Lupin said.

“We have proof.” Sirius fired off immediately, “Or, rather... you have proof.”

Lupin nodded, taking a step forward and only slightly flinching when the trio took a defensive step back. He held out his hand, but nothing more than that. “Yes. Proof, we can give you. The rat — give me Peter, please. Now.”
On the night that I’d finally caved in and told Sirius about the price I had to pay, the surprise one that came from nowhere, the Baron accompanied me back to the castle as per usual and had asked me something.

*Are you prepared, young reincarnation?*

For what, I’d asked the Baron.

*To ruin the lycanthrope’s life.*

It startled and horrified me that my answer was an unflinching, unhesitating positive. I was prepared.

The Baron had looked at me oddly, but then he’d smiled. I was truly a Slytherin. I went to bed that night feeling wide-awake and full of too many thoughts. Sirius had a mental breakdown because of what he was going to do: effectively murder/incarcerate one of his ex-best friends, and fulfill the other one’s greatest fear to do it. I, on the other hand, only felt a sliver of pain for the quiet professor who gave me occasional pointers on the Patronus and smiled at me and my boys’ ridiculous antics during class.

They explained to the trio and caught up amongst themselves, Lupin and Sirius. How Sirius saw the papers with my family on the front page, after our visit with Bill in Egypt. How Pettigrew must’ve faked his death by cutting off his finger and blowing the entire street up, killing all those Muggles as he did. How Sirius was assisted by Hermione’s cat, the cat that snuck him in to find me and often accompanied him in the day while I was at school. How the spell to force Pettigrew into his human form wouldn’t (unfortunately) really hurt.

Throughout all this, I studied Lupin and once refreshed Snape’s *Petrificus Totalus.*

I really, really hadn’t paid much attention to Lupin at all this year. He was a good teacher, ready to answer questions and clarify in his lectures and provide extra information when prompted. He never once-complained that I tagged along with Harry for Patronus lessons in the beginning, even though I knew he just wanted to spend time with his pseudo-godson; he’d only looked pleased when I succeeded in progressing with the Patronus, and polite when I assured him that I’d gotten all the pointers I needed from him, thank you, I’ll be alright to practice more on my own.

I would regret it, when he bit me. I would regret making him go through that pain.

(But not enough to stop this.)

“Ready, Sirius?”

Ron had handed the rat over peacefully, not protesting as I think he once did in canon. Sirius still had my wand — I’d shaken my head when he held it back to my questioningly, since I knew my elder-and-dragon-heartstring would accept him better than Snape’s or Ron’s or whoever else’s here — and Lupin retrieved his. It was fitting, I think, that the two Marauders trained their wands on the traitor, one of those wands belonging to me. Both men looked determined and angry, looking down on the rat in Ron’s outstretched hand. I’d long since released Sirius from my hold, stepping back; clearly on their side, but no longer acting “the hostage” for their protection.

“Together?” Sirius asked.
Lupin plucked the rat by his tail and let Ron beat a hasty retreat. “Yes, I think so. One the count of three…” His eyes were golden and cold, expression schooled into disdain but hiding a nearly palpable fury.

I smiled. Lupin really did remind me of Jay.

“One — two — THREE! Brutuhominus Revelario!”

“Brutuhominus Revelario!”

There was a flash of blue-white, making my eyes squint at the sudden blast of light, but I wasn’t too interested in another Animagus transformation. I quite enjoyed the expressions on the Marauders’ faces; there was a sort of hunger to Sirius, a hateful glimmer in his eyes and tilt to his mouth that spelled predator. Lupin, though…

It’d be just like Jay, really, to look that pleasant and collected and frightening as hell. Like there was a hurricane behind him, ready to tear apart anyone that pissed him off. Lupin’s smile was sharp and full of edges.

“Well, hello, Peter,” said the professor, “Long time, no see.”

“S-Sirius… R-Remus… Ah… My friends… my old friends…” said the man.

Peter Pettigrew seemed just like the sort of person who’d be a rat. Weedy and hunched, twitching nervously, watery eyes darting about. Pale and flat hair slick with sweat, balding, ratty robes hanging on a thin frame. Smiling nervously, insincerely.

Sirius made to lunge forward, but Lupin grabbed him by the arm, halting him. My wand was tucked behind his ear, in fact, in the style that I’d copy from Luna every now and then and Sirius seemed to like. I had a feeling he didn’t want to put too many suspicious spells on my wand and rather wanted to beat Pettigrew with his hands, these being the only reasons he wasn’t casting Cruciatuses and such.

“We’ve been having a little chat, Peter, about what happened the night Lily and James died. That night, and the night Sirius was thrown into Azkaban… I’m sure you’ve heard, even while you were squeaking around, trying to escape Ronald Weasley. You’ve always been a very good eavesdropper, haven’t you, Peter? You were always the lookout for us at school, always telling us what teachers were looking down which corridors… what victims were hiding where…”

“Remus,” Pettigrew breathed, eyes widening with every short, shaky gasp, “you don’t believe him, do you…? He tried to kill me, Remus…”

“So we’ve heard.” Lupin said, his face still relaxed and pleasant, wand still up. “I’d like to clear up one or two little matters with you, Peter, if you’d be so-”

“He’s come to try to kill me again!” Pettigrew shrieked, stumbling away from Sirius but not daring to go further when Sirius snatched his wand from his ear immediately. “See? See!? He killed Lily and James and how he’s going to kill me, too… You’ve got to help me, Remus! He’s going to kill me, he even admitted it!”

“He’s not going to kill you,” I spoke coldly, watching Pettigrew’s eyes as they darted from exit to exit. “I made sure of it.”

“No one’s going to try to kill you until we’ve sorted a few things out,” Lupin added.
“Sorted things out?” Pettigrew said, voice pitching with hysteria, “I knew he’d come for me! I knew he’d be back for me! I’ve been waiting for this for twelve years!”

Stupid, pathetic man, whispered something in my head, You've been waiting in comfort and ignorant bliss. I've had nightmares about the things you've done.

“So have I,” Sirius hissed, voicing both our thoughts perfectly.

...

My attention, however, was forcefully wrenched away when I took a breath to keep myself from strangling Pettigrew alongside Sirius and happened upon that familiar scent of coppery blood.

Ron.

Heart dropping in immediate worry, I quietly padded over to the Trio, all of them entranced by the floundering excuses and the snarling accusations being tossed around, and gently touched my brother’s shoulder. He was the furthest back from Pettigrew, having retreated behind the other two. Ron flinched at the contact but looked at me, dirt-streaked face and dark lighting making his eyes like blue beacons in the dark. There were a thousand things I wanted to say to Ron, because he deserved an explanation from his sister and not three virtual strangers whose problems shouldn’t have been foisted on us, but...

But goddamn me, if I weren't terrible at emotional things like that.

“Let me treat you, Ron,” I whispered, “You’re hurt and I can help.”

He glanced back at the Marauder trio, but lumbered along after me. I sat him back down on the bed, started trying my best with Healing without a wand — much harder and magic-consuming, but I had some practice with the spells. (Healing is not so difficult as it seems. It is an exercise in control, Guinevere... I can recommend some books, if you aren't adverse to the Restricted Section...). I had to tear parts of his jeans open, cleaning the wounds and the skin and conjuring bandages for him. At one point, Hermione had backed away from what was very much Harry’s family drama and started to help, with both her own wounds and Ron’s, all our hands busy as we watched the events unfold with grim faces.

“Ohught to recast the Body-Bind soon,” I murmured to Hermione once we were mostly done with the bad wounds, “Snape’s listening but I don’t think anyone wants to chance it.”

She nodded, looking too shocked to do much else but go along with me, standing and returning to Harry, moving closer to where Snape was stuck. I began to sew Ron’s jeans back up, ready to bind the leg on the outside at well, to give it stability. His left got the worst of it: savaged skin, bones broken in two places. One near the ankle, the other the fucking thigh bone, I forget what’s it’s called — the one that’s harder than bloody concrete, and Sirius Black broke it. That idiot, I was going to kill him after all this was over... Hurting my brother like this, honestly, I know we said needs and means about it, but my brother...

(I hated that I still thought this was worth it. Why was I so guilty that I wasn't guilty enough?)

“I’m sorry,” I said quietly, binding his legs again — not enough to fix the bone, but to disinfect and protect and bind until Madam Pomfrey could get to him, “Ron, I.”
“I get it, you know.” said Ron, voice low and eyes trained on the speaking adults and Harry.

(Ron was a natural multitasker, inherited from our genius of a father. He was listening and thinking on two fronts. I did this, too, especially when I was walking to class and meditating/Seeing at the same time.)

“Ferula,” I whispered, finishing my first aid.

Ron grimaced at the feel of his numbed leg being splinted. He seemed to tear his eyes from the conversation about Peter Pettigrew’s weakness, focusing his attention on me. “I get it,” he repeated, his voice gentle and rough, “You think I- Lyssie. Lys. We — all of us, me and Percy and all of us — researched Seer-Clairvoyants years ago. When you were stuck in that... in that coma... We bothered Dumbledore so much about it. He told us- He- I know, alright? I know... I know you don’t have a choice, because... because it’ll be right bloody bad, if you try to piss with Fate. I know that, and- and I can’t blame you, for keeping secrets, because the alternative is- is you dying, or something, and I- we won’t have that. None of us.”

“I’m still-”

“Sorry, yeah. Because... that’s you, Lyssie. You don’t- You don’t give yourself a break, ever. Which is right bollocks, you know, because if there’s someone who needs to bloody relax, it’s you. But... But you’re my little sister, Lys, and if we’ve got to get a little hurt so you don't have to be, that's okay. If you have to lie so that you can stick around with the rest of us, that’s okay. I know you.”

“Do you really?” I asked tiredly.

*Seer, but Slytherin. Slytherin, but sister. Sister, but stranger. Reincarnation.*

Ron smiled tightly. “I know you, Lyssie. You’re family.”

I know it was a tense moment. I know Harry and Hermione and Snape were being explained to, that they were learning of the Secret-Keeper switch, the faked death, the escape from Azkaban; all that important stuff. And Ron knew that too, but his blue eyes were trained on me because — to my big brother — I was more important than that. And it made my chest hurt in an entirely different way than an hour prior, and my face felt too warm and stuffy.

I know it was a tense moment, but I just loved my brother so much in this moment it was silly. I leaned forward and hugged him hard, feeling calm. I’d known he’d be on my side when he knew all of the truth, but it was so nice to have my choices be somewhat validated. Ron hugged back tightly, silent but solid. He didn't even have to know the full picture to forgive me, and it wasn't fair for him but I couldn't help but be grateful for it.

“Ron!”

We pulled away from each other as the rat-bastard scurried to us, kneeling down and pawing at our legs with nine fingers.

“Haven’t I been a good friend... a good pet?” Pettigrew begged, eyes glassy and jaw trembling, “You won’t let them kill me, Ron, will you...? You’re on my side, aren’t you?”

Ron’s face contorted with anger. “You used to scare Lyssie to death when we were younger! I let you sleep in my bed! I let you sleep in my bed when Ginny would sneak in!” my brother snarled, doing his best to wrench away from Pettigrew’s hands.
Pettigrew knew just how protective Ron was of his little sisters, and gave up on that front. He whirled around to me, ignoring when Ron drew me closer to him and tried to get me away. Pettigrew had tears very solidly in his eyes, now. “I was a good pet… a good rat… You’ve never liked me, I know, but you’re a kind girl… so good to your family… I was part of that, I was a loyal pet, wasn’t I? You wouldn’t let them do it, would you?”

“How many times will I have to remind you, filth?” I asked, grimacing at the sight his kneeling at my feet. “We’re not going to kill you, Pettigrew.”

“Azkaban is no better! I’ll die there, I’ll die- I’m not strong enough- I can’t go there!” Pettigrew screamed, throwing himself away from us and landing in a heap before Harry, pawing at the boy’s jeans frantically. “Harry…” Pettigrew said, voice shaking just as much as the rest of him, kneeling on the dusty wooden planks, utterly alone in a room full of people who wanted him to die, “Harry… you look just like your father… just like him… He and I were friends, we were friends… you- you called me Uncle, Harry, you used to call me Uncle Wormy…”

Sirius Black snapped, stomping forward and roaring, “HOW DARE YOU SPEAK TO HARRY? HOW DARE YOU FACE HIM? HOW DARE YOU TALK ABOUT JAMES IN FRONT OF HIM? HOW DARE YOU TRY TO CLAIM HIM AS FAMILY WHEN YOU KILLED THEM?”

“Harry,” Pettigrew persisted, “Harry, James wouldn’t have wanted me killed… He always protected me… he was my friend… James would have understood, Harry… he would have shown me mercy… He would have… I can disappear — none of you will ever hear from me again! I can swear it… an Unbreakable Vow, if you’d just… James, he would do it, he would- Mercy… because we were friends… You look just like him- just- just like him-”

“On the contrary,” said another voice, “James Potter was quite merciless. An Auror, Potter, do you know what that is? A hunter of Dark wizards… certainly started young, your father. One would think… you would remember that, Pettigrew…”

We all started at the sight of Snape picking himself off the floor with as much dignity as he could muster, a sharp wand movement cleaning him of dust and debris in an instant. Sirius, Harry, and Lupin looked ready to jump him, but he glared at them all before anyone moved.

“I am not a fool Gryffindor,” said Snape coolly, “I know when I am outnumbered, and when I’ve been misled. Besides—” He sneered at Sirius. “you’ll need my testimony if you wish to be freed, mutt. The fact that your life will forever be owed to your greatest enemy, I can think of no better punishment for a pathetic wizard like you, Black.”

“I feel like I ought to curse you for that, Snivellous, but I’ll let it slide in light of more important matters. Like Pettigrew.” Sirius growled.

Lupin nodded to Snape. “Thank you, Severus.”

Snape glowered. “I wouldn’t accept your thanks if it were the only thing saving my life, Lupin. Hurry up with it, wolf. Pest extermination is far below professors’ pay grade. Unsurprising that you’d take it upon yourself to clean up after you crawled with the filth.”

“Fuck you, Snape.” Sirius snapped.

“Sirius,” Lupin sighed.

“This doesn’t mean anything, Lupin. We will discuss the mutt after the rat is taken care of.”

The werewolf nodded agreeably. “Guentanemis Peter Pettigrew,” cast Lupin.
I didn’t know the spell, but it somehow forced Pettigrew to straighten his stance, though his knees firmly remained on the ground. His hands flew behind him, seemingly bound by nothing, and it looked like he was awaiting judgement. He certainly cried like he was.

“You sold Lily and James to Voldemort,” Sirius snarled, shaking — not with fear, like Pettigrew — but with barely restrained anger, “Do you deny it?”

Pettigrew whimpered.

“Answer, rat,” Snape whispered, the words like an explosion in the silence of the room.

Another whimper. “Sirius, Sirius, what could I have done?” he managed to get out, looking between the last of the Marauders desperately, “The Dark Lord… you have no idea… he has weapons you can’t imagine… I was scared, Sirius, I was never brave like you and Remus and James. I never meant it to happen… He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named forced me-”

“How touching.” Snape snarled.

“You have no ground to stand on, Death Eater.” Sirius spat. In another instant, he whirled on Pettigrew. “Just like him, Peter. Just like Snivellous- You were his SPY. YOU’D BEEN PASSING INFORMATION TO HIM FOR A YEAR BEFORE LILY AND JAMES DIED!”

“He- he was taking over everywhere! Wh- what was there to be gained by refusing him?” Pettigrew looked at Snape. “Y-You understand, don’t you, Severus? You were one of us, too. You were like me-”

“I AM NOTHING LIKE YOU!” Snape roared.

_The silver doe, pale hooves shifting the leaves around it. There was warmth and light and beauty radiating from its starlight hide — “Doesn’t your dad like magic?” “He doesn’t like anything, much.” — sitting side by side, red and black, small smiles and hidden bruises and curling flower petals. He glanced over at her, she was looking at the daisy in the palm of her hand. — laughing, heaving books onto the table, pages and old ink and pointing fingers, eyes bright and mind filled with questions and debate. “You should’ve been a Ravenclaw, Lils.” — Always._

_Stop._

“You don’t understand! He- He would’ve killed me!”

“THEN YOU SHOULD HAVE DIED!” Sirius was held back by Lupin, once again. “DIED RATHER THAN BETRAY YOUR FRIENDS, AS WE WOULD HAVE DONE FOR YOU!”

“You should have realized,” Lupin said quietly, “if Voldemort didn’t kill you, we would.”

“Not that we’re going to, either,” Sirius added, smiling nastily, “You’re going to feel every bit of what I felt these past twelve years, Pettigrew. You’re going to wish you’d never existed once the dementors are through with you.”

“No… No, no, no… NO!” Pettigrew squealed, struggling against his bonds, “There was nothing I could do! He was going to kill me! I-I-I’m not going to Azkaban, I’m not taking a Kiss- IF I GO, I’LL TELL THEM EVERYTHING!” He craned his neck to face me, eyes wide and teary and smile triumphant and crazed. “I’ll reveal you- I’ll tell them everything I know about you! Malfoy still works for the Ministry, he’ll hear it all from me- I’ll tell them! I’LL TELL THEM YOU’RE A CLAIRVOYANT, GIRL!”
Ron lunged off the bed and tried to reach Pettigrew, hands reaching for his throat, but his leg gave and he slammed into the ground. Hermione gasped his name and tried to help and stop him, Harry going to the two of them for solidarity. Lupin looked confused as Pettigrew kept struggling. Sirius started laughing.

“Clairvoyant? What...?” Lupin asked. He turned to Sirius, who was still giggling. “Sirius, snap out of it!”

I pushed off of the bedpost, coming around to Snape. I’d have to prevent him from attempting to cast another Killing Curse, wouldn’t I? Snape, however, saw my movement and glanced at the laughing Sirius and the clueless rest of the room. Pettigrew looked very much like he wanted to sink into the ground, wanted to turn back time and take his words back. He very much didn’t want to die, which seemed to be worse than Azkaban in his list of priorities. And really... if I hadn't had a plan, if I hadn't realized he knew, did he really think blurting out my secret would save his life? Fool.

“Mutt. Explain. Pettigrew is fully aware of a very important piece of information. Why are you going to keep him alive?” Snape bit out, re-cementing my good opinion of his intelligence. He saw he was missing something and hated it, enough to turn to Sirius for answers.

Sirius straightened from his bout of gleeful laughter, registering the heightened panic in the room and sobering in response.

Lupin nudged him with his shoulder. “Sirius. You said there was more to your story, before, but you had given enough for the ignorant of us to believe. This is... the rest of it, I take it?”

Sirius nodded. “Yes. I said... I came to Hogwarts, slipping in as a dog. The cat — your cat, Hermione — helped me for a while. My thoughts were... My head was foggy, but I knew what I needed. Protect Harry, find Lys. The cat helped me find Lys, and he kept me grounded when Lys was unavailable or unwilling, those first few days...”

“Why... Why look for Lys? Why choose her to help you?” Harry asked.

“Well... I suppose the Nundu’s out of the bag, hm, Lys?” Sirius glanced at me.

I nodded, a little sourly. “Well, Peter bloody Pettigrew decided to shout it out to the world, so I suppose it’s fine.”

“Yes, well.” Sirius smiled, directing his explanation to Harry and the others. I suppose he thought that was a safe option, or was savoring looking at his godson in the flesh. Maybe both. “Lys is what you’d call a moderate-superior Clairvoyant. In short, she knows things — past, present, future, if she has a catalyst for information, her magic will seek it out for her to See. Peter invaded her home... Seer-magic protects its Seer, you know, and Pettigrew is a Death Eater. If there was anyone who I’d have been able to convince to help me, with my head all screwy from dementors and being so close to my Animagus and everything else, it was Lys. And she did... After threatening to kill me and feeding me chocolate.”

“You left out the part about Septimus Weasley,” I murmured, feeling embarrassed and indignant at the mention of how I was a goddamn softie that first meeting.

“Yes. Ron, you would know — your great-grandfather, Septimus Weasley. He was... He was an Uncle to me, and before he died, he told me that in my greatest hour of need, I should follow the cat leading me to the girl with the Mind Eater’s book in her hands. The Clairvoyant descendent. If I did, then... She... She would have... has... helped me.”
Ron narrowed his eyes. “Dad doesn’t talk about his family much, though… I know about Septimus. A little too Black, for a Weasley, he says. But just because some old fart told you to approach my baby sister doesn’t mean you should have, bastard.”

“Ron!” Hermione whispered in outrage.

My brother let her scolding roll off his shoulders, focused on Sirius, who snorted. I smirked at him; I knew he’d like my unapologetic, painfully honest big brother.

“I know,” Sirius replied, “but I’m glad I did. You would’ve met a very different person tonight, if not for her. The sacrifices she’s made for this moment… Not even I would understand. But I found her, the girl my Uncle warned me about, and she’d known all her life, practically, who Pettigrew was. Lys had, in fact, been waiting for me. And when… And when I came to her, crippled by dementors, she made sure to get me back on my feet. When I told her I wanted Pettigrew dead, she told me to keep him alive and prove my innocence, all because his trial would benefit Harry more than anyone else.”

The trio turned wide eyes on me.

I shifted, slightly irritated at Sirius for ratting on me. Goddamn emotions. Too unpredictable and hard to plan around. ‘Pettigrew’s trial means Sirius walks free. Sirius walking free means Harry doesn’t have to live with his shithead Muggle family. Or if he wants to live with his shithead Muggle family, at least he’ll have a wizard guardian who can Confound them into being less shitty. Among other things.”

“Lys…”

“Not that this isn’t touching,” Snape sneered, clearly as done with emotional talk as I was, “do get to the point soon, mutt. Miss Weasley’s Clairvoyance is a secret the Headmaster and her Paterfamilias would dearly like to keep that way. The rat knows. If you haven’t got the stomach for it, I’ll gladly put Pettigrew out of his misery.”

Sirius growled at Snape. “Listen here, Snape. As much as I want the rat dead, my first priority is my godson and new goddaughter. The rat’s not going to die. The rat’s going to rot in my old cell at Azkaban after he tells the world what happened, and only that. He won’t say a word about Lyssie, we’ll guaranteed it.”

“And how are you going to guarantee that, Black? A pinky promise?” Snape sneered.

“A Memory Ward.”

The adults went silent. By the looks on Lupin’s and Snape’s pale faces, they knew exactly was a Memory Ward was, and who’d invented it, and quite possibly how. We did, after all, reference the fact that I possessed the Mind Eater’s book, which was illegal. Of course, they hadn’t thought about it when Sirius said he’d been looking for the girl with the Mind Eater’s book, but now that we bring up Memory Wards…

Well. The adults all knew about the book.

“What’s a Memory Ward?” Hermione asked timidly into the silence.

Looks like this was mine, the way Sirius and Snape looked at me first.

“It’s a Legilimencic technique and ritual,” I answered, the trio looking at me curiously, “Exactly what the name implies, really. The Legilimens sifts through the target mind’s memories and
chooses what they’d like to ward away from the consciousness. Sirius and I are going to ward Pettigrew’s memories of my Clairvoyance. He’s not even going to realize there’s something he’s forgetting when he thinks of me.”

Ron brightened at the prospect of me not being in danger. “That’s brilliant!”

“It’s extremely dangerous and highly illegal.” Snape stated flatly.

“Dangerous?” Harry prompted.

“Illegal?” Hermione muttered.

Sirius shook his head. “Besides the point. We don’t have time to debate the moral implications — the longer Pettigrew’s memories aren’t warded, the more difficult the ritual will be.” We don’t know how long it will take but the moon will rise in a few hours so we need this done NOW, is what I heard Sirius not-say. “No matter what, Pettigrew either gets his memories warded or dies. Tonight.” He glowered at Snape. “I would’ve thought that anyone fighting for Dumbledore would choose the road with the least bloodshed.”

Snape was about to retort, probably quite scathingly by his expression, but bless Lupin’s soul, he stepped between them.

“Enough.” Lupin announced. “Arguing for old time’s sake will get us nowhere. We’ve all agreed that Sirius is telling the truth, yes? And we all understand that Pettigrew possesses very sensitive information, as well?”

“Correct,” Snape bit out.

Lupin nodded. “Then here’s what will happen: Sirius will perform the Memory Ward. All of us will escort Peter to the castle, where we will explain to the Headmaster, and likely the Aurors if they’re called. No mention of illegal rituals will be made, because no mention of Miss Weasley’s Clairvoyance can be made. Sirius has confidence in his ability to do the ward, and has obviously planned this in advance along Miss Weasley, so we go along with that, at least for now. Agreed?”

“Agreed.” Sirius said immediately.

Snape, however, looked at me sharply. “Miss Weasley.”

I winced. I hadn’t noticed that I’d edged closer to Sirius, away from Snape, until his hand draped over my shoulder, warm and familiar. I started at the touch, glancing at him and receiving a comforting look. I’m on your side, remember, little partner? that look said. It bolstered me, that look.

“Professor?” I answered, a little less bleak than I would’ve a few seconds ago.

He ran angry, dark eyes over my face. “You Saw this.”

My fists tightened. I met his gaze. “I planned for it.”

“The consequences?”

“Too far-reaching for me to See the entirety of. I’ve paid what I could already. I will pay more.”

I saw Snape’s jaw strain. “We will be having words.” Snape hissed.

I nodded. I’d expected little else. I had, after all, gone behind almost everyone’s backs to meet a
criminal every night for the sake of this one. Practicing Legilimency with my already strained mind, habitually performing an illegal and very dangerous ritual from an equally dangerous book, planning revenge against a full-grown wizard who could have very well hurt me if he’d known... I had taken some very big risks. The only excuse I had for the secrecy was that I didn’t want to tempt Fate any further than she was already; a good excuse but hard to believe, especially on the other side of this mess. And there was always the argument that I could’ve just done nothing, which my only defense would be, No. I couldn’t.

“Severus?” Lupin asked tentatively.

“...Punishment will be doled out afterwards.” Snape said reluctantly, teeth gritted. Which was as good as an agreement, and we all knew it.

(Slytherins did not waste. Slytherins adapted and conquered. For Snape to ignore all the sacrifices I’d made throughout the year, which were surely leading up to this? It would be stupid, especially if he was not fully aware of all the cards in play. Hell, I wasn’t fully aware of all the cards in play, but I was gambling for a good ending anyways. Snape wouldn’t spit on that, not to the detriment of one of the strongest students in his care.)

(I would have to thank him, later, for trusting me, even after all this deception. Or perhaps he trusted Fate? Which would be even more impressive. It was hard to trust Fate, after all.)

“I’ll explain everything later,” I called softly to Ron, who was looking as baffled and nervous as the other two by now, “I promise. There’s just not enough time right now, Ron... Please trust me for a little while more.”

He held my gaze. Then he nodded, curt and shaky. On some level, he realized that I was the mastermind behind all of this. “Right. Just... Just do what you have to do, Lyssie, and then we’re putting this murderer away, okay? Then we’ll talk.”

I smiled, half-fond and half-guilty. “Thank you, Ron.” I turned to Sirius, smile wiped away. “Shall we?”

“Wait — Sirius, Miss Weasley’s going to help you with the ritual itself?” Lupin asked, alarmed.

Snape snorted. “As if it wasn’t obvious by now,” he muttered derisively, probably judging Lupin’s intellect, “Do you think my student has been sneaking about every night just to coddle the mutt?”

Sirius, rolling his eyes and muttering under his breath, waved my wand over Pettigrew, the man sobbing in fright and slumping down. He gripped the back of Pettigrew’s tattered robes with his fist, easily dragging him along the floor. Snape curled his lip as Sirius passed, the trio watching, Harry and Ron casting cold glances at the rat. I turned to follow Sirius after a bit, smirking at the THUD-THUD-THUNK noises that must’ve been Pettigrew being unceremoniously trailed down the splintered, dusty stairs.

I grinned at Lupin, relieved the ritual was finally underway. “I was the one with the Mind Eater’s book, Professor. Sirius could hardly translate the ritual without me. How do you think we practiced a two-mind ritual without each other?”

With that, I left Lupin with the impression that we learned how to perform Memory Wards by practicing Legilimency on each other. Not... entirely untrue, but it did give a bit of confidence to the idea that only Sirius was doing the ritual and I was just there to oversee. Snape, by his narrowed looked, probably detected my bit of deception, but I couldn’t linger on that. We’d already wasted enough time — them arguing about me performing a ritual on Pettigrew using Sirius as a
Sirius and I both knew there wasn’t a moment to waste, and our friends knowing that would definitely devolve into something more than a moment.

Needs and means, after all.

I wasted no time, walking in step with Sirius. “They’re too stunned by all the revelations to really think straight,” I commented lightly, “The only reason no one’s not arguing harder is that they were blindsided and we were not, and they know that.”

“Follow the leader,” Sirius muttered, grunting when Pettigrew’s — unconscious? yes, Sirius seemed to have Stunned him at some point — body ran into a turned-over hallway table. “Would’ve thought Snape would give a bit more fight, cold-hearted bastard he is.”

No, I thought grimly, Snape has more emotional stake in this than you’d think. He’s probably more emotionally compromised than Hermione at this point.

That, however, was not my secret to tell.

“One they get their heads on straight, they’re going to realize how bloody irresponsible all this is. Harry, Hermione, and Lupin will have questions about me, about the ritual. About everything we’ve been doing. Snape, too — he’s going to be furious at us. Me for associating with you ‘recklessly’ and you for dragging me into this.”

“You were already involved!” complained Sirius.

“That’s not how he’s going to see it, and you know it. The only reason he hasn’t killed you is because he hates Pettigrew more, and you and I are the only ones with a solid plan for how to deal with him and get the most out of it.”

“As if he cares about all the benefits of Pettigrew going to Azkaban. He doesn’t give a bloody fuck about Harry, does he? Screaming at him like that… I ought to punch him in that crooked nose of his, bloody git…”

“No, I rather think he knows that the only choices are to ward the rat’s memories or to kill him, if only for my sake. Protective of his snakes, Snape; and Alby doesn’t want my abilities out, and Snape is nothing if not Alby’s man.” I reasoned, opening the door to the small drawing room for Sirius to haul Pettigrew through. “Plus, you know Slytherins. We like our revenge to be long and painful. Azkaban is much more painful than death; even the rat knows it.”

Sirius smiled something closer to a grimace. “He doesn’t know the half of it.”

I looked at Sirius carefully. There was always an undercurrent of anger and bitterness when we mentioned Pettigrew, but it came out in full tonight. A wild sort of rage simmered in every angle of his body, like he was just waiting for an excuse to jump on Pettigrew and beat the life out of him. It made him look much more the ex-con than the victim, much more the killer than the godfather I’d accidentally acquired.

“He will,” I said, turning from him and facing forward.

“He will.” Sirius repeated, laughing darkly.

My smile mirrored his, and it reminded me strongly of the night I’d first suggested the idea of Memory Wards; this time, however, our vicious grins were tinged with a dark sort of triumph. After this, as long as Pettigrew went to the Ministry for trial, we will have won.
Wizarding rituals were the physical representation of spells, the truest a spell could ever be. Wizards were not advanced or powerful enough to translate things like Alchemy or Necromancy into their compressed versions (which were spells) but every spell could — theoretically — be broken down into the basest of components and acted through a ritual. *I liked* rituals, breaking spells down; I’d always had an interest in ritual magic, and experimenting with Harper and, on occasion, Nate, made me like this complicated stuff *more*.

The rugs were rolled back, the specific chalk-ink-maybe-blood mix painted on the floor. Only half of our usual candles were up, spots of soft, dull yellow in the dark. A central, huge circle interlocked with four smaller ones, the layers made of runes and matrixes to organize and interlock and connect them. There was a whole different matrix in the opposite corner of the room, too, much smaller and only a single center circle; that one was for Sirius, for the anchor. Our normal routine was that we ourselves pushed the candles to the side and shoved all the furniture away and did the painting, *we* transformed the room… Having it waiting for us like this was a little odd. (It was soothing, having to go through practiced motions of putting something as complex as this ritual together. Having it ready made was weird.)

“What to lock the last components down… Get the east and west?” Sirius asked.

“If you get the north and south.” I offered.

He nodded in agreement. “Quickly.”

Sirius dumped Pettigrew in the center circle, tied him down magically. We started flitting about the room, checking the ritual and preparing the last of it with practiced ease. A bundle of black cohosh, the long, pale flowers and bud-stems soaked in conjured water mixed with my hair… this went to the east circle, placed gently down on the floor. Sirius tossed my wand to me and I caught it, tapping at the runes in its circle, locking the plant into its place.

The west circle had sharper runes, locked with white heather soaked in water with Sirius’ hair. I
glanced up at him to see him drawing runes from our special mix onto his forehead and sternum, in
the style of the west circle. When he moved to prepare the north and south components, I went to
the tin of stuff and the cracked, terrible mirror nearly hidden in all the blankets we’d put up,
drawing runes into myself in the style of the east circle.

East for beginnings, for the mind; west for endings, for the anchor. North and south to forge a
sympathy bond, trick Pettigrew’s mind into thinking my invading consciousness was his own.
Runes to lock down the sacrificial symbols, to channel the magic properly, to guide me to and
from. The cardinal directions for power, the central rune matrix for focus, and my magic to supply
the bulk of the price. In the candlelight, it all looked very cultish and suspicious, but Sirius and I
had joked enough about it not to care anymore.

All in all, it was a pain in the ass but we were quick and efficient.

Sirius had set up his anchor matrix near his favorite cushions, sitting tense and excitedly. He
grinned at me as I walked by him, handed him my wand. Quick motions and whispered words,
Pettigrew was magically lifted up — just by his shoulders, head and legs lolling uselessly, still in
the confines of the ritual circle — and then Ennervate’d so his eyes opened. I stepped forward and
Sirius flicked his wrist, jerking the rat’s face towards mine. I wanted to have a few words now that
I wasn’t under intense scrutiny by skeptical friends.

He whimpered at the sight all around him, an unknown ritual and two of the people who despised
him the most, and it was a good sound.

“Hello, Peter Pettigrew,” I said pleasantly, smile anything but. “See, I’m normally quite careful
when I do this. Sirius and I have a really cooperative test subject, so I make sure not to jar his head
too much and sink into the sympathy bond properly. You can synergize with the target mind by
only eighty percent and still accomplish what you’re trying to do, did you know? It just sort of
scrambles the target mind.”

“It shouldn’t be an issue,” put in Sirius gleefully, “Twelve years spent as a rat will scramble
anyone’s brains, don’t you think, Lys?”

“No… No, please…”

“Oh, yes. Not to worry!” I said cheerfully, “You’ll still feel the effects of dementors, Pettigrew.
Quite keenly, in fact. Maybe a little too keenly… Who’s to say? Helvynya Prevett noted some
subjects became more paranoid, would babble nonstop, and never practiced Occlumency properly
ever again.”

“Especially so if she added a self-destruction lock to the ward,” added Sirius helpfully, “where if
someone did try to see what was behind the Memory Wards, the mind would simply… collapse.
They’d never find what they were looking for. That’s something we’re doing, by the way.”

“Sirius… Don’t let her do this, don’t- Don’t let them take me… Azkaban… I won’t survive there,
not after this- Sirius, it wasn’t my fault-! Have mercy!”

The words ‘it wasn’t my fault’ was probably was made both our smiles drop.

“You murdered Lily and James Potter,” Sirius replied, all mischievous fun drained from his voice
in an instant, “You murdered thirteen innocents to frame me. You supplied information to
Voldemort for who knows how bloody long, but at least the year prior to his fall — I don’t want to
know how many Order members died because of you. And you’d throw my goddaughter and my
godson to the Ministry wolves, to Voldemort again, if it meant your safety. No, Peter… You have
long since given up your right to mercy.”

It was only right that Sirius have the last word. Pettigrew would never remember this, after all.

“Ego imploro dea Magia,” I murmured, locking eyes with Pettigrew and feeling the thrum of my magic in my skin, rising up to meet my demands, feathery and quick, “ostende mihi viam.”

“I’ll be right beside you, Lys,” came Sirius’ soft voice.

I felt a smile at the assurance.

…

Your breath does not come easily, but you trail after them even so. They’re all smiling and laughing and screaming for their lives — or, at least their sanities. McGonagall’s detentions were so boring that you knew all of you would go insane if she kept you for more than two weeks. Covering her Transfiguration classroom in catnip and releasing every cat and kneazle you could forge the Headmaster’s signature to order probably covered more than two weeks, hence the yelling in between laughing. You join in, happy. The halls and students crowding them pass by in blurs. You turn back, stumble, see Professor McGonagall on your heels.

“Hurry up, Wormtail, or she’ll catch us! Might eat you, eh? Cats and rats, yeah?”

James. He’s smiling, lagging behind, hand offered to you, hair wilder than it usually is.

A bubble of laughter. You hold it back. “Stop talking about it! She terrified me already!” you say.

Lys, no. Not these memories… Please.

…I’m sorry, Sirius.

Don’t focus on me. You’ll return too early that way… You know what to do.

…Guinevere Lysandra Weasley.

You are curled in a hand. Irritated; you have just been jostled and woken. The boy beckons his sisters over. They are no longer so unsteady. The boy beckons his sisters over. They are no longer so unsteady. The darker one has always been quieter, less clumsy than her twin but still uncoordinated. She smiles just as wide, though. The Weasleys are all very smiley, and sometimes you wonder if the time will come when you’ll have to leave them. It’s not a pleasant thought. They are comfortable. But pale eyes trail down to you, and you squeak at the expression that crosses that child’s face.

You have known revulsion and hate, but you saw them in different faces. Lucius Malfoy. Severus Snape. The Carrow twins. The Dark Lord himself. Little Lys looks at you like that, for a moment.

The moment passes.

Maybe she doesn’t like rats. Your owner says so when she stomps away. Children are strange like that. It doesn’t matter.

Memories are too early.
It is a rather wide scope. He’s known me almost my entire life, after all.

Ergh. That’s something we have in common. Narrow it down, Lyssie. You’re not bleeding yet but I’d really like to avoid that at all. Merlin knows your brother will kill me.

All of them, too. Right… here: Lys. Clairvoyance.

They’re whispering. All of them, together. That is rare and you know it. You watch for these things because you must. To look and listen is to live. It’s easy to squeak a little, draw absent-minded hands to pick you up; your owner holds you against him. Always warm and comfortable. You listen. The Weasley siblings do not often crowd together like this. And where is Lys?

“Is this it? Did you get the book?”

“Wait, is that stolen? Wow, Bill-”

“Not so loud! Shhh!”

“Stealing’s bad! The Auror’s will arrest us!”

“Yeah, but we need it so we know how to help Lyssie, and Lyssie’s more important stupid laws.”

And you wonder why I am so willing to do what it takes to protect my family.

“Ginny, you shouldn’t say that-”

“At least not out loud, Gin."

“Right, you can think that all you want, but never get caught, see.”

I understand, you know.

“All of you be quiet! Found it. Clairvoyance.”

“Is Mage Sight in there, too? Dad said she had that, remember? Both of them!”

“Maybe it’s not, since Dumbledore said it’s not really a Seer thing anymore. Bill will just steal another book, don’t worry, Ron.”

“Don’t say that in front of Ron, Charlie!”

“Just read the thing, Bill!”

Listen. Watch. Learn. You listen and you watch and you learn and you barely breathe. You’d heard the Weasleys all scrambling about, and when Dumbledore had shown up in the Floo you’d panicked and immediately curled up in the apron pocket of Molly Weasley, but you hadn’t been able to piece together why, exactly. Something about a river. Drowning. More of Lys Weasley’s ridiculously powerful accidental magic. Something about her nightmares, again.

It makes sense, now. Nightmares were Clairvoyant Seer visions, negatively influenced by her emotions. Powerful magic because she was a Seer-Witch, the last of eight children — eight, the infinity number. Her sensitivity to magic, her hyper-intelligence, her maturity. It makes sense. You understand the little one much better now.

Does she know?
I know far too much. He wasn’t just an informant, you know. He was Marked for a reason.

You could kill her.

**Over my dead body. No one touches the pack.**

No. But wait. If she knew, surely she would act. She would have exposed you. No... More likely, she senses something off about your magic. Which means all you have to do is stay away from her. When your owner’s turn to comfort her in the night comes, you just have to hide behind someone else. Their magic will dwarf yours. If you stay away, she shouldn’t think about you, and if she doesn’t think about you, she won’t See. But you have to watch her.

Out of sight, out of mind. But you must keep eyes on her. If she Sees what you’ve done...

Whatever it takes, you tell yourself. Whatever it takes to keep yourself alive, you’ll do it. Whatever it takes.

...Let’s begin, then?

**No, gather all the memories first. We’re not going to be sloppy.**

You are watching the littlest one thrash in her sleep. It began with a whimper. Then it got worse. She smells of sweat and fear. Her blankets are strewn around again. Your owner has set you down on the girls’ dresser. Her older sister, bright and pale, is touching at the littlest’s face. Your owner has caught one of the flailing, chubby hands. He’s whispering to her soothingly. Her eyes snap open but she doesn’t see her brother, you don’t think.

You wonder.

Am I taking the Mage Sight out, too?

Maybe that’d be best. The Mage Sight isn’t as important, but it seems too intertwined with the Clairvoyance for you to pick them apart well.

Alright. I’d like to get out of here... I feel rat-like. Twitchy.

Focus on me, Lys. Not too much, but don’t get stuck.

Right.

They’re surrounded, she chants, They’re surrounded and they’re going to die. Who’s going to die? you wonder. Our uncles, the little one said, crying now, They’re strung up like dolls.

She gazes down at you. Older, now, but still young. Too young to look like that. It hurts you, a little. You are a good pet. You are loyal. Her twin pets your head with two fingers, still fascinated, ignoring her attempts to make her stop. Weasleys are stubborn. The older girl-twin picks you up, scowling at the younger.

“Why don’t you like Scabbers, Lyssie?” asks your owner. They think you’re not listening, because Ginny has you now and she’s quite far. Your hearing is better than they think, and you know how to listen even if you’re doing something else.

Bastard. I hate that I forgot about him, sometimes, too busy with my brothers.
I know the feeling.

She loves talking and playing and the loudness all Weasleys have, but the little one always gravitates towards the third eldest. The oldest two are busy, loud, bright. The demons twins more so. Ron and Ginny are children, laughing and crying and screaming the way children do. All except the littlest, Lys. She loves her quiet, bookworm, older brother, and does not love his rat. You.

“His colors are ugly.” You can’t judge someone or something by just how you like colors, says the third eldest. Percy. It’s not fair that you don’t like people with yellow colors just because you don’t like yellow. Right? What if you meet someone with a really nice blue but they’re mean? It’s like that, explains Percy. “You don’t really understand how colors work,” says Lys. There are no such things as bad colors, Lyssie.

“Yes,” says Lys, “there are.”

His colors and song are revolting. Probably because he’s weak and spineless.

Magic is tied in with strength of will, after all.

She is smaller than her twin. Her bird bones speak of someone meant to be short and solidly built, not lanky like her father. But as a child, she sits in the Paterfamilias’ lap and looks up with her head leaning against a chin chest, dwarfed. Long limbs and baggy robes drape over her. She is darker than her twin. She is quieter.

What’s wrong, little queen?

There are lights on but they’re dim and far. The moon is high. Fire crackles. It’s cold. She grips at her father’s fingers, looking up at him but surely not seeing. There are tear tracks on her face. She smells like salt and grief and fear. Lys always smells like fear, when behind that child-sweet all children have.

“I Saw them die.”

Who?

“The only ones I didn’t See were Charlie and Percy and Ginny.”

You wonder. Charlie has always treated you well. He likes animals. Percy is very protective of you, keeping you from the reach of the demon twins or the scolding of his mother. Ginny is always curious, and she tugs on your tail and fur, but she means nothing by it. You wonder if that’s why they’re still alive.

You wonder if you’re going to be the one to kill them.

He’s lucky he never tried.

If he ever does, I’ll tear him to pieces. But Lys-

Later.

Do you only see bad things?

No, I don’t. (They’re strung up like dolls.)
She whispers about the good dreams to her sister. She holds her hand and trembles. You do not think she dreams about good things most of the time. You do not think she dreams well even half of the time. She used to wake and breathe out her gasps and tears. It used to be clumsy. Now she wakes and doesn’t look like she feels a thing. Mechanical as she remembers that she is awake and not Seeing. She hides it well but you watch.

You’re doing better, now, aren’t you, little queen?

You watch the little one enough to know that she has not stopped the nightmares. She has just learned how not to react to them outwardly anymore. She had learned how to bury herself in playtime and her siblings so she is not mechanical with Occlumency.

Yes, I am, Dad.

You are intrigued by another liar under this roof. She looks at you in the passing. She’s older. Her face closes off. You have known revulsion and hate. You wonder what your magic — what your soul — looks like to her eyes.

There are no such things as bad colors, Lyssie.

I think you synergized more, Lys. Nearly completely. His mind won’t suffer a thing at this point, but you’ll have a hell of a time detaching. Are you okay?

…I’m just. Remembering.

Don’t. This is why Prevett said never to do this with someone you shared a lot of memories with.

It would’ve been more dangerous with you.

I know.

No… No, no, no… NO! There was nothing I could do! He was going to kill me! I-I-I’m not going to Azkaban, I’m not taking a Kiss- IF I GO, I’LL TELL THEM EVERYTHING! I’ll reveal you- I’ll tell them everything I know about you! Malfoy still works for the Ministry, he’ll hear it all from me- I-I’ll tell them! I’LL TELL THEM YOU’RE A CLAIRVOYANT, GIRL!

Finish it soon.

This is quite a bit harder than it looks, you know. Drawing the entirety of a ward in my head and impressing it into memories is not easy.

She is sobbing into her brothers robes. The twins and her own twin are with her. Percy — old owner — is nearby, looking lost. Your owner, Ron, is shaking where he sits. You feel odd. You do not see the littlest one cry anymore. She’s learned how to make herself stop. She mastered hiding the nightmares a long time ago. Sometimes you see her at home; sometimes she cries into her hands a bit, but not often.

You watch her cry for the death of her best friend. You wonder if Sirius cried over James.

You wonder who will cry over you?

“She hasn’t cried like this since she was five.”
Summer vacation. It’s warm and there’s dew outside, you can smell it. You pad around on your paws. You used to limp without one of your fingers, but you’re used to it now. Twitch at the sound from the girls’ room. You wriggle inside, the corner of the door is splintered enough that you can. The eldest is sleeping. The younger has snapped awake, breathing hard. She crawls to her twin’s bed, holds her the way you know she does when she’s dreamt of death. You watch Lys more because you need to know if she gets suspicious of you. She never sees you, so she doesn’t See you. But you watch.

You wonder if you’re going to be the one to kill them.

“I’m going to protect you,” she whispers to her sleeping sister, “All of you. Promise. You all kept me sane so I’m going to keep you all alive.”

Lys…

Not now, Sirius.

The Chamber of Secrets has been opened, and her best friend is inside. She’s sobbing that it’s her fault, that she should’ve known. Ron and Harry Potter are sitting away, looking lost and sad. The common room is solemn. You don’t think you’ve seen it this empty and tense and heart-breaking, not in this generation. It used to be quiet like this all the time. The Daily Prophet used to bring a lot of bad news. A lot of deaths.

Not in a while, though. Not since you murdered James.

“She hasn’t cried like this since she was five.”

Idiot boy. You know her better than her brothers do, all the watching. Listening. Learning. You listen and you watch and you learn and you barely breathe. The littlest one is a Clairvoyant. To be a Clairvoyant is to suffer. She cries far more often than they know, and only in the mornings, when you can’t tell if you’re awake or still dreaming.

Lyssie, that isn’t healthy. Occlumency isn’t supposed to be used as emotional suppression-

But it always, always is. It’s also not really important right now. I’m almost done…

You wonder if you should scamper over to her, curled in her sister’s bed and grounding her mind with stupid promises — promising to protect anyone but yourself is stupid, you know this — because you watched her grow up. You watched all of them grow up. But Lys still looks at you like she knows how many people you’ve killed, so it wouldn’t help. She’s afraid of killers. You wonder if you’re going to be the one to kill them. You wonder if you’ll make her break her stupid promises.

You wonder and you twitch and you fear but you do nothing.

You don’t owe anyone anything. No matter how many times you’ve watched that little girl cry.

…I think I’ve got everything.

Lys.

I’m going to begin the ward.

Lys.

I don’t want to talk about it.

...Alright. I’m holding you to that. Lock it down, Lyssie. Time to come back.

Yeah. Okay.

She is the enemy. Sirius’ hands clench and unclench, like he wants to snap your neck. He could do it. He’s Mad enough. He almost killed Snivellous, once. He can kill you now. Dementors do things to people, you know this.

“He’s not going to kill you,” the little girl you watched grow up says, “I made sure of it.”

She’s going to kill you.

No one is going to cry over your death, are they? All the better that you’ll make sure you won’t die. Whatever it takes. You can’t die. She’s powerful. People like powerful things. Who would look at you twice, if you handed a Clairvoyant to them? No matter if she’s just a little girl, crying and grieving for a family that isn’t dead yet. She was made to suffer.

You are not.

(You are not above scrambling away on hands and knees to get away from the bullies.)

She grips at Ginny in her sleep. Ginny’s sleep, that is. “I’m going to protect you,” she whispers to her sleeping sister, “All of you. Promise. You all kept me sane so I’m going to keep you all alive.” A stupid promise. The littlest Weasley is made for stupid promises.

You are not.

(You cannot look at a future full of death and place yourself in front of it just so some red-haired brats will live. You don’t know how to be unafraid of something like that.)

There is fire dancing between her fingers, a conjuration that took much practice not to burn her. She points out the indigo-blues that tinge on the sky that is Percy’s core. Lys Weasley is surrounded by her brothers, laughing as they brush against her shoulders and arms.

You are not.

(“Where are the Potters hiding, Wormtail?”

“G-Godric’s Hollow, m-my Lord.”

“…Oh? Not even going to beg for their lives, Wormtail? Even Severus begged, for his Mudblood.”

“…I-I-I swore m-myself to you, my L-Lord.”

“Ha! Is that loyalty, Pettigrew? Or is that just your pathetic nature?”)
When she thrashes in her sleep, the demon twins slip into her room and sandwich her between them, rubbing at her back and face and speaking quietly. It’s odd to hear them quiet. She mutters something about war and blood. She wakes in tears and is always cradled back by the hands of family.

You are not.

(James I’m sorry James I’m sorry sorry Lily Harry sorry Sirius I had to I’m sorry I’m scared I’m sorry I’m sorry James I didn’t want to die someone protect me James Sirius Remus help me I didn’t want to kill you I didn’t want this I’m sorry I just wanted to live I just wanted)

Lys is sobbing into the demon twins’ robes. She is often surrounded by first-year snakes, leading them like the little queen her family calls her, and one of them has been taken into the Chamber of Secrets. You don’t know much more than that. She mourns for her friend.

You are not.

She returns from the Chamber triumphant and, more importantly, alive. You know, listening and watching and learning, that she could have easily died. She does not celebrate this. She is ashamed of using her friend so that she could live.

You are

Lys helps her mother in the kitchen wordlessly, happy to serve her family.

You are not.

(If you were a Seer, would your friends be alive right now? You wonder.)

You are n

You are

There are no such things as bad colors, Lyssie. “Yes,” says Lys, “there are.”

You are

You

(Who?)

...
head lolling blood running from her nose runes on her forehead swipe fingers across Lys are you okay? mess up the runes disconnect properly did it work? are you okay?

I scrunched my eyes, drawing pain to my forehead, and then opened them, breathing in through my nose and almost choking on more blood. The room was significantly darker, and I was in a bit more pain. Sirius blinked at me, one hand supporting my weight — half-supporting, with me being on my knees — and the other with its sleeve drawn up, wiping at my face. blot it out get her clean she’s gotta breatheHe smiled warmly when I made a little groaning sound. good she’s back back back good job Lys

“You alright?” he asked.

The area just under my breastbone was radiating pain and I was shivering.

He frowned. ow I can feel that “No. Not quite.”

Sirius turned, waving my wand. “Accio Blood Replenishment. Accio Headache Relief. Accio Breathing Potion.” just in case your lungs are weak enough for another attack

“Thanks, Sirius.” I croaked, dutifully downing the summoned potions and fondly, exasperatedly taking the extras he kept shoving at me.

you’re welcome

I winced. The mental link was very strong. I was seeing double, my hands on the potion and drinking and me on my knees looking like a mess, drinking potions, holding myself up. It was very odd, and we usually never got quite this bad. Made me dizzy.

Sirius grimaced. “The completed ward must be a factor.” think you can stand?

I nodded, allowing him to pull me up as he did. We staggered together, both of us confused who was in which body for a moment, heads swimming. this is not something we planned for. is it? dizzy dizzy swaying standing We breathed in sync and my vision settled and we grounded ourselves, then glanced at each other warily.

“Pettigrew?” I asked.

“Rat in a cage,” he replied.

I nodded, starting to wipe away the runes drawn on my forehead and chest more than they already were. Sirius flicked my yours but somewhat ours kind of wand and forced Pettigrew into his rat form — the man himself was deeply unconscious, a heap in the middle of the ritual and floor pathetic — and swiftly Transfigured a cage from things lying around. He handed me the cage and let me take care of it Lys you’re still dazed from it I attempted Occlumency but winced at Sirius’ mental reprimand.

“Not yet, Lyssie,” he muttered, wiping away evidence of the ritual as per prior plan, “Can’t have our heads thinking the other’s part of it. Our Occlumency skills would be gutted if that happened. Give it a moment.”

“I feel sick.”

“Shouldn’t. We did it, Lyssie.” his memories are warded Lys we did it

I swallowed blood. The last of such, I think, for now. “I didn’t know how much he thought he was
I shook my head. Smiled. “Ignore me. I’m tired.”

“You did good, Lyssie.” even if it doesn’t feel like it Lys don’t let what you saw change how you think about that traitor bastard Lys I’m proud of you He hesitated. Then, quietly, “We don’t have to talk about everything else, Lys. You can rest, first. You deserve that much.”

I looked at the sleeping rat in the cage. where he belongs He’d be hard-pressed to transform in it. Maybe a stronger Animagus’ magic might be able to protect him while he grew in size, grew human, but Pettigrew? He was weak, twelve years of laziness and betraying his own core and lack of practice. how he didn’t go insane without casting is beyond me

He might’ve, actually. Gone mad without practicing magic. It happened, sometimes; wizards and witches were meant to use it, since we didn’t have any anatomical differences from normal, magicless people. The only thing that differentiated the average wizard from a Muggle was our core and our ability to use it.

“It’s not about what I deserve,” I mumbled, gripping the cage harder.

Sirius grinned, sharp and unsettling. “No, it’s about what the rat deserves, hm?”

I gave a short nod. “Yes. Now, we’ve got to explain some things to…”

… shock something’s off wait wait Lys

Sirius wasn’t looking at me. He was looking at the floor, a section of the north circle, half-smudged and wiped away, the white chalk bright against the dark and aged wood. His expression was thoughtful, and it was mostly instinct and carelessness that got me prodding at him mentally, putting a bit more of me into the mental link and sliver of light from the window from behind the blanket we put there light light pale shaft on the floor that means something we never loosen the blankets enough for that and

My heart dropped to my chest. The chalk was bright because it was reflecting light. All the candles in the room were out — the ritual magic must’ve put them out or something. I gazed at the band of light on the floor. Sirius surged forward, tearing the blanket near the edge stuck to the top of the window, the ripping sound a blast through silence. The window was stained and dirty there were splashes of light on the floorboards, now, making the dark room highlight with deep blues. The world was ink outside, save for the white circle in the sky, enormous with how close it was.

“The moon rose.” I whispered needlessly.

Upstairs, I heard someone scream.

…

get the rat be ready to run get to the tunnel now

I didn’t bother arguing with Sirius. There was a clenching in my chest, doubled because I could
feel my own worry, and I knew he was bounding up the steps by three’s, desperate to get to Harry. my pup my godson is he okay no no no—I winced when he slammed into a wall in his haste, rubbing at my aching shoulder as I rushed out to the living area and wrenched open the door to the Whomping Willow’s tunnel.

The door was wooden and sturdy, but not too thick, I could…

Shit! Sirius! My wand! I projected in panic.

I heard shouting upstairs. Sirius’ voice. There was an echoing BANG! and then I winced as my shoulder ached again. Someone’s arm was under my shoulder, I was lifting them up, it was gone, and then I was seeing Snape pushing Hermione along she’s supporting Ron he’s limping Moony is tied up behind but it won’t—Harry thunder down the steps, nearly tripping at the end and whipping around to help Ron and Hermione transition from steps to flat ground. Snape was rounding them up, looking pale and shaken, Sirius was trailing behind—

“HARRY! Get your friends, get Lys, GET OUT! RUN!” Sirius roared.

Something else roared, too. Or should I say howled?

fuck! Lys summon wand now

“Accio my wand!” I hissed, pushing enough magic into the spell that my wand smacked my palm hard enough to sting.

“Potter, out from Weasley’s arm — the tunnel’s not wide enough for three of you, not the entire- Weasley, Granger, you first — be quick about it!” Snape was barking out orders, wand out and flicking at decimated furniture, making the bulkiest of it all crash into the upstairs hallway, blocking the way.

There was a terrible, echoing noise — a mix of a howl and a scream of agony — and Sirius had, at some point, transformed into his dog form and was growling at the stairs. I’m the last out Moony won’t attack maybe if he recognizes pack brother maybe we can push back your bite pay it off maybe maybe maybe Snape had finished shoving all the furniture he could in Lupin’s way. Ron had fallen over trying to get to the tunnel door and Hermione and Harry both were yanking him upright again even as his face paled, freckles stark against his cheeks, his eyes flitting about in terror until they settled on me.

I had to ignore him, and looked at my Head of House. “Silver transfiguration spells?”

smart girl good keep him in here if we can Lys can’t be bitten I promised I’d try he’s tearing the ropes I can hear it

“I can conjure,” Snape replied tersely, flicking a spell at Ron that made Harry and Hermione have an easier time dragging him across the floor.

“I know wood to silver transfiguration, I have to be one of the—”

There was a crashing sound. he got out he got out he got out Another howl that pierced my ears, stumbling around drunkenly in my skull and making me wince. Everyone had flinched at it, Sirius letting out a keening whine for his enhanced hearing in that form. hurts loud sound brother brother Moony he’s hungry A curio cabinet went flying from the upstairs hall, tearing itself to pieces on the ceiling above us; the trio and I let out screams as the debris scattered around us, only missing by
luck. he hears us he’s hunting his wolf is disoriented doesn’t know why he’s here again have to hurry. Snape had stumbled back, but he waved it away and snarled something at the trio. Hermione and Ron finally got through the tunnel, Harry was hesitating, anticipating my turn to go in.

“Invectinihilitus Argenti!” Snape shouted, his wand swinging and large, needle-like glimmers of silver twisting into existence, slamming themselves into the walls and floor. Sirius yelped when one barely missed him, turning to glare at Snape, bloody bastard who muttered an entirely flat, “It seems I missed.”

I jabbed my wand, flooding it with power. “Lignarovogentum!” Uneven patches of silver bloomed all over the walls and doors, my core stuttering with drain of magic. careful Lys Harry’s in the tunnel please go follow now NO NO NOW LYS

A worn sofa tore through the railing and sent dust and splinters everywhere. I covered my face with my wand hand, ducking into my elbow, and when I looked up again I saw Snape’s frozen form and a werewolf at the top of the stairs.

…

What the FUCK?!

He was enormous. He wasn’t goddamn human size at all. He was at least three times bigger than his human self. A wolf’s head, slightly stunted snout, snarling, maw dripping with spittle that made white fangs gleam in the moonlight. The skull was large enough to fit my goddamn head inside. Thick, dark fur covered his entire body, along with the ripped remains of his robes, hanging off him in tatters not even fit for bandaging. His shoulders were slanted forward, arms to his sides — too long, not wolf-like, too human — crouched with thick legs postured for lunging, claws the length of my entire hand, nearly tailless, GLOWING EYES-

This was not canon at all. Those werewolves were like… twiggy little demon dog things… they were… whatever. What the fuck! This wasn’t a goddamn werewolf, this was a fucking NIGHTMARE BEAST. What the hell was this, Bloodborne? How did- How did Snape even survive? No wonder Sirius was a fucking bear-sized dog, he’d have to be to even touch this godforsakenly huge terroranimal-

He growled, deep and low and rumbling, and I distinctly noticed his nose snuffling at the air before he lurched forward, dust thrown up with his steps, and focused golden eyes on me. I felt my blood freeze when his claws and face and ears pointed towards me, mouth opening into a fangy smile dripping with spit.

I hadn’t really read over much werewolf lore after I found out about the three-nights-per-moon-cycle thing. That was the most relevant. But I did skim through the books, wondering what else I’d been mistaken about with my arrogant, Muggle assumptions… And there was something about how, werewolves, when they scented blood for the first time they transformed, all they wanted to do was hunt. There was more, there was always more, but that was the big thing. It was called a blood frenzy; werewolves even ignore pack-mates if they were hungry or restless enough.

My pale wrist was smeared with drying blood.

I was paralyzed at the sight of it.

Lys GET OUT

A wave of protectprotectattackbiteclawfightfightfightwash washed over me and a black blur
streaked up the stairs gracefully, slamming into the werewolf’s — into Lupin’s nightmare-beast form — front, making it roar and snarl. I sprang to action, gritting my teeth when a claw raked across Sirius’ side, flashing forward and gripping onto Snape’s still form, shocking him to look at me. There was a second of sheer, unadulterated fear in Snape’s expression before he smoothed his face into Occlumency-borne calmness and swept me to his side protectively, rushing the both of us to the tunnel door-

**lunging forward he smells you he smells your blood LYS HE’S HUNTING**

Sirius’ panic and instinct overtook me. One moment we were half a step from the door, the next my hands shoved hard against Snape’s ribcage and my magic drove us to the sides. Snape smashed into the opposite wall, eyes wide, and I’d banged my back into the archway to the unserviceable kitchen, and something splintered the tunnel door and tunnel wall and was screaming. silver hurting him Lys get up get up get up get away! I promised I promised I promise Lys

There was a hulk of muscle and fur and glowing, golden eyes in the middle of the tunnel, hissing the the patches of silver all over the door he’d evidently just shattered. Snape and I needed him out right now, as in right fucking now. There was a goddamn werewolf the size of ‘I could fit in his stomach right now’ and he was apparently hunting me.

(If he got me, he might do more than bite. I don’t think Sirius and I anticipated just how much stress my body went through, performing rituals beyond my ken and with only a smattering of Legilimency training; we didn’t expect me to bleed so much.)

(I don’t think we anticipated any of this at all.)

“Ventoxecanora!” I shrieked, gripping the cage to my chest and feeling my head ring at the terrible, high-pitched whistle that my wand emitted and Sirius could hear. fuck fuck no bad SOUND bad sound hurts PAIN pain pain

Lupin whined, the pitch gravely and shrieking, and another BANG! and flash of light tossed him clear across the room, nearly into the hallway where Sirius and I did our ritual. old blood smell he wants you he’s hunting YOU Snape looked on the verge of collapse after that, but he stumbled forward and I scrambled up, both of us reaching for each other. He grabbed onto my hand, the only one I had with the cage taking the other — Goddamn I needed to Shrink it or something but I didn’t know how to do that with Pettigrew still inside — and he fled into the tunnel, intent on keeping me with him this time, following the flickering Lumos of his wand. I felt Sirius tear into the werewolf, tasted the hot copper in my mouth and felt my nails sinking into flesh stay down Moony you can’t have them any of them you can’t no NO NO where are you going CONCENTRATE ON ME dammit

Snape dragged me along, hand sweaty and fingers clamped to my wrist, heedless of the way I stumbled over roots and slipped on muddy earth and flinched and hissed when I felt phantom claws scratching my sides and flank and face. only fought me this hard once when he smelled humans in the Forest but Prongs was there shit ow he’s stronger than I am The sound of wood splintering and snarling dogs and short, aggressive howls followed us as we ran blindly down the tunnel. Neither of us spoke, breathing hard and listening to the sounds of the dogfight — they weren’t getting much further away, not consistently, which led me to believe that Lupin Moony was trying to follow us and only Sirius harassing him was keeping him from barreling down the tunnel to eat me. please make it Lyssie get out go go go maybe you won’t get bit tonight please Merlin don’t let her get bit

I don’t think we were even halfway when we ran, literally, into Harry’s back. Or Ron’s, really,
because the tunnel was a bit wider here, enough to accommodate the three of them side-by-side for a while; the thing was uneven, as my bruised shins and arms learned.

“Potter!” Snape spat, “Granger, Weasley- Get on with it! There is a werewolf chasing after our hides, one would think you’d adjust your pace accordingly!”

Trust Harry to knock Snape out of his grim silence and straight into annoyance.

“Professor! We tried to Levitate him but he kept getting stuck when the tunnel got narrow and winding and the Featherlight wore off.” Hermione began, looking very panicked from what I could see of her.

“Move aside! Potter, Granger, herd Weasley if you please.” Sneered the professor.

I witnessed Snape bodily lift Ron into his arms — my brother protested and writhed until Snape hissed something at him that I couldn’t hear — and Harry and Hermione flattened themselves against the tunnel to let Snape go by with enviable ease. Ron wasn’t even under a Featherweight Charm anymore, if they tried to Levitate him. Hermione and Harry pulled and pushed my forward in turn, Hermione gently coaxing Pettigrew’s cage from my arm (“You know more spells against werewolves, Lys, you’ll need both hands.” Hermione reasoned, voice shaking and eyes blown wide.) Harry stayed behind me, a warm hand on my back when I struggled to follow Snape’s dim wandlight, a tether to my own head and not Sirius’ bloody fight.

rip tear ow ow ow my shoulder fuck Moony dammit blood everywhere he’s throwing things and clawing out the silver in his way he’s trying to clear it so he can get out BACK BACK dodge blood my shoulder pain PAIN PAIN

My entire body shuddered when I felt how deep that cut was. My hand flew to my shoulder, fingers digging into the robes and trying to remind my head that I wasn’t hurt and it should really separate from Sirius’ pain, because every moment I tuned into him meant he might tune back, and I couldn’t distract him right now. It wasn’t Occluding so much as it was keeping ourselves distracted, which was a technique that worked wonders for me in every aspect of life. Harry, however, noticed the movement.

“Lys?” he asked, in between heaving breaths.

My chest was burning but the Breathing Potion Sirius had gotten me was temporarily preventing an attack (which would make it worse later, but eh). Wizards and witches in general weren’t usually that fit, at least not for long distance bullshit like this motherfucking tunnel, so I was sure I wasn’t the only one with burning muscles and tired legs and gasping for breath.

“It’s nothing,” I replied quickly, lowering my hand. The roots were thicker now, less clumped dirt and more irritating, slithering steps.

Which meant I could start transfiguring silver again.

“Are you hurt?” he asked urgently.

(Another burden in this tunnel? Ron was already the tallest of them, crippled as he was; I would not be a welcome problem. At least… that’s how I was thinking at the moment, mind focused on survivesurvivesurvivelivegetawayrunrunrun)

“Lignarovogentum! It’s from the ritual- Lignarovogentum! Sirius and I had to link our minds temporarily so I can- AGH. Lignarovogentum! I can sometimes feel it when Lupin scratches him. He’s- Lignarovogentum! He’s trying to keep Lupin’s interest and contain him in the Shack, but-”
“You’re covered in blood.” Harry finished for me.

I nodded, not that he could see it with me spamming silver everywhere my eyes could look.

“And I’m human,” I added, “Werewolves like fresh, human blood—Lignarovogentum! And I daresay that Lupin hasn’t transformed potion-less in a while, has he? His wolf’s probably more bloodthirsty than ever—Lignarovogentum!”

“Is there a wand movement? Specific?” Harry asked suddenly.

“Straight jab, a lot of magical power—Lignarovogentum! It’s wood to silver, only aim for roots.”

Harry did his best to help and we left splotches of silver in our wake. That distracted us enough that I startled badly when suddenly there was fresh, cool air and the world was washed in moonlight, an annoyed but certainly not-raging Whomping Willow curving above me.

out you’re out you’re out thank Merlin keep going run run run I stumbled into Hermione, who’d stopped before she rammed into Snape. The professor turned slightly, still princess-carrying Ron, while the three of us caught our breaths — if I weren’t currently under effects of a potion, I’m sure I’d be choking for air just about now.

“Weasley.”

I looked up at him, forcing breath through my nose to slow it. “Professor?”

“Black’s status?”

Ah. So he’d definitely heard me tell Harry about the mind link. He would probably make it to the correct conclusion that, yes, I modified a highly dangerous and illegal ritual so that I could use a human being as my anchor, and then would likely gruesomely kill me for it later. But for now, I sunk into the link and grit my teeth at bloody shoulder wounds blood pain PAIN PAIN Moony no don’t you recognize me brother? another slash copper and silver smells everywhere hot blood pain PAIN

I snapped back into my head and almost reeled from how odd it felt to break out of the link that forcefully — Sirius and I were usually a lot more delicate in handling it.

“Still fighting,” I reported grimly, “Lupin’s trying to get past him, through the tunnel, I think. The silver and Sirius are keeping him in the Shack, but I’m almost completely sure Lupin’s in a blood frenzy and won’t calm down any time soon.”

Snape made a frustrated sound, testament to his stress with how calm the man usually was behind his Occlumency barriers. “The longer a wolf takes the Wolfsbane, the more violent the next potion-less transformation. Incompetent beast. Granger or Potter, whichever of you is strongest, take Weasley — we will be retreating to the castle immediately. Weasley, notify me if the mutt lets the wolf get the best of him — it’s only a matter of time.”

Amazing, how my Head of House could make absolutely everything into an insult.

AGH pain pain PAIN really fighting me Moony WAIT away from there Lys? LYS pain PAIN fear no no no no shit he’s ripping it all out Lys all the silver you transfigured and Snape conjured it’s being thrown away Moony still smart in this form he knows he knows he’s trying to get through

I turned around to glance at the tunnel—

Then Hermione shrieked and Harry yelped, and I turned around again and saw the small, metal
cage Pettigrew was locked inside bulge and bend and snap into flying pieces as a rat became a human once again. I was distantly aware of how Harry was thrown back, how how Pettigrew’s twig-like form managed to knock Hermione over, more focused on the newly stolen wand in his hand and the wild look on his face.

There were more movements, more details I should’ve paid attention to, but everything felt numb and buzzing as I tried to register the fact that-

“Sollicitus Natus!” his voice squeaked out.

-Pettigrew was free.

“NO!”

Chapter End Notes

...I’m sorry about that cliffhanger. BUT ALSO!

:3 I got more fanart... HUGE THANKS to moontipped for this fantastic rendition of a scene back in chapter 31!!!! I am very, very grateful to have received it! :) Thanks for sharing and drawing!!!
Chapter 39

Chapter Summary

Hrnnnnn... Iffy about this chapter, since there's a lot that isn't explained with how fast-paced the action is, but I promise I'll explain better next time. This is the final part of the third arc's climax, the rest will be winding down and prep for fourth arc, so all y'all calm down! XD

Thanks, as always and ever, for reading and commenting and generally being a really kick-ass, supportive audience. :) You're all the best! Enjoy!


...

My mind was in slow-motion, trying to wade past the horror; the very reason Sirius and I had suffered all these years was escaping. Pettigrew was escaping. The thought turned over in my head and made the world freeze on its axis.

Then time caught up and I had to shove the horror deep, deep down.

(Plans always blew up in my face. I had to learn how to adapt to that — was I or wasn’t I a Slytherin?)

Harry and Hermione had been thrown on the ground. Their hands and faces were sporting small, slow-bleeding cuts from the shrapnel of the metal, propelled by the force of Pettigrew’s magic. Their blood looked black in the moonlight, and a part of me rebelled at the sight of it.

(Pettigrew was obviously stronger than I’d accounted for. I underestimated him. I underestimated him and he made mine bleed.)

The other part of me was hyper-focused on the three figures standing in front of me. Pettigrew. Snape. Ron.

Pettigrew’s spell — Sollicitus Natus? — had been cast with a stolen wand, pointed at the biggest threat here. He’d caught Snape off-guard; the professor was shock-still, staring at nothing, frozen in a position half-shielding Ron. Ron was swaying, still injured, deprived of blood, his eyes wide as Pettigrew took Snape out of the game. The sudden, surprisingly competent enemy appearing in our midst shocked us all to silence. Pettigrew had been fast… too fast. We’d barely realized he was a human before he’d cast his spell on Snape, and now he had a wand and he was between me and my brother-

I felt wounds throbbing all over my body, most of them shallow but painful, and the dark was broken by glowing eyes and splashes of silver.

Lys Lys Lys what happened are you okay Lys I felt your panic are you?
Then Pettigrew was facing me, wand still pointing at Snape.

I’m fine, Sirius. Concentrate on your fight, I thought firmly. Distraction means death. Keep to yourself, keep to your fight, and I’ll keep to mine. You know that’s how we keep our heads separated the best.

okay but PAIN PAIN no no Moony don’t not there lead him to silver yes okay Lys stay safe

“One o-of… One of the Dark Lord’s favorite spell collections… the nightmare one…” he stuttered out, not for fear, but for how his eyes focused and unfocused — his mind was probably a little confused from what damage I’d done to it — “Snape won’t move, he can’t- he can’t see anything that’s going on right now, and- and if any of you try anything, I still… I still remember how to- how to cast a Crucius…”

I felt my blood boil. “With your weak will, it wouldn’t even tickle.” I spat.

Which meant that if I let him cast his little *Crucio*, I’d have the time to subdue him. Snape would understand, he wasn’t an emotional idiot, and it wasn’t like he was one of mine anyways, so all I had to do…

Pettigrew gave a dazed smile. “I broke Sirius’ Transfiguration with- with my weak will.” His eyes rolled, setting on the members of the Golden Trio for a half second each. “M-Maybe if they weren’t Gyffindors, they’d- they’d risk it… but you, Lys, y-you like Snape, and they- they’re too noble to… they’re too noble to let me cast it…”

What a little shit. Good thing he was wrong-

*Lys?*

Nails scraping on wood and chips of silver, the broken chandelier reflecting moonlight through the high windows, where is he where is he-

*Watch your left flank, he’s trying to get around, and get out of my head, Sirius!*

I snapped back to my own mind just in time to see Pettigrew’s pathetic face grow a wavering grin.

“But my Lord taught us to never take chances. *Disuplapsa! Accio!*”

Snape’s blank-faced form was thrown limply out of the way, tossed carelessly to the side, and I’d drawn my wand and had it pointed by the time Ron was dragged forward and Pettigrew hid behind him. My wand was sparking with my magic, channeling my anger as well, but it was at my own brother’s throat instead of Pettigrew’s chest.

Pettigrew, for his part, looked like he only had a single spell in him. His form was shaking, shoulders heaving; it looked like he’d collapse soon, but as much as I prayed he would, I knew it wouldn’t happen. He was smarter than we’d all believed — as he should’ve been. It’d be stupid to assume he was mediocre in every aspect, yet a Marked follower of Voldemort and a spy in Dumbledore’s inner circle.

*He took my brother hostage.*

*WHAT?*

If fear was ice, fury was fire. It felt as if boiling heat replaced all my frozen blood, magic and emotion bubbling under my skin, and all I wanted to do was *kill this rat-bastard threat to the pack*
“A single spell and I’ll kill him!”

I didn’t move my wand, but sparks were still spitting from its tip with anger.

Pettigrew’s wand was steady on Ron’s neck. Ron himself was pale with a furious, determined expression on his face, his eyes returning over and over again to Hermione’s form, half-risen on the grass and cuts bleeding lightly, and Harry, nearer to me and still half on his side, also bleeding, looking stiff and pained but not saying a word. The people who were mine were bleeding all over the place and it had me practically bristling because that wasn’t allowed.

(He took my brother hostage.)

I’m sure I had a glare worthy of Voldemort, directed at Pettigrew. He shook where he stood, but to my disgust, he didn’t waver. That Gryffindor recklessness and bravery was finally being channeled, I suppose.

“I… I was Marked for a reason, L-L-Lys…” said Pettigrew softly, “If you- If you cast a single spell…”

The heat in my blood peaked, and I swore the world flashed red with how badly I wanted to spit the Darkest, vilest curses I’d Seen and studied at the pathetic excuse of a man with my brother’s life in his hands.

BROTHER-KILLER! MURDERER! MONSTER! — slash across his throat, a ravaged shoulder, muscles and blood exposed to cool air, sightless blue eyes. “BILL! BILL, NO!” — “Mon amour, mon amour, ne me quitte pas!” — sobbing into their robes, fingers like claws in cloth, shoulders and chest heaving to catch her breath. The coffin was lowered — “Was that a joke, Perce?”

Stop.

“I should have killed you years ago,” I hissed, “I should have snapped your neck myself.”

“Should have been a Ravenclaw, girl,” Pettigrew wheezed, “Always so annoyed when… when someone tricks you- or- or when you don’t know something… Who would have thought that Scabbers the rat… your f-favorite brother’s pet… I don’t know- I don’t know how S-Sirius convinced you… why you believed him o-over twelve years of me… of… b-b-but a-all the better… for me.”

Good. At least the Memory Ward was strong. If I blocked off his access to all memories surrounding knowledge of my Seer abilities, then it stood to reason that he’d never known that I understood exactly what he was all these years. His mind was frazzled not only because I stomped around it carelessly and took bits and pieces away, but because it was desperately trying to fill in gaps that he wasn’t even aware were there. That was the beauty of the ritual, the genius of Helvynya Prevett; Pettigrew would never know he’d forgotten a thing.

“You have your hostage, then, rat,” I snarled, slowly lowering my wand, “What do you want?”

His eyes shone. “All I want is twenty-”

My glower darkened.
“Ten,” Pettigrew amended quickly — as he should, the little *pest* — “All I want is ten seconds. Your brother… his life for ten seconds. I-I… I know you, Lys… You’ll take it… You’ve always been ever so protective of your family… I was part of that, you know… I know… I know— Ten seconds of doing nothing, and then… and then… and that’s all, ten seconds, Lys. You’d give your life for… for your brothers. I-I’ve always wondered why… I’ve always… Y-You can give ten seconds to family, can’t you?”

“The day I call you family,” I spat, “is the day I take a knife and slit my own throat.”

“You called my dad family, too,” Harry said darkly, slowly rising to his feet with torn-up hands and an expression contorted in anger, “And you turned him and my mum in to Voldemort, and you’d do it to Lys and Ron in a heartbeat.”

Pettigrew had the eternal appearance of someone trapped; the way his eyes and head swiveled back and forth, his stuttering words, the glassy expression on his face… our venomous words made it all the worse. **good** “Y-You’d understand if you’d lived through the war… You don’t know… Y-You have no idea how horrible it was… people died every day, friends and family and- everyone. Y-You grew up in peacetime… You don’t know what it’s like.”

I wondered what he would have said, if he still remembered the fact that I lived the war in my nightmares almost every day? How would he have justified his shameless self-interest and cowardice to the girl who saw how they butchered her uncles, _Fabian and Gideon our friends no no no Molly don’t look Arthur don’t let her look_ their faces so similar to her older twin brothers? Who watched them tear children from their cribs and murder them for the crime of having Muggle blood? What could he have possibly said to appeal to us?

*How dare* he try to appeal to us now.

*How dare* he look at the effects his traitorous actions cause and try to convince us he wasn’t to blame, he wasn’t responsible. _brother killer murderer traitor traitor TRAITOR_

“You’re a coward,” my brother said harshly, “The worst kind of coward.”

I winced as Ron did when Hermione’s wand was jabbed into the back of his neck.

“The coward survives… I survived… Not James, not Mary, not Dorcas, not Fabian and Gideon, not any of them… ME. I survived, and they didn’t.” His eyes were unfocused. “No one thought I would… They all thought I’d die the first mission, that raid… but I threw myself at the Dark Lord and _survived._” His head twitched, eyes meeting mine. “Ten seconds, Lys. Ten seconds of looking… looking the other way, and- and- and that’s all.”

He only had enough magic and strength for one spell. A torture spell or maybe even an _Avada Kedavra_, or his Animagus transformation. Or perhaps he’d have a little more energy with a transformation, since it was so instinctual for him to be in that form? Whatever the case, we had to choose between the possibility of Ron’s fatal injury and the man’s escape into his faster rat form.

The choice was obvious.

“Drop the wand and you’ll have your ten seconds.” I replied, words stilted by the clenching of my jaw.

“Girl—” Hermione started at how Pettigrew turned to her. “You’ll count. Slow.”

Hermione’s face flashed with defiance, only to melt into alarmed fear when Pettigrew dug the wand deeper into Ron’s neck, enough that Ron swayed with the force. She kept her eyes on them
and nodded shortly.


“Nine-”

Harry twitched when Pettigrew dropped Hermione’s wand carelessly and spun on his heel, towards the Forest, his body shrinking as he did. It only took one second for him to transform, and he was mid stride by the time his rat form took over; a squeak and a soft thump meant his landing in the grass. If he escaped into the Forbidden Forest, that was it. Once we lost sight of him, it was over. Everything I’d done tonight would’ve been wasted.

“Eight-”

(Sirius’ hopeful face, asking me to describe Harry, flashed through my mind.)

(Endless, you and me.)

Ten seconds is more than enough for a man to transform. Ten seconds is enough for a rat to be lost in the dark. Ten seconds is all it takes to destroy everything I’ve worked for, these long months. Years, if we want to get technical. Years of me twitching at the putrid colors twisted around my brothers’, my sister’s, my parents’, the silent threat I had to pretend wasn’t there. Years of Sirius screaming in his cell or curled in the corner as a dog, hiding from those soul-sucking abominations.

“Seven-”

Years of suffering, made halfway useless for ten seconds.

(The choice was obvious.)

“Six-”

I darted forward with a snarl.

“Accio!”

The rat squealed when he started flying backwards, though the spell failed when he transformed back into a human, to throw off the magic. The force was enough to make him stagger backwards, a backwards glance of wide, betrayed eyes and a terrified whimper at the sight of me stepping towards him.

“You said ten-”

“I’m a Slytherin. I lie.” I sneered. break his bones and he won’t shift. “Incommoruptorus.”

A high, screeching shriek cut through the air. Pettigrew hurled himself to the ground, clutching at the forearm I’m shattered into at least seven pieces. that’s how you cast that one proper. The breaks would be jagged and uneven; his rolling around on the ground might actually cause some internal bleeding, not that I cared if he ruined his arm — as long as it kept him from transforming into a rat, I didn’t care. The bastard took one of mine, hurt the other two, and cast some nightmare spell on my Head of House; and this was just tonight’s offenses.

Harry was glaring at Pettigrew, coming up and standing shoulder-to-shoulder with me.

“He won’t transform like that.” I explained curtly, ignoring the man’s whimpers.
Harry nodded tightly. “Doesn’t sit right with me, but… thank you, Lys.”

I knew there was slight disapproval hiding behind everyone else’s relief, but I wasn’t going to show weakness to someone like Pettigrew, if he could even pay attention past his own pain. I smirked instead. “Someone had to do it. Accio Hermione’s wand. Here, Harry, get that to her. I’ll take care of Pettigrew.”

“We’ll get Snape and Ron and head for the castle, Madam Pomfrey can probably fix the both of them—”

**LYS**

My teeth were sinking into flesh and fur and my mouth was flooded with a hot copper taste, I was out of breath, it was dark and there was the sting of dirt in my eye, splinters in my back and gouging into the claw wounds—

**LYS HE’S IN THE TUNNEL**

A howl erupted, echoing from the base of the creaking Willow.

... 

“B-But... But I’m...” — blue eyes twinkling behind glasses, calm face, gentle words, “Yes, my boy?” A whisper, shameful, eyes a soft gold with stress... “I’m a werewolf.” Remus Remus my friend

Arianna ran through the grass and gathered flowers in her hands and never approached the hedge, with him watching reluctantly and his little brother smiling and jumping down to join her — laughed a little. “And what does that matter, my boy? Werewolf or not, a young wizard needs his education.” — golden eyes darkened into brown again, wide and hopeful, a small smile. “I can... I can go? I can go to Hogwarts?” — “I want to go to Hogwarts, too! When I’m older,” she said, smiling and letting Abe comb her hair. He glanced at his brother and exchanged a sad, fleeting look—

Stop. Twisted and curving, roots and rock shifted to make the tunnel. He stumbled nervously, following the Headmaster who whistled cheerfully despite — “And I can’t get out, right? I won’t be able to get out?"

“Nonsense. Of course you’ll be able to, my boy — what if something happened to this house? But the tunnel is packed and uneven, so if you’ve managed to destroy the door and were desperate enough to get out, it would be rather painful for all the roots and dirt you’ve have to barrel through!”

Stop.

Snape sat stiffly across from the Auror, who was sweating — high ceilings, stone room, magical wards everywhere that he could feel. “Palvolic. An Auror, I see.” “Y-Yes Professor...” “Hmph. Get on with it, then.” — A rat in the palm of his hand, sniffing at his fingers. Remus laughed — James and Sirius and Peter beamed at him, smudged with dirt and robes rumpled. “We came to
“He will return by the full moon. The Dark Lord lies alone and friendless, abandoned by his followers. His servant has been chained these long years. The full moon, the wolf’s moon... the servant will break free and set out to rejoin his master. The Dark Lord will rise again with his servant's aid, greater and more terrible than ever he was. The wolf’s moon calls... Fate intervenes... the servant... will set out... to rejoin... his master...”

Is that the prophecy? Lys, no, shit, don’t

Stop.

James frowned, squinting at the locked door. “What if someone sets the Shack on fire or something? Would you be trapped here, Moony?” — Potter, in stag-form, curled up in their pillow fort and skipping class. Lily flung open the door, enraged that Flitwick took points for Potter not showing up again and gasped as the buck squealed in surprise and turned into a teenager. They were friends at this point barely they started dating two weeks after — a rat scurrying into the forest, lots in the grass, a snarled spell, flying out into the air backwards and kicking and flailing.

“Hm? No... The tunnel is adjusted to my size. If my wolf needed it enough, he’d be able to squeeze through, dig out the parts that he couldn’t fit in, all that.”

Sirius grinned. “That means we can sneak you out, right?”

“I miss these days I wish I wish I — WHAT THE BLOODY HELL, POTTER?” “Shhhh, quiet down, Lily!” — increased dementor presence, Fudge motioning for more more more, they had to stop Sirius Black.

Stop.

Moonlight on the grass, a sea of silver strands, the werewolf’s fangs dripping with blood and saliva — The girl screamed, blood like black ink in the night, her silver-and-green tie dyed red. A howl buried her shrieking — “I WILL NOT QUIET DOWN, YOU’RE AN ILLEGAL ANIMAGUS!” The redhead girl threw anything she could get her hands on at the boy, trying to placate her — authorize the Kiss if that’ll make the flying buggers go faster, they couldn’t let the Boy-Who-Lived die — “...You hired that new assistant, didn’t you?” “Yes, sir.” “Get on it, then. We can’t have the populace questioning Ministry authority. Buy back trust. Get on it, Bones.” “Of course, sir.” — lying in the Hospital Wing, breathing deep, red hair clashing with white bandages and white sheets and white everything. The sun set and the moon rose as she slept, no no no this isn’t what I wanted for you and she twitched at the feel of moonlight on her trembling skin...

Stop.

I slid into my own body (weird... that wasn’t supposed to feel like that) and flinched at the force of my own magic rebelling against me, eyes trained on the tunnel underneath the willow’s roots that echoed with snarls and the sound of wood shattering and pained whines and the hiss of silver on wolf skin. When had... When had the werewolf gotten so close?

There were hands tugging at my arms, a hand gently patting at my face. Whispered, urgent words... My head was throbbing and my chest hurt, too. Something warm and wet was running down my nose, salt and copper in my mouth. I ached and I was still half-Seeing Lily Evans chase...
James Potter around his dorm room, screaming at him, and a girl in a hospital bed with half my face because the other was bandaged up…

“Lys, Lys, what’s wrong?” went the whisper.

Something was wrong… Something wasn’t right… Sirius was in my head before, where was he? He was telling me about my visions, he was watching, that wasn’t allowed but he was there… James Potter was laughing at her outrage, but… No, now he looked worried. There were cuts on his face and he was smaller and paler and… James didn’t have green eyes, what…?

“Lys, we have to go, Hermione’s trying to get Snape up again and Ron’s got Pettigrew, but we’ve got to go—”

Harry?

“LYSSIE, MOVE!”

The fog in my mind lifted just an inch. Where was Sirius in my head? He wasn’t supposed to be able to access my visions, we’d tested it… No, no, think straight, dammit, Lyssie — the tunnel. The tunnel wasn’t quite wide enough for three people all across, sometimes, but that could easily be fixed if the werewolf was desperate enough. It was supposed to save Lupin’s life, just in case. Now it was going to take mine.

There were golden eyes in the dark.

“Disuplapsa!”

I felt myself jerk to the side and ram into Harry, sending both of us toppling into the grass again, just in time for the barest brush of something speeding past me from the direction of the tunnel. Dirt and grass had exploded along with it, a howl and a snarl reverberating through Sirius’ chest. I landed hard on Harry, who gave a pained grunt as I knocked the breath out of him, and quickly rolled over onto my knees, twisting around to see the hulking, monstrous figure of Lupin clawing into the ground and turning clumsily, chest heaving and saliva shining white in the moonlight, dripping from his open jaw.

The pain of landing jarred me out of confusion just a little more more, but not quite entirely. My shoulder was aching and the images of James and Lily Potter and myself in a Hospital Wing bed and dementors flooding the sky snapping, shattering, turning into terror at the sight of a werewolf finally freed after years of imprisonment… those images were fading as the pain radiated in my shoulder, pulsing with my heart.

Lys I’m sorry our minds got tangled they’ve never gotten that bad but you have to go you have to go I’ll hold him off but you have to GO!

Sirius, the bear-dog he was, backed up against us, protecting Harry and I by placing himself in front of him, his own fangs bared and deep growls warning Lupin away. they’re mine Moony you can’t have them you can’t have them stay BACK To the side and in the background, Hermione was having little luck with an impassive, catatonic-looking Snape but was dragging him away while Ron limped after with with Pettigrew rat traitor pup threat in tow, all of them slowing backing away from the wolf’s flank. good Snape protect pups protect rat keep alive Even Pettigrew went quiet at the entrance of Lupin; he’d be very hard-pressed to transform into a rat now, with broken bones, and he’d know that. There were tiny whimperes coming from him, which I picked up on through Sirius’ ears, but they were muffled and Hermione was quietly casting Sound-Muffling Charms and Scent-Dampening Spells they’re fading from me can’t see them it’s working and all
sorts of things to keep the four of them out of the wolf’s hunt.

Harry and I were both perfectly still, not wanting to give Lupin a reason to strike. He was staring Sirius down, both of them snarling low in their throats, chests low to the ground and hind legs ready to propel them forward for a bite or a tear. 

It’s okay, Sirius. I know you tried. This is Fate, remember?

My hand tightened on my wand. A sense of helplessness and frustration and anger and aggression and desperation bubbled in my stomach, rising up to my chest and filling my lungs; not all of it was Sirius’, by how dampened the empathic pain was. I could feel cuts all over my body but they were dull. Harry’s breathing quickened when the werewolf make a false lunge and Sirius met him, snarling at the attempt, standing his ground and forcing the temporary standstill again.

You never promised that I’d avoid the bite. You accepted it.

Sometimes you can’t keep promises you make. Sometimes promises are stupid.

The moment Sirius charged forward, howling, I grabbed Harry and tugged him to his feet, momentum driving us away from the flurry of claw and snarl and fang. Sirius clamped his jaw down into Lupin’s shoulder, thrashing his head and pulling Lupin down, attempting to get him belly-up and in the surrender position stop this Moony stop don’t touch my pups; Lupin howled, loud enough that Harry and I had to brace ourselves and scrunch our eyes shut at the noise. When we looked back at the fight, Lupin had a clawed hand splayed over Sirius’ ribcage, shoving down with all his weight, which Sirius yelped at and kicked his way out of, back on his paws, charging forward again and ducking a swipe to nip at Lupin’s flank and turn him around.

My hand had somehow found Harry’s, which I only realized when my fingers tightened and his reciprocated. I blinked, checking on my core and noting I had enough to at least perform a Notice-Me-Not and hopefully allow the two of us to edge away…

But as soon as I began to channel magic, Lupin’s golden-eyed gaze swiveled to me.

MOONY PLEASE

There was a flash of black fur and white teeth, and then the werewolf was right in front of me, rearing on his hind legs with an arm swinging up to stun me-

My arm wrenched-

pain pain pain no LYS LYS NO

Hermione shrieked and Ron was bellowing, someone else was screaming, too, the stench of an animal up my nose, something warm all over my neck and face. My breath left me as I tumbled backwards, landed on something odd, not grass, and then my face was on fire.
My face-

I was screaming. That was me, the someone else. That someone else was me, screaming.

The werewolf was blasted away from me, claws dripping with blood, my blood, my face- It was like fire, all across the left side of my face, warm something spreading everywhere, pouring into my mouth, my eyes. Something changed, I was on grass again suddenly, and I wanted to curl on my side and claw at my face and make it stop but it was burning and throbbing and my magic was throbbing against my chest, trying to burst out.

Harry. That was Harry’s voice. I’d never heard him that worried before, actually. My face was burning and throbbing and I tasted blood but one of my hands flew down to my side and my fingers gripped dirt and grass and tore. Something slippery was trying to find purchase on my face — Harry’s hands? — and it hurt so much more with pressure but I sucked in a breath and felt my teeth creaking against each other.

He wants to hunt a human and you’ve been running Lys I know Lyssie I can I promise Lys

Even through the haze of pain, the hands all on my face and making the pain flare in my wounds, the spells being woven around me to hide me, I knew what Sirius was planning the moment it flashed through his head. My eyes, which had been shut tight in pain, flew open. The only reason I didn’t bolt up were hands on my shoulders, holding me down.

Sirius don’t you FUCKING dare.
I promise

To be a Clairvoyant is to suffer don’t you dare don’t you dare DON’T!

you’ve suffered enough Lyssie

My eyes roamed, one of them blinded by something I assumed was blood, and I locked onto Harry’s, determined and frightened behind his slipping glasses. “Harry, stop him—” I choked out, “Harry, he’s going to— he’s—”

“Sirius is fighting Lupin, don’t worry—” Harry said.

I wanted to shake my head, but instead I sunk into the mental link, feeling the burn on my face and my magic fade as I did, but stepping into new wounds. New blood, more throbbing, hurts all over my back and my shoulders, bruises, the taste of dirt and blood on my tongue, the scent of a confused werewolf and the fading smell of pups...

growling fighting blood smell weak but Lys I know she’s bleeding! Moony licking his claws wants more hungry can’t let that happen sorry Lys I’m sorry... shift shift shift paws to hands and no more blood smell but I know Moony can smell her I know it Lys Harry this is for you

I felt the moment Sirius shifted to his human form, staggering before the confused werewolf, half blood-frenzied. He took a breath that I felt in my lungs, that I breathed with him, and felt a jolt of fear panic protect nono no go through him when the werewolf stood on his hindlegs, sniffing at the air, golden eyes going brighter at the scent of my blood.

Lyssie’s blood no The werewolf barely turned towards where Sirius knew I was, bleeding on the ground with the trio and Snape huddled protectively, when Sirius steeled his heart.

you’re hurting already Lys go

Partners, I replied, pain flooding my head, my entire body covered in claw marks and slashes.

you shouldn’t have to feel

Partners, I insisted stubbornly, You and me.

“What-?”

“What the bloody hell is he doing?”

Sirius we-smiled. Lupin lumbered towards the tree, scenting me, and Sirius looked at his left arm and brought his teeth to his skin and bit down and ripped.

won’t let you take Lys or Harry or the others won’t let you take my pups their friends they’re MINE You’re an idiot, Sirius Black. We did all this so you could live with Harry.

wrong wrong wrong for you for your pups for your generation for you you you you not me was the warmth in my chest, underneath the hurt and the bubbling, angry magic and the lungs that were only breathing because of a potion.

want someone to hunt Moony? want fresh human blood? come get it, he screamed, in and out of the link.

(You shouldn’t have to feel me die, is what Sirius was going to say.)
“SIRIUS!”

Sirius grinned triumphantly when Lupin whipped around and dove forward, claws raking down Sirius’ arms to pin him down. I smelled the werewolf’s breath, I felt the saliva drop down on my cheek, and then I felt those enormous fangs sink into my shoulder and upper arm and back. I was gentle, he’s testing he’s just biting for now. Sirius’ eyes widened as the pain shot through, as his bones crunched under fang, and we both shrieked when we felt the werewolf magic latch onto his own arm. There was a thrashing sensation in our chest, like his magic was screaming, and I was sure if I flicked my Mage Sight on that it would be.

“SIRIUS! SIRIUS!”

“DAMMIT!”

busy with me busy eating Lys tell them all to run—PAIN PAIN PAIN

“Harry- How- We have to help, we have to—”

“T-T-Tie that t-tightly, Harry… sh-she’ll bleed out if you don’t…”

My bones were crunching, my collarbone and shoulder blade cracking between fang. Claws were digging into me, blood was spurting everywhere, the bite was burning like acid spreading through my veins, tearing me into pieces—

“Shut up, Pettigrew! How can you even— You bloody traitor, Sirius was just—”

“S-Sirius m-m-made his choice, and… and you— you have to focus on the one you c-can help, not… not him. Th-That’s— That’s how you survive, Harry… H-Hurry up! Th-The faster Lys is better, t-the fast we can get out of here… Girl, h-how are you on… on… on sp-spontaneous casting?”

“Oh my god… Oh my god…”

Magic was tearing through me. My strings were being infected, my clouds of ink darkening and convulsing and turning into something different—

Lys please

“-counterspell to the one… the nightmare… the spell I put on him.”

“Wh-Why are you…?”

“B-Because I… I don’t want to die… I survive… and we need Snape for that. S-So hurry up!”

I snapped back into my head, leaving Sirius’ agony. Something was being wound around my head, missing my mouth and nose, being tied tightly. It was quick and I started bleeding again and
someone was crying, but I whimpered when my wound was jostled. I felt Sirius as a ball of bright, convulsing agony in the back of my head, trying to escape his pain through my eyes, the bite of the werewolf and the playful scrapes and clawing afterwards muted by my mediocre pain.

Suddenly my world shifted and I bit back a scream as my wound, through the bandages, was pressed up against something. Someone was carrying me; Snape, maybe? There was some conversation about a counterspell… Maybe he was back? I didn’t know how fast or slow time was passing… This was the second time Snape would be carrying me… He must’ve been really annoyed…

“Weasley, can you run?”

“Yes.”

“What are you- Where-? Ron! We have to-”

*He’s going to run it*, I thought, my thoughts going hazy. Blood loss, probably.

> good thank Merlin tearing me tearing PAIN PAIN pain my muscles pain pain pain PAIN PAIN blood everywhere Moony’s licking at the blood slowly maybe he recognizes me? thank goodness Snape’s up he’ll get you out you need to go Lys

> “WE CAN’T JUST LEAVE HIM-!”

> “SILENCE, POTTER! Black didn’t savage his arm for nothing, *come along now.*”

You weren’t supposed to have paid the price for me.

> “Harry, we have to go-”

> “HE’S NOT DEAD!”

> if I had to die so you and Harry and your friends could live so Pettigrew was brought to justice so I could make things up to Snape so my pups were okay then that’s fine with me Lys this is okay this is okay you’ll be okay tell Harry I love him always loved him since he was born my pup you’ll be okay both of you all of you

> “BECAUSE LUPIN’S PLAYING WITH HIS FOOD! As soon as he gets bored, Black will be very much dead.”

> “I’M NOT LEAVING HIM-”

A howl.

I cracked my eyes open, as much as my body protested the movement and my face throbbed for it. The high-pitched, breathy sound rang through the sudden silence again. It didn’t sound… It sounded odd. It wasn’t right.

“Is that another bloody werewolf?” whispered someone. My brother, maybe.

“It doesn’t soun-”

It sounded again, and everyone held their breaths as it did.

> not a werewolf pain PAIN PAIN but Moony curious walking away thank Merlin oh fuck fuck pain PAIN PAIN again it’s sounding again Moony is looking Forbidden Forest possible packmate
“He’s leaving…?”

“Lupin’s not in blood frenzy anymore, he successfully hunted, so now he wants a pack and that might be a werewolf, so he- HARRY!”

“SIRIUS!”

The wrong-sounding howl rung out again, and I couldn’t crack open my eyes even if I wanted to. Sirius’ link was going crazy and my magic was drained, my body heavy, my face like fire. I just wanted to sleep… I was comfortable, held like this — Dad used to do this all the time with me, I remembered. I hurt and I just wanted to…

The howl again.

Failure was bitter and my chest felt like it was caving in, for no other reason than the fact that I couldn’t feel Sirius anymore. Was this the price I had to pay? What was the point of getting Pettigrew if Sirius died, two years too early? I changed Fate for nothing but clearing his name, and who the fuck cared about that if he was goddamn dead? Why did Sirius have to pay for my needless meddling? Why did I have to lose another one of mine? I couldn’t even properly grieve for all the pain in my body, for my rapidly fading consciousness, for my hazy mind that couldn’t comprehend that I had failed in almost every aspect and for what-

Sirius, torn to shreds — werewolf eating, hunched over the figure of a friend — Harry and Hermione with tears in their eyes, hands on a golden necklace thrown over their heads in the dark Hospital Wing — Ron nodding to them, wincing. His leg was in a cast but he left the Dreamless Sleep on his bedside table.

“Do what you have to do,” he said, eyes fierce and bright. There was a girl in the bed beside him, curtains thrown up all around her, he could only see — “I thought it was my dad who’d conjured my Patronus. I mean, when I saw myself across the lake … I thought I was seeing him.”

“EXPECTO PATRONUM!” — hurried in the woods, breaths harsh, icy cold and terror creeping up his limbs and slowing him. The sky was black with cloaks, the moon blocked out — “Save Sirius. You heard my sister, right? In some other Fate line, because of some other choice, he’s not dead.” — a white stag dancing with a silvery dog.

Stop.

The axe swung down on the creature’s neck. It screamed and then went silent and the half-giant couldn’t stop crying. — “He lost the appeal…” hands clasped together, blood making their fingers slippery, backing away from the wolf sniffing in their direction. — sighed and rubbed at the dog’s ears comfortingly, leaning against his bulk, leading him to the Kitchens — “Hello, Sirius Black.” “Hello, Seer. I have a few questions about a rat.”

Hermione clutched at her chest, clenching her teeth, fingers shaking on her wand. “Hermione? Hermione! You’re using too much magic, I know magical exhaustion when I see it!” “I have to hide us, Ron; Lupin can’t hunt what he can’t sense…”

Stop.

Sirius turned around and grinned when Harry walked into the room. — Sirius was strewn across the grass, a horror movie of a corpse, sightless eyes gazing at the stars with a smile on his bloody face. Someone screamed sobbing apologies in the background — she stilled as she was carried,
expression going blank even as the wound kept bleeding through the bandages. She fidgeted, turning, catching her brother’s eye, grinning despite the pain, despite the grief, despite the void in her head where he was supposed to be. “I really hate Time Turners.”

Stop.

Wait... What? What on earth...?

Lupin sat with his face in his hands and wept, threw his arm out to smash into all the knick-knacks on his desk. “I KILLED HIM! I KILLED HIM! THE TRUDEST OF ALL OF US AND I KILLED HIM!”

Stop.

“Time Turners piss the fuck out of Prophesiers and Clairvoyants, you know. Fate and Destiny always change when wizards have access to the Sands of Time.” Ron explained seriously, looking between Harry and Hermione with dark circles under his bright eyes. “Do what you have to do.”

Stop.

“But we can’t interfere too much, Ron- We might go insane if we interact with our past selves!” “Bollocks to that, Hermione! If people really went crazy that easily, at the drop of a hat, my sister would’ve been put away a long time ago! I know you’re strong enough, mentally, to do it — you’re a genius, Hermione!” — a flush on her cheeks, looking away. Harry smiled grimly, but he was shaking and there was dried blood on his — “He’s going to live. Ron, you have to convince Hermione and Harry to... They can save him, Ron, they can... In another... In another line of Fate, they already have...” — high ceilings, stone room, magical wards everywhere that he could feel. “Palvolic. An Auror, I see.” — Sirius swung his arm around James and James swung his arm around Sirius and they faced the snowy sky and laughed.

Stop.

A slow, painful (but not pained) smile spread on my face.

(I had forgotten about that disgusting cheat code Hermione carried around her neck.)

I fidgeted in the arms carrying me until I found Ron and Harry and Hermione. Ron was peering over Snape’s arm, looking like he wanted nothing more than to pluck me out of Snape’s arms and carry me himself. His face blurred as my own blood loss began to threaten unconsciousness, but I reached for him weakly, only managing to wiggle my fingers; Ron knew exactly what I wanted, though, and grabbed onto my hand awkwardly.

My wound pulled but I grinned broadly. “I really hate Time Turners.”

Ron looked confused, on top of everything else. “What?”

“He was supposed to have died but Harry and Hermione will save him. Tell them that, okay? I’m... I’m sorry about the hippogriff, though. But you all and Sirius matter more than it...” I babbled, knowing I was due for a damn fainting spell soon, “S-Sorry about all this, big brother. Watch out for... for the dementors, okay?”

“Lys!”

There was a huff from Snape, making my wound throb at the scratching of fabric on the bandages. “Potter, Granger! Is Pettigrew secured? Good. Potter, go check on Black, then — impatient and
foolhardy, just like your father…” Snape muttered the last part.

Footsteps jarred the world, but the stars were still as I looked at them and my brother’s hand was stubbornly remaining in my reach, even though it slipped sometimes. So Harry was going to check on Sirius, who was so weakened and injured that I could barely feel the path to his mind. Somehow, they’d get to the Black Lake… Somehow, the future Harry and Hermione would see that, wouldn’t expect it because Sirius was dead in their timeline, and… God, it was hard to think with my face half-melting and my vision going fuzzy, but dammit all, Sirius was alive and I was somehow Seeing into the version of time where he wasn’t and no wonder Seers hated Time Turners if I was getting visions this strong despite my empty core and my body trying to pass out and conserve as much anaemic blood as it possibly could…

I should have passed out long ago. I was certain the only reason I wasn’t was magic. My world thoughts were slowing, as if my mind was sleepy from the visions. Slowly… everything shrunk down into snapshots of images. My whirling mind was settling down. Adrenaline was fading. The stars were dim. It was freezing cold, except my hands, holding Ron’s. Snape was okay, carrying me and snarling — probably at the Gryffs. Pettigrew was secured. My brother and Hermione were here. Sirius was alive, if very hurt. Harry was going to perform a kick-ass Patronus. I wasn’t bitten.

*We did it, Sirius…*

There was no answer, but as I slipped into the dark, eyes closed and a heartbeat under my ear just like when I was a child and Dad would hold me… it was peaceful and there was a spark of laughter and the howl that echoed in the night was almost comforting to hear.
The sky was wrong.

You’d like to think that nighttime skies were always as clear as this sky looked, deep greens and teals and blues sprinkled with cloudy shades of orange and scattered with stars. It was like the sky itself was made of magic and I could see the colors in it, only they were so enormous and far away that it didn’t seem like it was moving. This was a sky for photographs and photo-editing and video games and all that Muggle stuff I hadn’t seen in years.

The sky was wrong. This was not real.

But I was calm for it. I shouldn’t have been, but whatever confusion or urgency was hazed over, and all I felt was fascination… and an unsettling peace.

“The sky didn’t used to look like that.”

The hand on my shoulder should’ve been warm, because it always was, but there was no sense of temperature. I should have been more bothered by it.

Sirius?

With all the darkness, it should’ve been impossible to see him so clearly. He was wearing robes I’d never seen before, loose and comfortable, hands in his pockets. His grin was easy, hair tied back, looking healthy and hale. Something niggled in the back of my mind about how relaxed he looked, that he somewhat wasn’t supposed to look this way right now, but I couldn’t grasp the thought.

He was facing the sky, looking at it in fascination.
“If this is what the sky used to look like a thousand or however many bloody years ago, I think I understand why my ancestors started taking on constellation names. What do you think?”

Where... are we? Sirius...

His eyes flickered down to me, filling with a blank sort of concern. “Oh... I can barely see you, Lyssie. You haven’t woken up yet, have you?” He chuckled, reaching up to scratch the back of his neck, smile turning a slight sheepish. “No wonder it’s still so dark here.”

...?

“Sorry. It’s... well... this place is one of my favorite clearings in the Forbidden Forest. It was an old, abandoned camping ground of the centaurs, I think — it’s a bit too close to where Sprout hides her orchards, so... yes... Well, I haven’t been able to come here for a long time.”

Why?

“Ah... When I came after Pettigrew and Harry, well... let’s just say that it’s not abandoned anymore, and leave it at that. I... missed this place.” Sirius gazed at the black mass of trees, thick enough that they looked flat to my eyes, and settled behind me.

I turned, frowning at how his nostalgia seemed to stutter, and then froze.

I should’ve been much more alarmed, much more curious, but all I felt was a vague sort of sleepiness and tiredness. Two golden eyes flickered in the dark, coming closer. Close enough that I could see the outline of an enormous wolf, dark enough to blend into the shapeless, endless tree line. It growled and I should’ve activated my fight-or-flight response but I only blinked.

That’s a werewolf.

Some of my nervousness must’ve bled through whatever odd, hazy magic was at work here, because Sirius chuckled and smiled at me reassuringly. “Don’t worry, Lys. He won’t come any closer. The hairy git wouldn’t dare.”

An odd, childish urge to duck behind Sirius sprung up... and another niggle of my mind sounded when I did just that, though Sirius just laughed. What was I missing here? Why was my mind all foggy but this place was so clear, and where was I, and why didn’t I care? What on earth was making it so my emotions were suppressed, why was Sirius here and not in the Shack, and... and...

“Ouch. You’re getting really worked up, huh?"

You think?

Sirius gave a smile a bit more like a grimace. “Sorry. It’s... It’s hard to think here, and I reckon it’s half that you still haven’t woken up and another half that furry bastard lurking in the dark there.” He nodded at the wolf, who rumbled but didn’t even snarl.

This isn’t real, is it?

A golden moon rose behind the wolf. Its light didn’t reach the woods, the shadows black as ever. But the grass around us, up to my knees, was flooded with light and the brook running nearby was visible, grey pebbles shining. The clearing and sky were beautiful and surreal and I wanted to get the fuck out of here. Or, rather... I should have. I should have wanted to get the fuck out of here. (There was a lot of ‘should haves’ here, for some reason, and I couldn’t quite piece together why
“What’s the last thing you remember, Lyssie?”

…I’m not sure. There’s no start. There’s just this, and memories.

“Like a dream, right? Like we’re sharing the same dream.”

Like we’re sharing the same mind.

“Yes.”

My eyes widened. The forest’s flat blackness sharpened into true woods, shapes of trees, the golden eyes set in the huge skull of a hulking werewolf. Too lanky and oddly-shaped to be a wolf, too big, but not human by half. Silent, though. Watching. I turned to Sirius and finally felt a sharp pang of horror as his healthy appearance flickered, the shadow of a skeletally-thin, profusely-bleeding, raggedly-dressed man overlapping with the way I first saw him in this place. There was a burning sensation on my face, the left side of my face, and I felt coppery warmth sliding down into my mouth.

The haze was lifted, enough that I could think. A thousand different questions passed through my head. What little of this was my head, I suppose. There was only one I singled out, voiced out as much as I could.

Are you… Did you live?

Sirius smiled warmly, blood in his teeth but eyes warm. He looked much more aware, too, even as his image flickered. “We all did. Or so the Aurors tell me — little hard to be interrogated when the moon’s up and my body is too weak to transform but too accustomed to a canine form not to try.”

…I’m sorry.

He smiled. His hand moved from my shoulder to square on the top of my head, heavy and warm. “There’s nothing to be sorry about.”

So they always tell me. I’m always sorry anyhow.

 “…Which I think we’ll have to wait for the waking world to address, Lyssie.”

But for now we’re in your head, aren’t we?

Sirius turned back to the sky, gaze on the too-large moon. The wolf followed suit, staggering to its hind legs and facing the sky. A stream of crimson comets distantly winked in and out of sight, and I felt a pull on my magical core when the comets increased, drowning out the dark sky with light. It was like fireworks, silent but for the wind and the brook and Sirius beginning to laugh.

“I haven’t been able to access my mindscape in years,” Sirius said softly, “Not since the… the dementors. But here I am, the sky all different, a brook that doesn’t belong, and every time I think I might start thinking about… about bad things, the sky turns red as Weasley hair.” He glanced at me, grinning. “Must be a sign, eh?”

I wanted to laugh. So that’s what that warm, pleading tug on my heart was.

Red sky isn’t usually a good omen.

“I said something like that to James, once. Know what he told me?”
“Of course. It is James,” Sirius snickered. But his eyes softened and the sky had darkened — just a little, because it was still a brilliant cosmos, just no longer lit up like New Years eve. “He said the sappiest thing… ‘Red can only be the omen of lovely things coming my way.’”

Sounds like something he was saying while Lily was entering the room.

“Oh, it was. It definitely was.” Sirius looked up at the woods, and I followed his eyes. A white, glowing stag was standing among the trees, further back than the wolf was — the wolf was right on the edge, one leap would have the thing on the two of us, but it was calm and still — and featureless. It grazed in the dark, and then raised its crowned head when a matching doe of the same silvery light joined it. They stood together, facing the both of us and the wolf behind us silently.

There was a click. A piece of understanding, of sense, which I’d been missing so much as I stood in this mindscape world, cobbled together from my and Sirius’ memories. Everything should have been more familiar, more understandable, because I was in my mind and it should’ve made more sense to me than anything; but this place was more Sirius than me, for whatever reason. The click was recognizing the bits that were mine.

Happy thoughts.

“Fireflies in the dark. Red skies chase away the bad.”

The darkness is mine, because I’m sleeping, and so is the brook. That’s where Luna and I used to play in all the time, I’m sure of it… And the forest, the clearing… the wolf and the moon are yours.

A sharp look at the eerily silent creature, golden eyes still trained on us patiently. “I felt him tear my Animagus apart. Furry bastard.”

Staking a claim.

“As werewolves often do.” Sirius agreed.

...The forest is brighter. I can see trees.

They were deep blue and black, but I could see them. No longer just massive outlines, but twisted, tall woods and underbrush. They seemed to go on forever, empty but for the doe and the stag made of starlight and the werewolf waiting for us as the grass ended and carpet of leaves began. Foreboding as the Forbidden Forest, one would assume, but it was just… familiar and right, almost. A feeling I’m sure was Sirius’, not mine.

“You’re waking up,” said Sirius matter-of-factly.

What happens next?

“Oh, all sorts of things,” Sirius said lightly. “I get past the moons. Ministry inquiry. Medical treatment, yours and mine, especially. A trial. Seeing if this mind-sharing or dream-sharing business is permanent. I’m going to adopt you as my goddaughter. I’ve got to fix my house up and add that wolf chamber in the basement. And add a basement. Also got to figure out if I ought to threaten some Muggles who’ve got funny ideas on how to treat my godson. None of this in a particular order, mind you.”
I could see it now. We’d have to make up some sort of bullshit to make sure Lupin and Sirius came out of this in the best light possible. The Ministry would make that a pain in the arse to do, but we’d manage it; Alby would help us, and I’m quite sure that I could Slytherin something up. A trial, yes. And then Sirius would bundle Moony up and they’d go to Grimmauld Place and make it livable. Safe. I’d be invited over with Ron so we could see Harry and help them move in.

Mum would probably come along and fatten us up, all the while clucking at Harry for poor eating habits. Maybe I’d bring Ginny, just so she could see how normal Harry was; she’d grow out of that crush soon enough, talking to Harry and seeing how sassy and stubborn the kid could be. Oh, and Fred and George would tag along to hang around the Marauders, werewolves or no. They wouldn’t care. Harry could even follow us back home and play on the pitch, fly around a bit.

There were fireflies all over the forest, now. Soft and sure, butter-yellow blinks in the dark; gentle, compared to the metallic gold of the moon and the wolf. Sirius was smiling softly at the sight. I think I was, too.

(Happy thoughts.)

…That sounds like a very nice future.

He grinned, facing me and framed by fireflies. “It will be.” Sirius declared. “Now… time to wake up, kiddo.”

…

The high ceilings of the Hospital Wing were what greeted me. Slowly, though, swimming into focus. I knew from the scratches on the arched beams that I was in my usual bed. And I knew from Madam Pomfrey’s ridiculous obsession with the sterility of white that I was covered in the stuff, the cheap sheets to the pillows to the thin clothing that was definitely not my usual jeans and wooly sweaters and T-shirts.

Wait. There was something wonky about what I was seeing. Imbalanced. And there was something on my face.

“…I’m not half-blind, am I?”

Because even if all I saw was pale wood and white, I heard the muffled roar of Alby’s magic, the strings and brass and singing, which was only a little bit outdone by the very muted song of Hogwarts. Grand and powerful and Light, though there were sweet notes of old sorrow and wavering ones of hesitation, choices burdening his shoulders. Seems I’d really have to get on my The Magick of Man-Hunters rituals if my blinders were failing this oddly; something to do over the summer, I suppose, even if I should’ve taken advantage of Beltane.

You could barely see it, the way Alby carried his straight shoulders and wise, blue eyes and disgustingly garish robes with him. He was sitting in a — once again — Transfigured chair, plush and plum-colored, looking quite comfortable and commanding. There was that neutral-pleased smile on his face. My single eye roamed over his aged, stooped frame; he looked no different from the last time I’d personally spoken to him, face to face, which was… almost a year ago, I think?

(I asked Alby if he thought Tom had been telling the truth.)
I could not possess you, Lys, he said. I did not want you to die so I could live, he said. I wish you had been born in 1926.

Ah. No wonder I hadn’t spoken to Alby in such a long while. I tended to avoid… that sort of thing. Emotional confrontation sorts of things. Triggering myself sorts of things. That, and I suppose Alby was just very busy — fighting Fudge every inch of the way, on the dementors-guarding-Hogwarts bit, among other things — and so was I.

I missed him, sometimes.

“No, my dear, I am pleased to inform you that you will continue to retain perfect vision. The Healers who arrived from St. Mungo’s told Madam Pomfrey that you weren’t to remove the bandages, however, seeing as werewolf injuries — claws and bites alike — resist the healing process as much as they can. You were quite lucky.”

A relieved sigh left me. “And I wasn’t bitten, either.”

“No at all. Only a scratch.”

“And Sirius lived. And Pettigrew…”

Alby smiled more brightly at that. “Oh, yes, Mr. Potter and his friends informed me of all that happened. Peter Pettigrew was immediately taken into Ministry custody, albeit much more roughly than Sirius Black once an on-site interrogation was performed, with myself as witness.”

Hm. Now that I was awake and speaking, it felt like I was stretching something that didn’t really prefer it, which was uncomfortable though not painful (yet). Aaaand there it was, the pain. Just a twinge, like bruises were being pressed in rhythm on my face. My left eye seemed to be spelled closed and covered in gauze, the fancy stuff — I knew by just running the tips of my fingers over it.

I blinked my right eye. Since, you know, it was my only eye right now.

I grinned past the pain. “How long’s it been?”

“The full moon has passed in it’s entirety, and you have missed many of your exams, but have woken just in time for the feast. No doubt what your parents were hoping for, when they consented to keeping you in Madam Pomfrey’s care, rather than St. Mungo’s.”

I sighed. My parents. My family. Another year, another dramatic hospitalization. I couldn’t keep doing this to them — I had no doubt they were worried. Probably beyond worried. They deserved much better than dreading sending me off to Hogwarts with new scars. They deserved, at the very least, a true explanation. And an apology. All sorts of things. More than this guilt in my chest could give them.


“My dear Lys, if you wouldn’t mind terribly, perhaps you can answer some of my own questions?”

My eyes opened. I felt tired and sleepy and my face hurt, but there was no time for complaining. Not now.

“What do you know already? I’ll fill in the gaps.” I offered, smiling weakly.
Alby gave a fleeting smile.

(Gone were the days of finger painting in his office, laughing as Fawkes squawked indignantly at a flick of apple-green I’d never seen in anyone’s colors before, running through the fireplace and calling out ‘Until tomorrow!’’s.)

(I wondered, sometimes, in the very back of my mind when I woke up from particularly bad nightmares or visions and Occluded using what Alby’s taught me, why being a grandfather and why being my superior clashed enough to create this much distance.)

“As reported to the Ministry,” he began, “Sirius Black attacked your brother, Miss Granger, and Mr. Potter with the aim of Peter Pettigrew in rat form; very minor injuries were accrued from that confrontation. Remus Lupin, realizing Harry Potter was late for his Patronus lesson and aware of Black’s Animagus form, decided to investigate and realized the truth of the matter.”

“It was a Wednesday night, though…”

Alby smiled. “Ah, but the Ministry doesn’t know that Mr. Potter’s Patronus lessons were on Thursdays, do they?”

I nodded. “Fair enough. Lupin won’t be… punished, will he? For not… for not coming up sooner about Sirius’ Animagus form.”

“I made sure the Ministry believed that he wasn’t aware of the presence of a black dog in Mr. Potter’s life until then. They do know about that, of course, if only to lend more credence to the fact that Sirius Black had all opportunity to inflict harm on my students and chose not to.” Alby didn’t seem irritated that I interrupted, but I ducked my head as I realized how off-track we were. His voice was still mild and pleasant. “Now, to continue… Professor Snape was delivering the monthly Wolfsbane, of course, and grew alarmed when he could not find its drinker; so, of course, he went searching, leaving the potion behind in his haste.”

“And he happened upon Lupin and Sirius standing off against three students.” I added, remembering walking into that mess and being shot at for it.

Alby hummed. “Yes. Where Sirius Black and Remus Lupin spun tales so fanciful that it bordered on delusion, and Professor Snape made to attack and subdue. But he was distracted when you, my dear, entered and proclaimed that the rat was, indeed, Peter Pettigrew. You’d known there was something wrong with him as he was your family’s pet, but you dared not speak of it because, for one thing, he did yours no harm, and for another, he was constantly in reach of your family. It is widely known that Arthur and Molly Weasley are viciously protective of their children, especially in the wake of the Blood War, so the Ministry would believe that you have inherited that and would not risk your siblings or parents for anything.”

“Alright… A bit of a stretch, but I suppose that’s… well, the Ministry is probably busier with other things than a little girl keeping secrets for the sake of her family’s lives.”

The Headmaster chuckled. “Indeed. With one of his Slytherins behind Sirius Black, Professor Snape had no choice but to listen to the story again and consider it more thoroughly. Your brother sided with you, and the rat was revealed, and all seven — eight, with Pettigrew — made for the castle to contact the Ministry. In the heat of this excitement, the Wolfsbane was forgotten, and Remus Lupin transformed; he was nearest to you, and in his initial blood frenzy, he detected your blood — Pettigrew attacked you when he was revealed, is the Ministry’s belief — and attacked. The only reason you all escaped was Sirius Black’s transformation into his Animagus form to allow you all time to escape.”
I nodded again, thoughtfully. So all that was changed was the timing of everything.

“And Lupin bit him in the Shack?” I asked.

“No, no. As a blood frenzied werewolf, he managed to get out onto the grounds where Sirius sacrificed himself to save you all. Perhaps some touch of magic or love made it through to the wolf’s mind, because he fled to the forest soon after, and Sirius staggered up — despite his injuries — and made to get away from you all on the off-chance that he’d transform after the bite. Mr. Potter followed him and fought off an innumerable amount of dementors to keep his godfather safe while Professor Snape, Miss Granger, and your brother brought you and Pettigrew to the school where all of you were treated immediately.”

“Alright. And the Ministry… knows this version of the story?”

“It is the only version of the story, to the Ministry.” Alby replied cheerfully.

I snorted. “Am I going to be testifying this story?”

Alby hummed his affirmation. “In the summer months, no doubt. Quite the conundrum for the Ministry.”

I had questions. Many questions. But only one mattered at the moment.

“And what’s the version the Ministry doesn’t know?”

Alby eyed me. “A much more speculative one. The truth, I fear, is hidden in your and Sirius Black’s mind. But from what I’ve been told, by Professor Snape and your two Gryffindor friends and one Gryffindor brother, I’m to believe that you found Sirius Black months previous, nursed him to health as much as possible — in every possible way — and proceeded to ignore my instructions regarding Helvyyna Prevett, learning to perform and then altering an intensively magical Legilimensic ritual to seal Pettigrew’s memories of your abilities.”

His face hadn’t lost its genial smile, but I felt that the air around us grew heavier and darker with every word said. His magic was flaring with his dislike of the situation, with his irritation. It didn’t roar, per say, but it went quiet and murmuring, like a threat in the wind. I swallowed and remembered the moment I’d first Seen Alby’s magic, colorful and bright and oppressive, the moment I’d realized how very frightening a Light core could be even without knowing the magical theory of core allegiances.

(Funny enough, I couldn’t tell if this was displeasure of a leader being defied, or of a grandfather scolding their very errant grandchild. It could’ve been both. That, even in this situation, sparked a bit of affectionate amusement in my head. Behind the fear, of course.)

(The fear, but not guilt. Never.)

I took a deep breath. “I apologize for undermining your command as my mentor.”

The heaviness in the air stilled, and then drew back by just the slightest amount. “And though it has been many months since we’ve last spoken, I know you well enough that you are not apologetic in the slightest for somehow finding Helvyyna Prevett’s Sollertia Augurium and learning one of her more invasive techniques.”

Another brittle smile. “No. Not in the slightest.”

Alby’s shoulders sagged, just a little, and the pressure surrounding me abated entirely. He looked
worn, his thin and lanky frame more fragile than normal. The bright colors he wore almost swallowed him. I was familiar with that resigned look; more familiar than I should be. It almost didn’t make me feel a thing anymore. His magic started to hum again, quiet and worn and faltering-but-steady as it always was.

“Perhaps it was too hopeful, to keep you away from the Dark Arts.” He said.

My magic thrummed in my chest at the thought, a flash of horror and indignant anger going through me before I forcibly calmed. “Changing someone’s core allegiance unnaturally like that is never a good idea, Alby. You taught me that.”

“I never forced Light magic around you, my dear,” he said gently.

My teeth were grinding against each other. “So you starved me instead? My family is Light, Headmaster. You didn’t have to force anything.”

Alby sighed. “I cannot apologize for trying to guide you to the Light, my dear.” He looked up at me carefully, measuredly. “Just as you cannot apologize for pursuing the Dark with aplomb, once you were given the chance.”

A truce.

I nodded, Occluding my irritation away. There was nothing I could do about any of this now, and really, this wasn’t the point of this visit. Alby had done me wrong in denying my core the magic it could truly thrive in, but now that such a thing was acknowledged, he didn’t seem to be trying to take my borderline-Dark Arts away. This wasn’t the time.

“Almost five months,” I started. Alby looked attentive, knowing I was dropping this line of conversation. “Sneaking food and potions out, translating that particular section of Sollertia Augurium, practicing shoddy-but-effective Legilimency — it took five months and we barely made it as is. I’ve known exactly what Pettigrew was for all these years, but Fate wouldn’t allow me anything until this year. So when I Saw the chance, I took it. I was guided to taking over Slytherin as parvus potesta reigning, you know. The connections, I think, were important — lots of kids with Ministry connections, probably to do with Sirius’ trial or Pettigrew’s or whatever it is. That was needed, so I did it. Josephine Zabini, especially, was key.

“And then Sirius. I met him after break, and tested him. Do you know what I saw when I spoke to him, half-crazed and half-starved and barely human? A loyalty and devotion to his that rivaled mine, my family’s. I couldn’t ignore that. I couldn’t ignore how I’ve had to lend Harry nutrient potions when he gets back from that Muggle filth he lives with. I couldn’t ignore the threat Pettigrew’s had over my family all my life. Five months of little sleep and too much work and having to translate the most terrible writing ever, going behind my friends’ and family’s backs… it was worth it, Alby. Sirius was bit and I’m scarred for life, there’s going to be hell to pay from Destiny since I’ve pissed on one of her prophecies, but it was worth it.”

I finished, the last words fierce and almost growled out. The image of a golden-eyed wolf in the dark flashed through my thoughts, covered in black fur and blacker shadows, and approving grin resting on a fanged maw. A bark of laughter that faded. My attention snapped back to Alby, who was considering my words.

“What did you do to the ritual, Lys?” the Headmaster asked quietly.

I narrowed my eyes. “How do you even know I did anything?”
He raised a white brow. “My dear, the Ministry investigated. I, myself, went to the Shrieking Shack to erase everything but what would lend credence to the story they know. I found the small drawing room on the first floor, and have studied Helvynya Prevett previously. I know those matrixes are not the originals. And, on a lower note, your school bag has been returned to your dormitory, though Tilly insisted on patching what was torn with the brightest thread she could dig up.”

Ah, I see. Erasing evidence. And goddammit, Alby saw the ritual room. Well. Better than the Ministry seeing it, but still.

“I was not skilled enough to perform the Memory Ward ritual by myself,” I said carefully, “and Sirius wasn’t mentally stable enough or distanced from Pettigrew enough to perform it alone, either. Helvynya Prevett wrote about a man she’d coerced into undertaking the ritual with his favorite hunting hound as his anchor…”

Alby’s eyes widened. “You were used as an anchor? A living anchor?”

…I wasn’t sure if it was better or worse that Alby concluded Sirius performed the ritual, because there was no way Sirius had been mentally stable enough to do so, but I decided to leave it. He came up with it on his own, after all.

“Some tweaks to the matrixes, a few changed runes. Sirius and I already had to use each other for Occlumency-training, since his mind was shredded and I didn’t know how to help him without learning a bit of Legilimency. It had some… odd side-effects, but if we left alone for long enough and Occluded firmly after our magics untangled, we were settled.” I explained.

The shared mindscape-bullshit-dream thing could… wait. For a bit. Until Sirius and I figured out what the hell happened, if it was permanent, how to fix it if not, how to deal with it if so. All that jazz that would probably not be received well by Alby, who was already miffed at my Sollertia Augurium thing.

(Dumbledore didn’t even care that it was illegal. Then again, this was the man who encouraged Hermione and Harry to fuck with time to save Sirius — both this world and the canon one I remembered — so whatever. I guess.)

“I see… Well… If you do not mind, Lys, I will be reviewing your altered matrixes. Would you consent to my checking your Occlumency barriers as well?”

I lowered my eyes. “With all due respect, Alby… No. I’m not seven anymore. Some thoughts need to be left alone, now. My barriers aren’t too good at the moment, I know, but I’ll fix them myself in due time.”

Alby nodded, understanding. (Thank god.) “Of course, my dear.” He paused. “I do not mean for you to see me as an enemy. I am not, I assure you. I am, as I have always been, an ally to you. A meddling old man of an ally, I suppose, and one who has made mistakes, but… I fondly remember the days when you would sit on my knee and hum Hogwarts’ magic to me. I did not want that child to become stooped in the Dark, to be on the edge of Madness.”

I blinked. Then I smiled, sure and soft. An apology was laced throughout all of that. “I know. You’ve got the best of intentions, Alby. You just… need to take a step back, sometimes, I think. Not on your scale, but I know what it’s like to have a thousand things to do that you neglect important things to do them. It’s easier if you have a partner in crime, you know? Sirius made this half of the year… much easier.”
(Was Sirius what it was like to have a godfather? Probably not — he was a bit irresponsible, letting me do Dark rituals like that — but if it was close, then Harry was in good hands. I never knew my godfather, dead in the war. Not a lot of us Weasley kids did. No wonder our parents were so determined to care for us, if there was no one else who would.)

Alby smiled sadly. “There are few wizards around anymore, whom I’d call a partner.”

_Bright blue eyes and pale hair — a teasing grin, crooked and playful — “We can make the world a better place, Albus! Think of it!” — triangle bisected by a line and centered by a circle, all in black, painted on the walls. The Deathly Hallows — an old man in a prison, sitting at the window and waving down to someone who couldn’t see him anymore, too far away, about to Disapparate_—

Stop.

Gellert Grindewald.

I closed my eyes. Private memories. I didn’t want to go any further than that.

“I recommend the Hat, then. He’s quite helpful. And… I need to talk to him anyways, remind me next year. Or Fawkes. The flaming pigeon is quite nice when he wants to be, probably wise for being an immortal dickhead, so…”

Alby chuckled, probably remembering one of the many spats I’d had with Fawkes during the lessons in my childhood. (They weren’t my fault! Most of the time! He was such a damn Gryffindor bird, all red and gold, and then he was also so hoity-toity-I’m-a-legendary-phoenix-worship-me that I had to mess with him — I was a kid with poor impulse control!)

“I shall think on that, my dear Lys. Visit me more next year, won’t you? Admittedly, my office is quite cozy and charmed, but I do miss the days of your running around underfoot within it. I said as much last year, did I not?”

I laughed, but my thoughts were sad. “Sorry. I’ve been busy this year… which is an excuse.” I had lied and misdirected quite a bit in this conversation with Alby. It wouldn’t hurt… to give him an honest truth. This wasn’t nearly as important, anyways. “Truthfully, I haven’t really been… in a healthy mindset. I told you about Tom Riddle, didn’t I? It was your office I realized his red was in my colors, all along the edges, like he’s protecting me. It’s not… I couldn’t go back. I didn’t want to think about that. So I don’t. I keep busy and I think about other things and I don’t mourn the Dark Lord I shouldn’t miss.”

Honestly, what was with me? Emotions all over the place. Righteous anger and joking amusement and grieving sadness, all in one conversation. Like I needed to get a year’s worth of speaking with Alby out of the way. I suppose it didn’t help that I was exhausted and my brain hurt from Seer visions and my face was a little bit on fire. I’d Slytherined enough, I could be a bit whiny granddaughter for a moment, couldn’t I?

Dumbledore’s gaze softened. “Visit me next year, Lys. Whenever you wish. I may not fill the role of mentor in your life, now, but I can still help you. I know a thing or two about loving people the world says you shouldn’t. I also know a thing or two about Tom Riddle. If I’d known you still suffered that loss now, I would have insisted long ago.”

“…You don’t have to. Weren’t you mad at me a few minutes ago?”

“I was displeased, but I understand. And in this, I am certainly not displeased, save in the fact that you hid your grief away and avoided the issue. But I understand.”
I swallowed. My magic hummed around me. I didn’t have my Soothsayer eyes up, but I could imagine the deep crimson blanketing around me. It always did that. It never acted like the rest of my magic; always a protective shell, never the cowering indigo. Which is why it was ridiculous that I associated it with Tom Riddle, but…

“I’ll bring you hot chocolate and lemon tea.” I said. His favorites, even though they tasted horrible together.

The Headmaster smiled. “I will be waiting.”

(I wondered what I’d done to pay for this. The hurts in my face and my chest were jostled unexpectedly, but all I could do was smile for it.)

It was probably the Headmaster who made sure I didn’t have any more visitors after our talk. I was drugged up to my ears with Pain Relief potions and exhausted — physically, mentally, and emotionally — and despite how much my family and friends deserved to know I was alright, I couldn’t do it. Alby must’ve sensed that or maybe he assumed so, because I know if he hadn’t barred visitors, I’d be buried in them.

Alby’d shown me quite a lot of mercy, letting me delay the flood of visitors for a moment. I’m sure he thought I needed it. And I did — getting my mind straight and letting the stories sink in and thinking about my next moves were important.

So the Ministry was given a story where Lupin made a mistake but did his best, Sirius Black was sympathetic and heroic, and Peter Pettigrew had a hand in all the misfortunes. Apparently he punched me in the face or something, made me bleed, got Lupin into a blood frenzy needlessly; a nice touch, one that smelled of Slytherin — I’d have to thank Snape later. The ritual was hushed up completely, which was fortunate. And it sounded like Lupin was going to get off easy, too, especially since the official story was that once he realized he bit his friend, he fled immediately; that was all Alby, I bet.

All in all, there were some holes, but the Ministry would be too flustered and emotional to examine those any further.

Good.

Alby was pissed at my interference, but I’m sure he knew there was a thread of Fate influencing it all. Nothing he could do about that; he knew better than to demand visions of me. He seemed to forgive me easily. And I suppose his own apology for his manipulations when I was younger, and maybe even for the neglect afterwards, made up for that, too. I’d have to visit him.

I’d have to get my head on straight; next year was my last chance before everything went to hell. No more inopportune flashbacks. No more shitty Occlumency that broke at the slightest bit of pressure. No more festering grief. I had to be better than that; I was a leader and though I wasn’t the figurehead of the war, as Harry and Alby would be — one right after the other — I was still a pillar. I made myself into one, and I had to follow through.

Pushing on and distracting myself didn’t seem to be working too well. That would need to be fixed. I had to be completely ready for when Voldemort was resurrected — an event I was almost 100%
sure Fate and Destiny would never allow me to change.

The Dark Lord was coming back, no matter what I did. I had to prepare for that.

_Last year, last chance, something whispered in my head._

_But before then, I thought firmly, the ones I call mine deserve to be told._

Not everything. My boys didn’t know about my Clairvoyance and I wanted to keep it that way: they didn’t need to worry about that, too, among all the other grief I’ve no doubt caused them. But Hermione and Harry were told about my Clairvoyance — sneaky little bastard, that Pettigrew — and I needed to speak to them, to explain. My family needed to know about Pettigrew from my own lips, about Sirius, about what I’d had to do; I might have to entrust _Sollertia Augurium_ to Nate for the summer, to keep it safe. If I were my overprotective parents/siblings, I’d burn the thing to keep me away from it. I needed to apologize to all of them, to cover my tracks, to let them know that keeping secrets isn’t a mark of distrust against _them_, but simply a mark of paranoia against _me._

They deserved the truth, even if it was after the fact. I couldn’t give them any more than that, even though I wanted to.

I turned over in bed, slanted moonlight through the shutters hitting my bandages and making them flare up with pain. I winced at the feel, and imagined the golden-eyed wolf in my head, blinking at me solemnly, huffing white, warm breath onto my face. There were fields of stars above him but no golden moon, and the clearing was empty of anyone but us.

My hand reached out, pale and draped in the hospital robes I’d been dressed in.

Before I touched him, I blinked. There was only the dark of pale privacy curtains and the hush of the Hospital Wing. The bedside table was scattered with empty and half-full potion bottles, my Iron Supplement, nutrient, Pain Relief, and an untouched Dreamless Sleep among them.

…

I would definitely need to see the cambion this summer. Maybe _with_ Sirius. He’d understand my acquaintance with one of the Darkest creatures in the world — How could he not? We apparently shared a mindscape, and I had a sinking feeling that if I were to call out to him, if he were conscious or near to it, Sirius would answer. And seeing as the ritual was done and finished with nearly a week ago… Well. This was unprecedented.

Another chore for the summer. Another bullet in the list.

But for now, it was time for me to sleep. I’d be getting an ear-full tomorrow, for sure. From everyone.

My hand reached for the Dreamless Sleep, a dark green bottle that reminded me of cartoon wine drawings, miniaturized. It tasted less awful than most potions, but I still shivered at the taste. In my sleep, my hand laid on the wolf’s muzzle gently and it gave me a baleful stare, not even a hint of fang. Fireflies lit up the air around him and I did not dream of terrible things for the first time in a rather long while.

Chapter End Notes
The next chapter may also be late, on account of school beginning and such. Sorry about that! But this here's a warning in advance, but I promise — I PROMISE — I will not drop this story right here. That'd be cruel.

Thanks for reading again! I appreciate all of you. 🌸}
Chapter 41

Chapter Summary

I was SO ahead of the game on this chapter. It's been done for ages, I'm even working on the next one now (about 80% complete) so I'd like to think you'll get your next chapter on time, too. :D There's actually quite a lot of cool-down chapters and Chapter 42 is shaping up to be much more emotional than this one, but I hope it's still quality.

Thanks as always to those who read and those who comment and kudos and bookmark — I definitely would've given up on this fic a long time ago if not for the support I've been receiving for it. :)

Enjoy!

EDIT: HEY HELLO I almost forgot to mention I got fan art AGAIN!!! Good god, I love you guys. :) Here is the LINK!!!! It's lovely, and I appreciate you, fandom-otaku0735! Sorry it took you so long to find me on tumblr! XD

... 

It wasn’t even surprising, really.

One moment, Madam Pomfrey was magicking away empty and half-empty bottles and muttering not-so-under her breath about reckless students (“First I had Potter, and if that wasn’t enough, Mother Circe just had to send Weasley, and do I get a pay raise for all the worry you two cause me? Of course not…”) and the next?

It wasn’t surprising, not when I think about my family. But it was very abrupt.

“LYSSIE!”

I snapped to attention, knowing that screeching-sobbing tone even if I were half-dozing and drugged up to my ears in pain medication.

“Mum?”

I was suddenly buried in peppermint and fuzzy robes and breakfast smells and warmth. I protested minutely as my face was pressed into my mum’s chest, her arms crushing me to her; it was good I was very, very drugged, because otherwise my face would be on fire again.

Something wet and warm was trickling on my head, and I knew from too much experience with blood that it wasn’t that.

“M-Mum- can’t- can’t b-breathe…” I choked out, the sound muffled by her trembling shoulders and rumpled clothing.
She released me and I almost felt there should’ve been a popping noise for it. I blinked at the sudden transition from smothered to in-a-white-bright-room, but bit back any annoyance when I looked at her.

Her hands were on my shoulders, and she was assessing me carefully. Mum’d always been a bit overweight — probably never managed to get her hourglass back after so many kids, poor Mum — but she had a pretty, heart-shaped face with warm eyes and hair just like Ginny’s, though usually put up so she could work. Her robes looked like she’d thrown them on, and she was still wearing an apron smeared with what looked like flour or something; must’ve been stress-cooking, which was a step above her stress-knitting, so she was likely freaking out silently at home about me. The thing that got me, though, was the wetness on her cheeks and how red her eyes were — always warm, and whenever I was involved, always worried.

Shit, were those *eye bags*? God, when was the last time my mother’d *slept*?

“Oh, Lys…” she said softly, eyes tearing up as she looked at the bandage on my face.

I quirked a smile for her. “Hello, Mum.”

And somehow, that got the dam to break. She started outright sobbing, warbling words incoherently, pulling me back into her embrace much more carefully but just as fiercely as before. There were tears dripping into my hair and back but the only thing I did was hug her back, gripping my hands into her robes to make sure she knew I was alive.

She pulled back again, enough to look at my face with her overfilled eyes.

“Your face…” she murmured piteously, “My baby, your face…”

I smiled, as much as I could. “It’s not so bad. Madam Pomfrey’s been keeping an eye on it while I’ve been sleeping, and I’ve been taking Pain Relief every other hour, since I woke up. You got here pretty quickly, Mum, you’re seeing practically the worst of it. It’ll get better.”

My mother just cried, and my chest felt heavy and pinching with how nothing I could do would make her stop. The childish urge to paw at her face and wipe away the evidence that made shame creep on me had my hands twitching. Ginny didn’t cry often, as outgoing and happy as she always had, but the few times she did — the few times she let herself cry in front of me, her sister who never quite knew how to make her stop the way Bill and Ron did — all I could do was gently rub them away and wrap my magic around hers, indigo curling around maroon. She recognized that feeling as something that vaguely translated to *togetherlovetogethertogetherlovelovemine*, that feeling she’d known since she was born.

I tried to do the same with Mum, though I couldn’t flick my Mage Sight on. It was harder, going by just my ears, but my low, fast-paced song quieted and blended more into Mum’s bell-like, humming tones. If I looked, maybe my colors would struggle more, threading through Mum’s larger magical core, but I hoped the feeling would be the same. I hoped it comforted just as much.

“Oh, luv,” Mum whispered, “You must’ve been so scared.”

I blinked, taken aback. “…What?”

Mum teared up even more; her tears were ready to spill. “Albus told me- *us*- your father and I- We were told ev-everything. A-About th-that Pettigrew man, a-about how Albus- how he kept you aw- away from the Dark Arts — wh-which is horrible of him, b-because yo-you’re Dark, luv, you *h*-have to practice y-your natural magic, e-especially since the r-rest of us a-are *Light*… Oh Merlin,
and that book—our ancestor’s b-book, you went through it b-by yourself, a-and… And y—you were almost bitten and you were c-connected to th-that Sirius Black fellow wh-when he was, a-an-and then you had to nurse him a-all year…. Oh Merlin… my baby, you must’ve been so terrified, I’m so sorry I wasn’t there, I never even s-suspected—”

“No!”

Mum drew back from me, surprised at my vehemence. I didn’t blame her. I was, too.

I cleared my throat, which was difficult with the sudden lump. “Mum, it’s not… Don’t apologize! You weren’t- You weren’t supposed to know, I hid it from you — it was my fault. Please don’t cry…”

Mum shushed me with a quelling look. Not that I was scolded too much growing up — spoiled youngest with unfortunately powerful abilities talking here — but I’d seen it enough to know to shut my mouth.

“Lyssie,” she started gently, “You’re my baby. You were afraid and now you’re hurt and as your mother, that responsibility comes down to me.”

“I’m twelve,” I responded, flinching at how weakly my words came out and wondering where that confidence that made me a Slytherin queen went, “I’ve been doing… Seer things. Sneaking around and getting illegal books and being pillars for mentally unstable ex-convicts. I chose to do that, it’s not… You didn’t do anything. Don’t apologize for it. Sh-Shouldn’t you be mad?”

“I’ll be furious later,” Mum assured me, smiling weakly, “The first thing a mother needs to know is if her baby’s alright. And- And- Oh, Lyssie, you’re not, are you? You look so thin and tired and you were already so sickly during Christmas, now your face an-and your Oc-Occlumency, with the dementors and that- that werewolf, oh Merlin…”

“It’s okay, Mum- Don’t blame Lupin. It was… It was payment. For Sirius to be free and Pettigrew to get locked up. It’s not Lupin’s fault. If anything, it’s mine.”

“Oh, luv, I’m not- He hurt you- I- Well- I’ll certainly try not to blame the poor man, he looks perfectly miserable as is, but it’s hard when- Well. Madam Pomfrey said d-during the initial treatment you were th-thrashing around, a-and the full moons m-made you worse, all feverish and delirious and- Oh, Merlin, Lyssie, I d-don’t mean to- to blame the poor man, the man d-doesn’t control the wolf after all, but Ron told me th-they had to put a Silencing Charm on yo-your curtains and he couldn’t sleep either…”

“I don’t remember any of that, Mum, so I think I ought to apologize to Ron, if anything…”

“Th-Thank goodness for that, luv, but… But it doesn’t change the f-fact that w-we were all so worried and- and- Why didn’t you tell us about Pettigrew? About th-that horrible, disgusting man in our home — we would’ve gotten rid of him, you didn’t have to be so scared all these years — th-that little creature probably made your nightmares all the worse, bringing your fear out and- and your Clairvoyance drawing on that!”

Ah, there was the fury. And thank Merlin it wasn’t directed at me. Yet.

(The indignant rage was barely a distraction from Mum’s blotchy cheeks and eyes, but I took it in with glee. I didn’t know how to deal with tears, and I was very used to keeping mine away. An accomplishment, considering how easy I cried during movies and books in my last life.)

“Fate wouldn’t have allowed that, Mum. This year… It was my first chance to get at him, to
punish him for what he did to Sirius and Harry and us and everyone else he’s ever wronged. I took it, and my face… was the price.”

Sirius was the price.

Unfortunately, Mum’s anger gave away to tears once again. “But… Lyssie, I know your father had this… this conversation with you, b-before, but… You know you don’t have to sacrifice y-yourself for everyone, don’t you? R-Ron and Harry… t-they thought you did all this f-for Harry’s sake? I love Harry as much as R-Ron, I worry about that boy all the time, b-but I’d never… I didn’t- I didn’t want you in th-that coma when you saved Ron all those years ago, and I certainly don’t want you to- to think that I encourage m-m-mutilating yourself f-for… for anyone else…”

I scrunched my brows together. “I saved Ron’s life, Mum.”

“And whose did you save this time, Lyssie?” she asked pointedly.

A flash of irritation overwhelmed everything else I was feeling. Was she calling my efforts pointless? Really? “Sirius and Harry’s! And mine! Mum, Pettigrew knew I was a Seer, I needed-”

“Albus gave the very distinct impression that you paid for his capture, young lady-”

“And who’s to say that I didn’t pay for the ritual, too, Mum? I certainly can’t, my Sight isn’t strong enough that I can differentiate specific cause and effect!”

“Don’t take that tone with me, Lys…” she warned.

Part of me wanted to argue, because if she was going to call me out, then I was obviously going to defend myself. The other part of me — the larger part of me — was still curled around her magical core, was looking at her red-rimmed eyes and sloppy appearance, was feeling the pulse of pain through the pain killers. That part of me had my mouth shut and my eye lower, chin bowed slightly; even beyond Slytherin, this much was a obvious call of submission.

(Besides. This was my mother.)

(Even Draco Malfoy bowed his head to his mother.)

“I know,” she said, calmer and quieter, “I know you’ll do anything for yours, Lyssie. But… But your father said it was ‘me and mine’, didn’t he? That includes you. Lyssie, I’ll never… We’ll never understand what it’s like, for you to- to know such horrible things, to S-See them… We’ve tried to get you the resources you need to- to defend yourself o-or to help yourself, we’ve tried… t- to not… to not talk about the war s-so you don’t dream about it at night a-and wake up screaming. We’ll… We’ll never know h-how you feel, but if you’re scared, if you’re stressed, I wish… Why didn’t you come to us, so we could at least- at least give y-you somewhere to feel safe? T-To help yourself, too. To protect yourself, too. Not just y-your brothers and Harry and th-those friends you talk about so fondly, b-but you need to keep yourself safe, too.”

“I’m alive, Mum.”

“You were alive last year, but all you had was grief you refused to share and a concussion that healed in a day, luv. This year, you got sc-scars that will n-never go away. What about next year, Lys? W-Will your father and I have t-to dread Albus coming through our Floo next year, too? For something worse?”

Guilt crushed my arguments and petulance into pieces.
“I don’t do this to make you worry.”

“My Lyssie, I know.” Mum said, smoothing my wavy bangs away from my face to look at me properly, eyes flitting from my bandaged side to my good side and back again. “But we would worry so much less if we knew you wouldn’t throw yourself into these situations so—so recklessly. We were hoping that your Sorting meant you’d be calmer than your siblings, not wilder.”

I had to laugh at that. I had a feeling that she was waiting for Dad to come talk to me; Dad always got through to me easier than she did. Not that they didn’t love me the same or that I didn’t love Mum, but she and I both knew I connected to Dad easier. No doubt that my conversation with Dad would be more... compromises and deals and explanations. Dad, as an Occlumens and just as himself, had an easier time compartmentalizing; he wouldn’t break down, trying to make me promise to be better.

He would tell me to be better and then use his emotions to make me promise. Dad had become much more of a Slytherin, dealing with me over the years. Just like Percy and Ron and Ginny, actually.

For now, Mum was letting that important part of this conversation go. Waiting for reinforcements. I smiled at her and ignored it. “Sorry Mum, I think I just made all of Slytherin that much more reckless than they made me cautious.”

Mum chuckled. “Of course you did. You’ve always been a little unstoppable force, Lys, everyone else getting caught in your path. Just... Just, please, Lyssie. Your father and I can’t worry about you and Ron and Harry all at once.”

“Are Ron and Harry getting this lecture?” I asked dryly.

“Young lady, if you thought that was a lecture, you’ve been far too sneaky and not observant by far, these years.” Her eyes narrowed and I swallowed at the sudden intensity in them. (Oh dear god, I would have to apologize to Fred and George for laughing at them all the time whenever they faced Mum in one of these moods, wouldn’t I?) “Going out after curfew? For five months straight? To see a man—granted, an innocent one—but a GROWN MAN who’d broken out of AZKABAN every night and practicing LEGILIMENCY? Messing with a Dark Legilimencic ritual from the book of one of the Maddest Dark witches in history? EXHAUSTING YOUR MAGICAL CORE AGAIN AND FIGHTING A WEREWOLF AND USING THE BONE-SNAPPER CURSE—on a terrible man—BUT AT ALL? YOUNG LADY, WHEN YOUR FATHER GETS BACK FROM THE MINISTRY—that is all overworked because of you—WE ARE GOING TO HAVE A SERIOUS CONVERSATION ABOUT YOUR CHOICES-!”

(A small part of me remained wrapped up with my mother’s colors, song layered on song, familiar and relaxed and pleased and comforted. The other, larger part of me was half-paralyze in terror as my mother shouted every frustration she had at me, reassuring me that she loved me dearly every other sentence and congratulating me on breaking Pettigrew’s arm, but still. I see exactly where Ginny and Ron and somewhat-Percy got their tempers from.)

(This was infinitely better than making my mother cry.)
The day passed in a similar, Weasley vein.

Mum stayed when my brothers (and sister) all piled in, not missing a chance to say hello to us before we officially came home for the summer. Bill and Charlie were obviously still abroad, and Dad was stressed at the Ministry I’d flung into a screaming mess of belated trials and bad security and such, but all of us Weasleys were squeezed into my privacy curtains and grouped around my bed for a few hours.

Mum was perched at my side, having claimed one of my hands to hold and listening intently as I taught her the spells to reduce the swelling in her eyes (after crying) and helped her look a bit less of a mess. Percy was the first to burst into the curtains, red-faced and gasping for breath and zeroing in on me with such intensity that my hackles raised and I prepped for another lecture. Only, instead of words, Percy just flung himself forward and hugged the life out of me, making my face wounds twinge and him throw himself backwards when he felt the flinch.

“Percy, it’s alright! I’m due for another round of pain killers, anyways — don’t worry about it!” I shouted over his stuttering apologies.

(Percy was so much like our mother it almost wasn’t funny.)

Mum laughed at us quietly as I coaxed Percy back near me, giving him a gentler but no less well-meant hug. I winced inwardly when I felt him shaking slightly.

“Perce?” I prompted, half-cuddled into his side.

“I almost hexed a professor,” said my favorite brother, voice dazed.

I drew back quickly, glaring. “It wasn’t Lupin’s fault!”

He looked pointedly at my bandages.

I glared harder. “I chose this, Percy. I actually expected much worse. Fate decided to surprise me.”

He paled at the implication. “You were going to willingly be bitten?” he hissed.

Mum gasped. Then she growled, “Lyssie…”

“Looks like we ought to actually prank him, then, eh, Gred?”

“Too true, Forge, too true.”

A momentary distraction in the form of the twins passing through the curtain cheerfully, plopping down near Percy on my bed and patting at my knees in initial greeting. If either looked a little more happy when they did, indeed, confirm that I was physically there and as well as can be after a werewolf scratch, I wouldn’t mention it. Percy (grudgingly) shuffled over to let them get their quick hugs in, George lingering a bit longer than Fred, both of them looking much less sleep-deprived and hassled than my Mum and Percy.

I gave them flat stares after leaning back on my pillows. “Touch Lupin and die.”

“Well…”

“We don’t exactly have to touch Lupin to prank him-”

“-and shouldn’t you know that by now, Lyssie?”
“Master pranksters don’t need something as paltry as **physical contact**—

—-for their victims to be pranked, proper-like.”

My expression didn’t change a bit, for all that I was cheered at the most elusive of my Hogwarts brothers being around. ‘The man literally fell over himself to help Harper when he knocked over the Grindylow tank, I think he’d rather die than bite a child. As it is, he bit his own best friend, so yeah: leave the poor man alone.”

The twins looked rather carefree about it, and I didn’t detect any glint of mischief in their eyes, so I figured they weren’t too pissed at Lupin to begin with. Percy looked a little petulant, and Mum gave me a look that said I’d be talking to her and Dad later, so I left it well alone. At least the twins were sensible; they, plus Bill and Charlie, had always skipped out on the Weasley protective craziness, I felt. Protective, certainly, but not to the point where our parents, Percy, Ron, somewhat Ginny (depending on her mood), and I were at.

“So? What’s the news around Hogwarts, then?” I asked brightly.

“Well,” Fred started drawlingly, “the dementors are gone.”

“For good reason!” Mum started venomously, “Attacking a severely injured man and Harry like that! When Sirius Black was innocent! And Harry was only trying to help him after being savaged by a werewolf! Unbelievable!”

“And after all that they do to you and the other Slytherins,” Percy muttered, “Yours and Potter’s were more severe cases, but not a single student wasn’t affected by the dementors. I can’t believe the Headmaster and Minister didn’t know better.”

Oh dear god, it was always nice to see when Percy criticized authority. That meant I was that much further away from that terrible world where he’d leave the family for the Ministry. And maybe he did it more because I — his favorite sibling — was always so delighted when he did. Huh. Butterfly effect, I suppose.

“I’d like to point out, in defense of Alby, that he fought the Minister every step of the way.”

“You barely spoke to him this year, Lyssie—” Fred put in.

“-but then again, you do have a talent for knowing things.” George finished with a wink.

Mum fluffed up like a protective mama bird. “Good on Albus, then! Those monsters don’t have anything to do with natural allegiances — children shouldn’t meet those things on their own school grounds!”

“So Harry went and cast a Patronus, then?” I asked.

“Ronniekins confirms—”

“When will you two stop calling me that?”

“Why, Ronniekins!”

“And Gingin!”

“What a pleasant coincidence!”

“Are you two, by chance, here to visit a family member as well?”
“One whom is so grossly behind in the Hogwarts rumor mill that it’s quite unbecoming of a Slytherin queen?”

“Oh thank Merlin, my twin and my brother are here. You two can go now.” I said, as exuberantly as the demon twins.

“Oh, brother, I have been wounded-!”

“How our dear youngest sister treats us!”

Ron grumbled about the twins but gave me a brief hug, stepping out of the crowded area quickly and taking a seat near Mum. Ginny, however, glared at Percy until he slunk away nearer to the twins so she could take his spot. I laughed at her and let her hug me tightly, taking care not to flinch at the pain in my wound this time.

She swept her eyes across my face — looking much less teary than Mum’s, for sure, her disposition more like the twins’ — and grinned widely. “You are going to have wicked scars, Lyssie, and I hope you intimidate any boyfriends I snag next year with just a look.”

My heart lightened at the easy acceptance and solid support behind that statement.

I smiled at her. “Shouldn’t you be dreading that?”

“You’re not getting a boyfriend, Ginny.” Ron stated warningly.

Ginny ignored him, shrugging. “If someone does manage to get past my Slytherin sister with the awesome scars, then I think they might deserve me.”

“Well said, Gingin!”

“Don’t forget our pranks!”

“You are not dating next year.” Ron hissed.

Ginny smirked at the awkwardly silent Percy; our older brother didn’t know whether to join Ron or stay away from Ginny’s wrath. She made the decision for him. “And not to mention, it’ll make sure anyone who wants to date you isn’t a shallow git, too.”

Percy straightened up and threw out his most imperious voice. “Lyssie, I strongly oppose the idea of you dating.”

Mum chuckled to herself. “I suppose that’s one way of looking at things positively… I needn’t warn you two girls, but boys see pretty faces and lose their wits completely. You two know to only bring home the ones who get those wits back, don’t you? As nice as it is to have a boy around your finger, you’re my daughters, and I won’t accept anyone less headstrong than the both of you.”

“MUM!”

“Mother, please don’t encourage them.”

“Dad’s going to die if he hears of this.”

“Dad’s going to cry when he hears of this, you mean.”

“And even if we’re not identical,” Ginny went on, patting my hand and ignoring our brothers commiserating around us, “we’re both very pretty, you know, Lyssie. If you’d only grow your hair
out and let me at it, I’m sure you’d be buried in Valentines again, like last year.”

I shivered. “The only reason I wasn’t this year was that I made a potesta-wide announcement to give all of mine to Harper. He sorted for me.”

Ginny snickered. “Yes, well, our first year was right funny.”

“No it wasn’t! Most of mine were hexed!”

“HEXED?” Percy and Ron and Mum chorused, outraged.

Ginny rolled her eyes. “Anyways, what was I saying? Right. We’re both rather pretty, you know, and with your scars you’ll be even more appealing. It’s not like Lupin wasn’t stared at by some of the older girls, you know, so I’m sure-”

“Oh, ew, Ginny, I didn’t need to know that!” Ron protested.

Percy looked disgusted and the twins’ cheerfulness faltered into small grimaces. Mum snickered.

I blinked. “I’m… not sure I wanted to know that, either. What- You’re twelve. Why are you thinking about these kinds of things?”

“Well, Sarah’s thirteen, and she’s definitely thinking about-”

“Merlin, Ginny, not here! Do this when we get back home and you two share a room again!”

“I’m… As Head Boy, I’m going to pretend I didn’t hear any of that.”

“Why does it matter if you’re Head Boy or not?”

“Yes, do tell, oh glorious Head Boy!”

And so it went on like that; a grouping of my siblings was just asking for chaos and ridiculousness, so it was to be expected. Mum looked mostly content, listening to us and enjoying the gossip and doling out a sharp word if someone swore (Ron, mostly). The demon twins and Percy caught me up as best they could, in between Ginny and Ron distracting us all.

The entire school was buzzing with stories from that night. It was mostly agreed that the Ministry-given story was the true one, since some Ministry workers let it slip to their kids and some ghosts were confirming it (I’d have to thank the Bloody Baron for his information damage control, I was sure he was at the center of it). Obviously my wounds were over-exaggerated, a slew of Gryffindors convinced that I was as disfigured as Mad-Eye Moody and would have to wear a mask to school. Some believed I was actually bitten.

I wasn’t surprised to learn that Lupin had to be let go and that no one was quite sure what was going to happen to him, as no one was quite sure what injuries he inflicted in his wolf form. Alby’d told me he’d be alright, since the confusion of the night and the influence of Peter Pettigrew were what really pushed him to biting an ex-con and accidentally scratching a student. He might be fined, but I had every confidence that Sirius — Lord of the Black Family — would intervene once he was freed officially. All of this, I related to my siblings and they were likely to spread the word as soon as someone asked them about it.

For the most part, it was a quiet — for us Weasleys — visit that cheered me up more than it didn’t. They didn’t leave until Madam Pomfrey declared visiting hours over and rushed them away.
“I think the rest of everyone you like will visit tomorrow,” George assured me as he was almost bodily hauled out by the pissed-off Healer.

Mum kissed my forehead, following Madam Pomfrey and her shouting at the twins for being overly-loud. “I’m so very glad you’re alright, Lyssie. It was nice to visit you, even if it was in the Hospital Wing again.”

Ginny darted in to squeeze my hand once more. “Tell me the full story on the train?”

“I’ll tell all of you at home,” I said with a laugh, “Sit with your friends on the train.”

She nodded. “See you later, little sis.”

“Thanks for coming.”

“As if I’d skip out on you. G’night, Lyssie.”

Mum laughed as Ginny dragged Percy and Ron out, both of whom were complaining and trying to give me side-hugs. She pulled the white blankets up on me a little more.

“I’ll see you at home, luv.” Mum said gently in goodbye.

...

The next morning, my wounds felt a little worse and Madam Pomfrey clucked at me for it. I spoke too much yesterday, which aggravated the wounds; she upped the pain killer dosage and said that I’d have stricter visiting hours, if only because she knew I’d never be allowed to stay quiet with all the visitors here to ask me things. I situated my pillows and readied myself for whoever was due to interrogate me today.

I raised my right brow — as my left was completely covered with gauze and tape and would be incredibly uncomfortable to move — when I saw Ron poke his head inside with a sheepish twitch of his lips.

“Why, it’s been so long, Ron.” I said dryly.

He stepped in fully. “Harry and Hermione didn’t want to visit you without me.”

Harry followed easily, eyeing Ron. “Don’t listen to him, Lys.”

Hermione strode through after him, staring pointedly at Ron. “Who was the one trailing after us when we were talking about going to visit and getting sulky when the twins and Ginny complained that you shouldn’t get to see Lys again?”

Ron had a pink tinge to his face, stuffing his hands in his pockets. He skulked over to me, sitting at my bedside, one knee up and the other leg dangling over the bed, nested right next to me. “Percy and Ginny were hogging all your time. We didn’t even ask if you were okay.” Ron mumbled.

I smiled. Ginny probably yelled at the fretting Percy and Ron — Percy not as secretly as Ron, of course — that she was my twin, of course she knew I was alright besides the usual you’d expect from a werewolf claw. Neither would be satisfied with that; Percy probably made Ron a list of things to look for to make sure I was really alright.
Ron probably memorized it, the way he was surreptitiously (not really) studying me.

Hermione and Harry took seats beside each other, on the opposite side.

“I can see you’re practically vibrating in your seat, Hermione,” I said, amused at her guilty expression, “I can answer whatever you want, within reason. I suppose you did all sorts of research on Clairvoyants in the library already?”

Hermione huffed. “Ron was better to ask about Clairvoyants than the library. All information on that branch of Seers is so vague! Or insubstantial. They’re so rare that it’s ridiculous! And Ron says that you’re a Seer-Soothsayer and a Seer-Clairvoyant?”

Ron rolled his eyes.

Harry chuckled, but turned earnest eyes on me, eyes flicking to the bandages often. “You’re alright, Lys?” he asked.

Hermione made a small ‘eep’ sound. “Oh! Yes, of course, Lys, you don’t have to talk too much if you can’t! With a wound like that, it must hurt if you move your face too much… Oh god, you are alright, aren’t you? We tried to stop the bleeding as much as we could, I was honestly contemplating fire spells to make it stop, since I knew you were anaemic and really couldn’t afford to lose as much blood as you were, but I didn’t know enough about first aid to know whether I should or not—”

“You were magically exhausted, Hermione, I wouldn’t have asked a single Incendio from you at that point.” I said kindly, remembering that detail from my vision vividly, since Ron had looked so worried when he pointed the symptoms out in her.

She scrunched her brows together quizzically. “I’m almost completely sure you were unconscious by that point, how did you…”

“Clairvoyance, Hermione.” Harry reminded her.

“Oh!”

I smiled at her shocked/delighted/interested expression. No wonder Ron had a crush on her, honestly, Hermione was positively adorable when she got excited. He needed a strong woman to keep him in line, too. My brother would make a good choice; and if I did something to change that, I’d do whatever I could to change that right back, because I shipped it hard.

I was an aunt in my first life. I really would like to be one again.

“Is… Is it true, Lys, that you started having visions when you were five?”

It was, surprisingly, Harry who broached the topic — truly — first.

Unbidden, the words of a memory came up: She hasn’t cried like this since she was five. I automatically glanced over to Ron, who pressed closer to my shoulder and had a somewhat-cross, somewhat-determined look on his face.

I shook my head. “I’ve been Seeing since I was born, actually. My mental development was actually quite fast because of it.”

Ron grunted. Probably thinking uncharitable things towards my Clairvoyance.
I reached over to pat his knee. “Not every single little thing I Saw was a nightmare, Ron. I remember that some visions were quiet pleasant. Most, in fact. The chronic nightmares were…” I went half into lecture-mode, knowing Hermione would be interested and Harry would do his best to follow along, “…well, Alby and Dad and I have a theory that Clairvoyant visions — at least mine — react to certain stimuli. Things that trigger strong feelings in me, I See more about them. The more I loved our family, the more I Saw how the war shaped it. The more I was afraid of that, the more terrible things I Saw done to us. My magic rose up to protect me, but it can’t very well attack itself, so my accidental magic was strong and that scared me, too. So I Saw terrifying magic — and where was a lot of that? The war.”

“Which is why you had to learn Occlumency so young.” Ron muttered.

“Occlumency?” Hermione asked.

Ron answered. “Mind magic. Legilimency is the branch of Mind Arts that lets people go into other minds. Attack, right? Occlumency is the opposite, defense. It can get really bloody intricate, depending on skill level. Dad taught himself and then taught Lyssie, and Dumbledore helped after that, but Lyssie’s Dark so defensive magic will never be her specialty. Plus her core’s not even matured.”

“Snape’s an Occlumens and a Legilimens,” I added.

Harry looked horrified. “Snape can read minds?”

I snorted. “Don’t worry, it’s illegal and unbecoming to throw Legilimency around like you’re thinking. Snape would never let himself be unbecoming.”

Ron gave me a Look. “Why did you never tell us your git Head of House was a Legilimens?”

I rolled my eyes. “As if Snape would lower himself to using magic to look into your heads. If he can’t read the thoughts straight off your faces, he’d be a failure of a Slytherin.”

Hermione gave me a funny look. “What is it you do in Slytherin?”

Ron shook his head. “Best not ask that, Hermione. They’re all either gits like Malfoy or nutters because of Lyssie.”

“Josephine Zabini was already crazy before I met her.” I pointed out.

“Josephine Zabini likes making girls cry just because she thinks their faces are amusing.” Ron returned flatly. “You didn’t see when she’d come to the Tower to flirt with Percy for that one month and a half they dated, but our girls would hide. Percy’s never been more respected. Lyssie, that woman scares the demon twins.”

I gasped. “They’re not dating anymore?!”

“No, thank Merlin.”

I frowned. “Percy hasn’t said that in his letters. And Josie never told me…”

Ron rolled his eyes. “Yeah, well, you’ve been a bit busy sneaking out to go perform dangerous bloody rituals with Sirius Black, now, haven’t you?”

I shrunk down, sheepish. “Ah, well… I got a godfather out of it, sort of?” I grinned at Harry. “That makes us god-siblings of some sort, doesn’t it?”
“He’s your godfather?” Harry asked, puzzled.

“He decided that he was going to be, what with the whole… taking care of him for nearly half a year? I honestly think I know the man better than I know Ginny, with us having jumped around each other’s heads for so long.” I grinned at Harry. “You were a smiley baby, Potter.

Harry blushed.

Ron snorted, pointing at Harry. “Just deserts, Harry. You were laughing your head off when Mum got out the bloody baby pictures last summer, and now my sister’s got dirt on you.”

“He used to chase his house cat around and once almost flushed it down a loo.” I supplied helpfully.

Hermione looked scandalized, as a cat-owner. “What?!?”

Ron cackled.

“I don’t even remember any of this!” Harry protested.

“Too bad, Harry, I’m going to embarrass the ever-loving shit out of you the moment you start noticing girls. S’only fair, since all my older brothers’ve done it to the poor bastard who was born after them, and I’ve only got Lys and Gin.”

“Wait, is that why Charlie wrote Percy so much last year?” I asked.

“Yeah, ‘cos Bill needled him. Percy’s planning on writing essays about, you know, the wands and cauldrons talk and then dictating them to a Howler for the demon twins when it’s his turn. I’m his snitch.” Ron explained gleefully.

…This was such a brothers thing I couldn’t even feel put-out about not knowing about this tradition until now. Hermione and I exchanged glances and tried hard to keep smiles off our faces as Harry complained.

“Wait, this means the demon twins are going to go at you.” I said.

Ron grimaced.

I shook my head. “Sorry, Potter, guess you’re next in line. Ron’ll go mad if he has to endure the demon twins without some sort of vengeful retribution on the horizon.”

“Why am I being punished for Ron getting embarrassed?”

“Because younger brothers always get the short stick, mate. Trust me.” Ron assured.

“I’m not even related to you!”

“Wrong,” I said helpfully, throwing a very amused grin at Hermione, giggling behind her hands, “You’re my god-brother, which means you’re related to me, and I’m related to Ron, thus you two are related.” And you’re going to marry my sister so you’re our brother-in-law, you know.

Harry gave me a very betrayed look. “Is this revenge for the flying thing?”

I smiled sweetly. “I don’t know what you mean.”

“Bloody Slytherins.”
After than, it was just a lot of trading stories and banter from there; light-hearted and cheerful. Which was nice; maybe Ron figured I’d need more cheer after he saw me yesterday. I just made sure to thread the conversations with information I knew Harry and Hermione wanted, alternating between explaining and making them laugh and getting more school gossip from them.

I talked a lot about Sirius and my months just working alongside him, telling amusing stories so they all knew and liked the man as much as I did. (So Harry could learn about his godfather.) Somewhere in between me recounting the way Sirius and I prepared the ritual every day — for both Hermione’s benefit and Harry’s, honestly — and explaining how my Clairvoyance wasn’t strong enough for me to be 100% aware of all the prices and all the effects and all the choices, my face started bleeding again. I felt it before Hermione gasped and pointed, but I waved the concern away and was put out when they decided to get Madam Pomfrey.

Hermione and Ron went off to find her, leaving me with Harry for a bit.

He’d scooted closer while I was talking animatedly about our shared godfather, nodding along to my explanations of Clairvoyance and the Memory Ward as Hermione delighted in it, asking questions to keep us on subject when Ron and I started squabbling.

I touched at the gauze on my face and frowned when my fingers came away red.

“Well, that’s not promising.”

Harry cringed. “Are you alright?”

I nodded, fibbing just a little. “I’m so loaded up on pain-killers, Harry, I can barely feel it.”

Harry nodded. “Er… Lys?”

“Yeah?”

“Do you… I mean, it sounds like you and Sirius are really good friends already, and… And I… He asked me, really quick, before everything went sideways… Er… Do you think I’ll get to live with Sirius after his trial?”

I blinked. Then I sighed. “Oh. Oh, Harry, I… I guess that’s another thing I have to apologize for. I don’t think… Well, werewolves are given so little rights as is, it’s just… There’s a lot they’ll do for Sirius, especially because he’s the Lord of House Black now, but. I don’t think werewolves are allowed to adopt human children.”

The disappointment and hurt in Harry’s expression made me want to curl up in a corner in shame and guilt.

He swallowed. “Oh. Well… It’s not your fault, Lys, since- since if he wasn’t bitten, Pettigrew might’ve gotten away or something, so. I mean. Er… It’s… It’s okay. He might’ve have a hard time taking me in, anyways.”

The disappointment and hurt in Harry’s expression made me want to curl up in a corner in shame and guilt.

He fidgeted. Bloody boys, so reluctant to emote the softer feelings. Or maybe it was just a teenager
thing? I was the same, I knew, with my anxiety about emotional confrontation and that sort of thing. Being vulnerable *sucked*. In light of that, I felt a bit more sympathetic towards Harry.

I reached over to touch at his shoulder. “Just because you don’t get to live with him doesn’t mean he’ll leave you alone forever. After the trial, you know he’s *going* to push the law as far as it can go. He’s a Marauder, isn’t he? He won’t be able to take legal custody of you, but that doesn’t mean he can’t visit you every day or have you over every other week. Not to mention, since he’s now *my* godfather as well, you bet your arse I’m going to use that Black family fortune to pay for Floo powder so I can go bother you, too.”

Harry chuckled. “The Dursley’s don’t have a real fireplace.”

“That can be easily remedied, as we *are*, you know, magical.”

He snorted, and it looked like he’d been trying not to. I grinned at the sight.

“Chin up, luv,” I said, emulating my Mum almost a bit too much, “It isn’t too bad.”

Harry eyed me, still looking embarrassed but seemingly determined to get past it. “You say, as your face is gushing blood.”

I shrugged, remembering the stinging pain suddenly but playing it off. “Ah, well. You can’t have everything, Potter.”

There were voices and footsteps approaching outside of the curtains. I heard the angry tones of Madam Pomfrey already, which meant I’d be yelled at and the Trio would be booted. Harry knew it, too; us old Hospital Wing veterans were dab hands at figuring out the dragon-lady’s moods and predicting her actions, after all.

Harry smiled at me. “You know you’re a good friend, don’t you, Lys?”

I snorted. “No, no, I’m a *terrible* friend. My boys will tell you that I haven’t properly tutored them or helped them with spell-casting for months. Some will even complain that I’ve been foisting paperwork on them.”

He shook his head. “You’re spread thin, I don’t think that means you’re a bad friend.” He grinned, pushing his glasses up and fidgeting. “Thank you, Lys. For everything you’ve done. I promise to make it up to you one day.”

“You don’t need to.” I said gently.

*You’re going to be the figurehead of the war,* I thought sadly, seeing this thirteen-year-old Harry Potter smile at his feet and shuffle in place and not think about how heavy the Destiny on his shoulders was, *You’re going to kill Voldemort. You're going to protect my brother and love my sister. You don't need to make up for anything. This is me, making up all of that for you.*

Of course, I couldn’t say that. That would be a change in itself, warning Harry beforehand. I couldn’t pay the price right now. I think I was already in debt with Fate and Destiny as it was; the pulsing pain in my face, under my eye and coming down to my neck, was proof of that.

“See you later, then,” I said.

Harry beamed. “Yeah. See you, Lys.”

The curtains flew open and Madam Pomfrey positively screeched at the wet, red bandages on my
face. (“WEASLEY! Did I or did I not warn you not too speak too much!? You ridiculous child, look at the state of you! YOU THREE! OUT! Miss Weasley has more healing to do!”) Hermione and Ron were behind her, looking slightly traumatized and apologetic, waving me goodbye as the Healer ranted up a storm. Harry ran out to slip into his place between them, throwing a cheeky grin over his shoulder as he did, and the Golden Trio were gone, heads filled with stories of Sirius Black and magical theory and promises for summertime.
Chapter 42

Chapter Summary

Okay. So every time I'm like, 'Yeah the chapter's DEFINITELY gonna be on time' this bullshit happens. I only had half of it done when I woke up eleven hours ago, and I only started working on it when I came back from class... So yeah. No more. I will NO LONGER jinx myself, who the hell knows when the next chapter's coming out!? Sometime in two weeks-ish!!

Anyways. Barely made my deadline (ya girl on the American west coast) and maybe it feels rushed because of it, but here's some DRAMA. A 'lil too much, but eh. Hormonal almost-teens, am I right? Also, y'all give the loveliest comments ever, I swear. So happy~ :)

But yeah, you're all the best! Thanks for reading! Enjoy!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

... 

I woke up to my jaw clenching and my wounds burning, pulsing with pain with every beat of my heart, skin tingling as slats of moonlight slid through the curtains I’d asked Madam Pomfrey for. Apparently the Hospital Wing was drafty enough that the light-but-thick cloth shifted, pouring moonlight onto my face and aggravating the werewolf-inflicted wounds. Annoying.

There was a distant groan of pain in my joints, pushing against my muscles and skin; like the ache of sore muscles. My arm swung up weakly, reaching for the ceiling to stretch out the soreness in vain, and I saw a golden-eyed wolf nudging at my fingers, felt the cold wet of his nose and the warm breath on my face. It towered above me but gave off a gentle feeling, an impression that he was trying to comfort me.

And then I was looking at the ceiling again, wondering if I was losing my mind.

“Oh, Lyssie, you’ve really fucked it up now.” I whispered.

I had the feeling this was a more permanent than not addition to whatever the hell was wrong with my head. Sirius had said something about mindscapes, right? Which was a higher-tier level of Occlumency, one I never quite thought I’d reach with how terribly mediocre I was at it; I had decently mastered the first tier skills, meditation and low-level barriers and streamlining thinking, but anything to do with traps or intricate memory puzzles or keys or symbolic representations of the way I thought? That was beyond me at this point.

It wasn’t beyond Sirius’, once upon a time. The dementors took away his mental stability, which likely collapsed his mindscape and whittled away at even his barest, simplest Occlumency barriers.
I had stabilized Sirius for five months. I guess performing a ritual that often and then one of us being bitten by a werewolf while still linked sort of… pushed me into a permanent place as a stabilizing agent? That sounded feasible.

Shit.

Late-night overthinking always got me down. Or paranoid. Both, maybe. I was definitely more optimistic when I wasn’t in constant pain, it was light out, I’d just seen some of my favorite people, and I wasn’t overthinking shit.

Tch. I needed to go to sleep, dammit.

Except that magic-song approaching was really quite familiar.

Wasn’t even halfway through my curtains when I grinned (stretching my wound but ignoring that). “You have a thing about visiting me in the Wing late at night, don’t you?”

Dietrich stepped through the curtain and I felt my smile falter at the sight of him.

The… The thing about Dietrich, right, is that his anger burns as bright as a Gryffindor’s; it’s just harder to tell, because his ideal is for his temper to run as cold, like how the demons twins were — not that anyone saw it — or how Nate was. Even years after knowing Dietrich, interacting with him, his Occlumency-trained mask of indifference was ever-present; I just knew how to read the minute twitches of his slate eyes, the height of his brows, the tension in his jaw and shoulders.

He was angry when he came to me last year, when he knew about Tom Riddle’s ability to steal a soul though probably not his Horcrux nature.

He was furious now, standing at my curtains with his ash hair disheveled and uniform as messy as Harper’s.

“How’s it going?”

My voice sounded meek, which annoyed me, but I felt a jolt of fear, hearing the halting screeching in his magical core’s song, which was normally so steady and stringy and deep, even if I didn’t usually listen.

“Guinevere.”

His voice was as flat and emotionless as it was when we’d first begun to speak.

I felt a pang in my heart at the formal address.

“Dietrich,” I said cautiously, “What… What’s wrong?”

“That,” he said, his accent’s strength betraying the frustration he was surely hiding, “is what I have been wondering for five months.”

It felt like something was shriveling up in my stomach. “Dietrich-”

He held up a hand, quieting me. It was something I did when I acted as parvus potesta. I noticed he’d been picking it up, holding court for me when I was too exhausted to. If I weren’t sure that he was too emotional to notice, I might’ve seen it as a slight or a challenge.

“I had assumed,” he started quietly, taking a step or two in my direction but no further, “that my constant pestering was… infringing. You have always been extremely independent. After… Well, I
did not want you to think I did not trust you. I did not want to… nag, is the word. I believed if you needed help, you would come to me, your Second. I believed… I believed that.”

My fingers twitched, gripping my bedsheets. My eyes ached and my wounds burned in the moonlight, but a faint sheen of gold encased my vision, and it was through channeling magic more carefully into the invisible rune circles painting on my hands that the golden glow faded. I could see in the dark, and I could see Dietrich’s colors.

I almost cried at the sight of it.

His cobalt-byzantine and steel-blues were curling in on themselves, opaque and lethargic. The edges looked burnt and wilted, strings of silver and deep teal tightening on the clouds of color. A high, keening note interrupted his already stilted song. I could not translate the sight of a magical core into true emotion, but I would… I saw the hurt. I saw the exhaustion.

Dietrich’s magic, always forming into neat shapes and blanketing over the magic of those he considered under his protection, under our protection, was wounded. And I knew, I knew, it was my doing.

“You’re Seeing my magic, aren’t you,” he said flatly.

“I didn’t want this.” I choked out.

His magic exploded into action, and I tasted it in the air, felt it press down around us. His eyes were blazing.

(Dietrich’s anger always did run hot.)

“I begged you, last year, to trust me! I begged you to let me help you! You promised you would! You promised that, next time, I would be BESIDE YOU! You call me your Second, and yet- And yet-”

Oh god, I was going to cry.

“No, that’s not-”

Dietrich sucked in a breath, looking flustered and hurt and angry. His frame went stiff again, magic reeling in; he was Occluding. He was hiding from me.

“If… If I did something wrong- No. Not even that. If I am not enough for… for a Second, for your Second, I understand.” Dietrich forced out, voice too-calm and eyes trained in a spot to the right of me, “I do not… I proved to be a burden last year, I proved unable to remain calm and unable to defend myself, and that is- that is why you chose to keep me in the dark this year. I am- I would have only wished that you had told me. The false hope- I thought-” He met my eyes, finally. “I thought I was your best friend. I thought that… I thought that was what a Second was, to you.”

My left eye couldn’t cry, it seemed. Or, rather, the bandages were soaking it up. It felt like I was bleeding, inside and out. I wanted to reach out to Dietrich and hug him, even though hugs made him confused and awkward.

“D-Don’t say that,” I got out, voice thick and wavering, “Don’t- You’re not a burden. Y-You’re my best friend, Dietrich — you are. I made you my Second because I trusted you, I made you hold Slytherin for me because I knew you could.”

His magic flared again, faster and more violently than before.
“Then why did you LIE? Why am I treated like a glass decoration?! Je ne suis pas du verre! You cannot coddle me when you say I am your equal! You cannot call me important and then ignore! Pourquoi ne suffis-je pas?! You cannot say one thing and mean the other, Lys, you cannot do that, I do not understand why you do this-

“I am your Second, you said I was your Second, tu es juste une menteuse, why was I the one most surprised when we heard you were bleeding to death in the Hospital Wing AGAIN? Why was Nathaniel completely aware, why did Julius and Lucas both suspect- Cela est arrivé à nouveau, j’étais à nouveau seul- Why was I the only one who didn’t know what was going on, who was playing with Slytherin while you were out risking your life again- I wasn’t even- I-”

Dietrich paused, frazzled and closer to me than I realized and so tightly-coiled he seemed fit to burst. He took a breath. It was like watching a fight with himself that he just couldn’t seem to win. It was like seeing him lose every time he spoke.

“And this is just me. This is just… I am angry that you hid everything from me, but- but do you know… Do you even care… Harper was crying again. He came with me, to see you on a full moon, and we heard you screaming, Mon Dieu, je n’oublierai jamais les cris, and- Julius thinks he should have stopped you, Lucas is the same, and Nathaniel is as smug and infuriating as ever, but- but- Lys. You used him. Whatever you did involved his work and it does not… We are Slytherin, we use others, but you cannot call us friends and then treat us like tools. You cannot. Je pensais que tu étais différente. Do you… Do you even care about the rest of us?”

My heart stuttered.

I felt light-headed, mind blanking.

Did… I… even… care?

My control over my magic was impressive, especially taking into account how much there was and how unruly it was, threaded through with Seer magic and still growing. The last time I went accidental was when Pandora Lovegood died. That was the first and last time I’d ever lost control out of anger. I’d promised never again.

I heard glass crack. Spider-thin shadows carved themselves into the moonlight.

I broke that promise.

But one thing I had never done and didn’t ever intend to do was hurt someone else if I went accidental. The core of me was a protector; an obsessive, incompetent, neurotic protector, but a protector nonetheless. I did not hurt mine. My soul wouldn’t allow it.

As soon as I registered a flicker of fear, my head cleared and silvery-gold strings shot out, wrapping around clouds of indigo and deep blue and teals and orange and dark, coiling crimson; they wove into a net, holding my roaring magic back, keeping it from sinking into more shatterables and attacking with all the energy my anger gave it.

But that left me with a lot of anger and no outlet for it.
“How dare you say that to me.”

Dietrich’s sliver of fear melted away in an instant, leaving behind the fury he’d been nursing. “We are treated as tools. While we take care of Slytherin and homework and paltry things such as that, you turn to others when you are truly in danger! What else should we think? You were lying to us! You used us!”

It felt like there was a ball of molten iron in my stomach, weight pressing down on my chest.

“Everything I have ever done, it has always been to protect mine!”

“So I suppose we do not count, then, when it is your Gryffindors — Granger, Potter — who were helping you when the werewolf split your face in two?” Dietrich sneered.

“It didn’t involve you.” I said tightly.

“We are supposed to be the ones closest to you. We are supposed to be your most trusted.” His eyes flashed, face falling into that blank mask again. “Or so you led us to believe. At least do us the courtesy of correcting our thinking, Guinevere.”

I never realized how mocking a name could be. How grating the syllables would sound.

I snarled. “That was not my intention. Stop putting words in my mouth!”

“What else am I to do, when you do not speak to me? I was the only one who was surprised when Professor Snape took us aside, I was the only one who didn’t know — and I am the only one who is your Second! Your best friend, le plus fiable, that is what you said, and I waited for five months for you to explain why you would not sleep, why you became obsessed with yet another book, and at the end of it all, I am blindsided by my failure to act as Second? Pourquoi tu ne m’as pas dit?! I FAILED, when you assured me I was succeeding?”

My voice was harsh and low. “I couldn’t tell you.”

“THEN TELL ME NOW!” he roared.

Always the reactive person, I screamed back. “IT’S NOT THAT EASY!”

“No, it is,” Dietrich hissed, “You just choose not to. You just can’t stand the thought of telling someone you don’t trust at all.”

Don’t trust at all.

Do I even care?

Using them.

Liar.

Do I even care?

Choose not to.

Led them to believe.

My friend.
They don’t count?

Do I even care?

They don’t count.

You’re one of me and mine.

Liar.

Don’t trust at all.

Do I even care.

The glass cracked again, and I felt something snap inside.

“Do I even care.” I said softly. I chuckled — everything was so ridiculous that I couldn’t. I looked at Dietrich and felt the moment my nails broke skin and buried their blunt points deep in my palms. “You wanted to know, Dietrich? Fine. I’ll tell you, my friend.”

I ignored the way he flinched, the shock stark on his face, the regret in his eyes.

I didn’t care, after all.

“Let me tell you a story, my friend. I don’t suppose you know this,” my voice stated calmly, curiously, “but the House of Weasley and the House of Prewett have an odd history of radical ideology and unyielding power. The Prewetts were often extremely magically powerful, lots of Soothsayers born to them. The Weasleys were similar, but instead of sprinklings of Soothsayers, they had a Clairvoyant every now and then.”

Information I gathered and painstakingly learned from the beginning chapters of Sollertia Augurium. Bits and pieces Alby taught me, augmented by my own obsessive research — all those years ago — into my bloodline, my presence in this world.

Things my parents were too afraid to bring up, trying to keep my visions away.

How beloved I was.

(My mind felt foggy and numb and on the precipice of something. I was so angry that I couldn’t even feel it anymore.)

“The brain of a human infant is not developed. A baby cannot even smile until they are a few weeks old, did you know that, Dietrich? But magic can supply the rest. When Seers are born, their magic can act as a sort of secondary mind, so visions can be processed, so the Seer grows up with their ability. It’s why Seers are so skilled at the Mind Arts; our bodies adapt to that magic, our minds are streamlined for protecting and taking knowledge that shouldn’t be ours. But it comes with a price, you know.

“Why do you think Prophesiers are so crazy? The Prophet of Delphi. Cassandra. It isn’t right, to See things when your mind is so new. There’s as few Empaths as there are Clairvoyants, and do you know why? They kill themselves more often than not. They can’t take all the emotions they feel. Assessors, too. Ancient ones picked up swords and could See every death that blade caused, every throat cut, every bit of flesh shredded. I’m no expert on other branches of Seer magic, of course… But I was tutored by Albus Dumbledore, and having experienced this firsthand, I understand more than one would think.”
Dietrich was pale, waxy in the moonlight. He looked like a ghost in the dark. “…You’re a Seer.”

I smiled, and it was not kind.

I didn’t care.

(If only I didn’t care.)

“Seer-Clairvoyant. I have dreamed of death and war since I was born, Dietrich. The more I loved my father, the more I Saw the way his House was torn to pieces. The more I adored my mother, the better I Saw the way she screamed when she found what remained of my uncles, Fabian and Gideon. The more my brothers carried me, the more Ginny made me smile, the more I feared for their lives, and the more I Saw the way they all die.” The smile faded. I felt anger, rushing through me like fire, horror and recklessness and grief and rage, blending into my head and making everything shake and float. “Fate has held my family in her grasp for as long as I can remember, and I have wept and bled, fighting to pull them out. I have shaped my entire existence around protecting them, because without them to have told me it was going to be alright at night, without them to have reminded me of reality, I would’ve gone Mad long ago.

“You have no idea… You have no fucking clue what lengths I would go to, have gone, to make sure my brothers and sister and parents don’t become the corpses I dream of every night. You have no idea what I’ve felt, the only people that matter in the entire world being held hostage in front of me. I don’t care?” I laughed. “I do nothing but care. I am nothing if I do not care. I promised myself, years ago, that I wouldn’t let Fate have them. I wouldn’t give anyone to her. They’re mine. I don’t call them mine because I trust them to protect me, to help me. I call people mine because, they are. They belong to me. FATE CAN’T HAVE THEM. I’ll die to keep them alive. I’ll die to keep Fate from having what belongs to me.”

I straightened, meeting Dietrich’s gaze, not allowing him to look away. I was numb and prickling and in pain and I couldn’t read his expression right now. I couldn’t think.

“You were a tool,” I said coldly, “You and the others were tools I needed in Slytherin, to give me power. Power I needed to keep mine safe, to keep me safe so I could keep protecting them.” My voice softened. “And then… And then there was the way you always tried to steal my notes, and the faces you made when I messed up in Potions, and the secret way to the Kitchens, and how you copied my writing, and how… and how you smiled without smiling and scolded like my mother.

“And there was Harper, who was so unthinking and careless, but always so earnest — too earnest for Slytherin — and how easily he was manipulated and how offended he got when he realized and how excited he was by getting a spell right after you taught him. And Jay, kind and afraid, organizing our books and smiling to himself when I braided his hair and getting annoyed when Harper disorganized his homework. Lu, stubborn and impulsive like a Gryffindor, cruel when he knows no one’s looking, proud and unapologetic and always looking at the sky, straining when he’s being scolded and bragging when he does something right. Even- Even Nate, all sneaky and sly and definitely bullying the Ravenclaws, trying to act older than he is or understands, teasing and making fun and terrified of- of being part of us.”

My anger had burnt out. And part of me was panicking, screaming at me to Stun Dietrich immediately and wipe his fucking memory now. The other was deeply, suddenly hurting, missing my boys around me and remembering how worried they all were — in their own ways.

How Jay and Lu asked after me, how Harper trudged on and made an effort to sit near me to make me laugh even if he didn’t know what was going on. How hard Nate worked, how he never asked
but was always curious, how Dietrich didn’t know anything because I know he’d been in the abandoned classroom, polishing his dueling skills and studying practical spells just in case something like Tom Riddle happened again. I missed them all terribly, so much that I ached, and I hated myself for never being able to balance all the things important to me.

I couldn’t help but smile at the thought of them, the ones who anchored me down in Slytherin. My family kept me sane, they kept me grounded with proper morals and bloodtraitor ideology and constant support, unquestionable security, unnamed forever.

But my boys, my friends, Luna and the Golden Trio, they were the ones I chose, strangers that represented the things I loved the most, the things I treasured the most: loyalty and fun and independence and strength and balance and reckless nobility and stubborn optimism and quiet observance and sharp wit.

“You were all supposed to be tools.” I gasped, “But I’ve always- You know I’ve always had a problem, getting attached to things and people I shouldn’t. I thought- I thought I deserved it, I thought I deserved having friends who were just mine, and then… And then the Chamber happened, and I realized… I realized that- I just-”

I felt the tears down my face again. I couldn’t stop them.

“You weren’t supposed to be able to be used against me, too. I didn’t- want- you used against me, too. I can’t-” I was sobbing, hiccups interrupting my words, and I felt embarrassed for it and for this outburst, but I was already almost finished, so I couldn’t very well stop now. “-I can’t See your bodies, too. I can’t- I won’t- You were supposed to be safe. I- d-don’t- want to see- th-the- the way y-your- your bodies look when- if- I-I-I don’t- I don’t want to wake up and- and not know if you’re alive- or- not…”

Dietrich’s blank mask was gone, and I barely noticed it. In its place was an expression of stricken horror, of confusion and regret and near-tears, and-

And then he turned and fled, only a fluttering curtain and this weight in my chest left in his wake.

…

What have I done?

Soft white light had brightened and mellowed into early morning, my face no longer throbbing from moonlight but slowly pulsing with general discomfort. There were drops of red as dark as Tom Riddle’s colors splattered on the white blankets and sheets and sleeves, dried and sporadic, and my palms were practically scabbed over. I only vaguely noticed these things, though. My head was too full and empty for me to do anything else, even sleep.

What have I done?

…I’d just given Dietrich everything he could ever use against me. I’d just given Dietrich a reason to use it against me. I’d lost my shit and now he knew what I was, what I could do, and he probably hated me now.

It was- It was one thing for some distant friend to have Clairvoyance, your best mate’s little sister who you talked to every so often, or that girl in Slytherin you tend to like but don’t know all too
well. Harry and Hermione weren’t pissed at all, it seemed, and they had Ron to turn to for answers; they had a barrier to jumping to conclusions, they were older and experienced in life or death situations, those two weren’t my best friends. It was one thing for knowing a Clairvoyance when you yourself had Seer blood, when you were accepting of everything and always in your own head anyways. Luna knowing about me was safe, Luna took things as they came and never anything less, never much more. It was one thing for your little sibling to have it, for you to have listened to her cry and scream in her sleep, for your sleeves to be torn near to bits with how she’d hold onto you out of fear that you’d disappear. My brothers and sister… They’d known, they’d understood, they’d… they’d…

They would never think I manipulated them because I thought it’d be a laugh.

None of them would think I was abusing my Sight for anything but making sure they were alright.

None of them were people I’d call tools.

I called Dietrich and the rest my tools.

What.

What was wrong with me?

Why did I do that?

I might as well have given Dietrich a loaded gun and pointed it at my temple, telling him it was up to him when he’d like to pull the trigger. Or, as it was, I might as well have given him my wand and closed my eyes.

I didn’t know which was the worst part: giving him my secret or losing yet another one of mine.

It hurt enough when Tom died. It was still hurting. It hurt in spasms; I could be looking at a quill and then suddenly I’d miss my friend, I’d feel my chest ache with could have been’s and if only I had’s and all sorts of complicated, messy things. Tom had barely been one of mine, Tom had been a surprise and a mistake and then he was suddenly gone.

What was I going to do when it was Dietrich, my best friend, who was disappearing?

How much would it hurt then?

How-

“Oh, this won’t do at all. You’re drowning in nargles!”

Once again, I snapped to attention.

Luna with her pale coloring and penchant for sitting back to watch, it seemed like she would blend in with the curtains, but she stood out in a cloud of silver and lavender and pale, pale minty green. My Mage Sight had turned on and I hadn’t even realized it.

She smiled wistfully — all her smiles were wistful — and drifted towards me. Madam Pomfrey’s face disappeared back behind the curtains with a nod and a quiet ‘hmph’. I wondered if she’d been worried for a split second, before Luna sitting down on the edge of my beside, facing me, distracted me from that line of thought. Luna reached out easily and plucked my hand into hers, easily and comfortably.
I opened my mouth to speak but she gave me a blank look, and I quieted, letting her look at the palms of my hands, the tan of my skin, the stray spots and freckles. Then she shook her head, tutting, and bowed her head to get her necklace of twine and corks and smooth pieces of bottle glass, the pieces we used to pick out of the Muggle fields to take home and hang up in sunny windows. She shook it out gently, letting the pieces of the necklace jingle together, and then plopped it around my neck with no further ado.

“You already look much better. This will make sure the rest will go off somewhere else!” Luna said in a scolding tone, “I told you that you should stop taking other people’s nargles, Guinevere. Now look at you! You hardly have any fairiefiddle in you. It’ll come back, but you mustn’t trust that. Snakes don’t trust much.”

There was something comforting about riddles in this new life of mine.

Well. Not so new as it was. But still. Before, I didn’t care much for them. Too straight-forward for it, too tired for it. This life, though, I grew up with magic strangling my mind and dreams, with the demon twins and their tricks, with Luna who used symbols to say everything, and now in Slytherin, where there were seven different meanings to every word. Riddles were comforting, and I felt myself draw up in strength for it.

Trickery was a reminder of how to be strong, after all. Or rather, that I had to be.

Leave it to Luna to know this.

“Snakes don’t trust much, but I did. I told my lieutenant the easiest way to lock a fairiefiddle in a cage, and I was bitter and thoughtless enough to give him a reason to do it. I left him behind and he was angry, and when he told me so, I called him a tool.” I spat the last words, remembering that embarrassing scene from last night and hating the ache that rose up in response to it.

Luna poked at one of the corks resting on my collarbone. “It’s not working right. You’re going to break it like this, Guinevere.”

That startled a laugh out of me. Luna never really pouted, but here was the closest thing.

She touched my bandages, but my face couldn’t feel it. Her expression went sad.

“They love you and they’re hurt because they don’t think you love them back,” was what Luna said.

I flinched. “I do.”

She shook her head. “Not everyone knows like I know. Not everyone sees like you See. They try because they admire you and you think they can because they act like it, but you’re so much older than all of us, Guinevere. The visions made you that way.”

“I don’t want any of you hurt. If any of you got hurt, what would be the point-”

What would be the point of all my sacrifices? What would be the point of me?

Luna doesn’t need to hear these things, and I don’t quite think she hears exactly how my thoughts go, but it’s close enough. Her expression is gentle and her silvery-blue eyes are razor-sharp for once.

“You hurt when they do. They want to do the same.”
A flicker of annoyance, a shadow of what it was last night, crossed me. “You think I don’t know what people say about me, Luna? What people think? It’s not normal for a twelve-year-old to be willing to kill and die for her friends. It’s not normal to love people the way I do. I’m possessive and manipulative and selfish and I love exactly like that. It’s not normal. I don’t want them to be anything like me.”

Luna smiled. “That’s not your choice.”

“Everything is my choice.”

She let out a soft, amused breath. Her fingers were still on my blood-crusted, bandaged cheek. “I suppose it is. But it’s too late, now, Guinevere. You can't rewind, you're not an hourglass fairy. There's no sand in your steps. Not that the nargles are helping you see that. What are you going to do now? You’ve got to paint your colors again, and maybe that will make it better, but first you have to pick up the brush.”

I sighed. All the things Luna told me, I knew. Somewhere, I knew. My boys were not supposed to be in Fate’s crosshairs. They were supposed to live unremarkable lives. And then I entered the picture and I changed that. They took a bit more of my colors than I took theirs, because they were truly young and I was just remembering how to be. They were more moldable than I was. They had more paths open to them than I did.

And I changed that. Fate’s chosen Seer, her friends, they were going to have a little touch of Fate on them as well. Whatever paths they had, I destroyed those. They gave me friendship and trust and I filled them with the vicious, single-minded loyalty that was the only thing driving me, now. Accidentally, yes, but I’d done it, and there was really no point wallowing.

Ergh. I spent an entire night wallowing. Fucking hell, I’d hoped I was smarter than this by now.

And… And the other thing.

They were… Well, Dietrich was pissed because I was keeping him out of the loop. He’d not known why, so I told him, but that was me ranting. If I’d- If I’d really cared, I wouldn’t have avoided Dietrich, thought of him as an obstacle. I would’ve told him in no uncertain terms. Made something up. I avoided the problem and then it blew up in my face. I was a coward, that way. I wanted things to stay the same; I wanted him to trust me as I lied to him and made him think that I never would.

I treated him as, well, maybe not a tool, but… but not as the Second I called him. He was right about that. And it wasn’t my fault, and it certainly wasn’t his fault, that I couldn’t, but. He didn’t see it that way until I oh-so-helpfully enlightened him.

Goddamn idiot. I expected my boys to play to my tune but I got pissed when they acted out. And that was an over-exaggeration, but it was just about the right shade of this problem. I had to be prepared for this. I couldn’t just… wallow. They love you and they’re hurt because they don’t think you love them back, is what Luna said. Well I certainly hadn’t acted like they were my true and equal friends, even if I did love them all dearly.

Maybe… Maybe Dietrich didn’t get that? Or hadn’t thought of it. Before I blew up at him. I’d… I’d have to make that clear. Apparently it got lost in translation, somewhere down the road. I wanted them to understand. But before that…

I squared my shoulders. “Right. Well. This still doesn’t change the fact that I shot myself in the foot.”
I sighed. Dammit. “I paved the path to my own destruction.” I winced, thinking over what I’d said last night, with a clearer mind. Somehow, while Luna was speaking, I’d started breathing evenly, to the beat of my magic. Half-Occluding. “Oh Merlin, Luna… You should’ve heard the shit I said to Dietrich last night, shit, he probably thinks I’m a bloody monster—”

Luna brought her other hand up to my face. I felt a little flummoxed; Luna normally didn’t have to do this. She was floaty. She didn’t ground people, me — she helped me escape. But here she was, eyes trained on mine and calming me down because I needed it.

“You’re so very infected with nargles, I’m afraid of Loser’s Lurgy being brought about.”

Ah, but she more than made up for this odd clarity with her riddles. All was well in the world.

She said firmly, more than I would’ve expected from her, “Do you think your grey wolf will betray you?”

“I don’t trust anything. I’m a snake.” I said stubbornly.

Luna brought her hands down and poked at the corks on my chest. “They’re not working properly, Guinevere, I really do think you broke these. Otherwise you wouldn’t be saying silly things.”

“It’s not silly,” I muttered, feeling tired all of a sudden, “I’m not vulnerable like this to anyone but you and my family. And… Well, now Harry and Hermione, too, but we all know Harry owes me and Hermione wouldn’t dare. They’re both too good.”

“And the grey lieutenant isn’t?”

“No!” I near-shouted, “Dietrich’s the best of them!”

Luna raised her brows even higher than they already were. “Then don’t worry, silly. Wolves are the loyalest creatures of them all. Yours just happens to be covered in wrackspurts and it’ll take him a little bit to shake them off. You really did have to pick the ones the nargles and wrackspurts all love, didn’t you?”

Despite myself, I felt defensive of my boys. “They’re all the best.”

Luna giggled. “Then don’t worry so much! Just wait and see. You chose them for a reason, you know. And they chose you back. That’s what counts. Red snakes and golden queens and fox tricks and heartache don’t matter so much when you brush the wrackspurts away. That’s a choice, too, though. You have to choose to get them away.”

“When did you get so wise?” I asked wryly.

Her face was serene, hands in her lap now. The picture of lovely posture. “Don’t you know, Guinevere? Everyone calls me Looney.”

(I felt my face twitch. Looks like all my pent-up aggression, nearly-spent anger, and utter fear at this situation could be channeled, after all. It would sure make me feel better, planning out something to make the Ravenclaws cry.)

(Luna laughed breathlessly at my expression, surely knowing what I was thinking.)
“Putains de détraqueurs.”

I sat back, feeling much cleaner and much more yelled at after Madam Pomfrey’s visit, half an hour or two ago. Luna had laughed at me, the traitor. And Madam Pomfrey seemed relieved at my snarking back to her, even as she roared at the state of my everything.

My heart thundered in my chest even as my face was impassive. “There was a swear word in there, but I don’t know the other one.”

Dietrich did not sit, and his eyes didn’t meet mine. Not that I’d know, really, because I was the one looking at a spot over his head.

“Fucking dementors,” he said quietly, “is what that means.”

“Ah.”

He took a step forward. “If I had all the world’s fears in my head, I do not think I would be half as well as you were, when they came near.”

I crossed my arms. Resisted the urge to hug myself. My vision was blurring with tears despite everything and I knew what I looked like when I was about to cry and knew Dietrich could see it. Fuck, I thought I was ready, but Luna had only left an hour ago and I really, really wasn’t actually ready-

“I’m-”

“You were wrong,” Dietrich interrupted.

I blinked at him. He took another step forward, inching his way to me.

“You were wrong,” he repeated quietly, “to trick your way around me. To let me busy myself and go behind my back. But… But I cannot say that I would not have pushed, if you’d told me that your business was private, that you could not bring me. I cannot say that I was not eager to prove myself to you after my mistake last year.”

“My mistake, you mean-”

“We both made mistakes. You let your guard down with the soul-stealer. As did I. It should not have happened and yet it did. And then this year as well. You have treated me like glass, gone behind my back, and I have shadowed your every step, questioned your every move. We did not act as leader and Second, this past half-year, and my fixation on that is perhaps what led to my… outburst, last night.”

He was another step closer. At the foot of the bed, or just past. I resisted the urge to slip into Mage Sight and look. This didn’t feel like the time.

“I had forgotten,” Dietrich said softly, “in my anger, that before I was your Second, I was simply your friend. I had forgotten that… that to mind you was not the same as to support you. That trust was not the same as affection. I had forgotten. And for me to disparage your choice as a leader and connect that to your love for me, and all our friends… that was foolish.”
“I chose to leave you out of it because you’re all my friends,” I said quietly, “Make no mistake about that.”

Dietrich looked down. “Yes. But I told you that you did not care for us when you did. A leader would have used us to her advantage. A friend would have agonized over it and kept us away. A stupid friend, perhaps, but it is no less true.”

I cracked a smile at that. Dietrich was close enough to touch my hand, were it laid out.

“You did not leave us behind because you did not trust us.”

I gave a nod. “Yes.”

Dietrich didn’t move. “You did not leave me because- I did… I… failed.”

“No-”

Dietrich narrowed his eyes. “I did not fail in your eyes. But I have failed. It just… is different now.”

“Yes, but-”

“You left us because you were afraid.”

“Yes.”

“You have been afraid for a long, long time.”

“…Yes.”

He was quiet. Then he took a breath.

“…I’m sorry, Lys.”

His voice cracked, and I couldn’t take it anymore.

I don’t know who moved first: me, opening my arms up and reaching, or Dietrich dashing towards me and clamping his hands around my ribs. Whichever it was, I had my arms wrapped around Dietrich’s neck, face buried into the crook of his shoulder, and he was half-kneeling on my bed, slouched over and likely entirely uncomfortable but unrelenting in holding me.

One would think… One would think this would be like me and Mum’s desperate hug, talking over each other and crying. But that wasn’t what happened.

It was just me holding onto Dietrich for dear life and him doing the same, voice muffled but sentences full.

(And if Dietrich’s accent was bordering on my inability to understand it, well. It was only bordering.)

“I’m sorry I did not know.”

“I’m sorry I couldn’t tell you.”

“You know I would never betray your secret like this.”

“I didn’t know — I’ve been afraid so long. It’s been a secret so long.”
“I’m sorry you were afraid. I’m sorry I made it worse.”

“So am I, but I’m not, too. I just wanted to keep you safe. The Chamber was my fault, Dietrich, don’t you understand that?”

“It wasn’t.”

“You weren’t Fated to be taken. It was supposed to be Ginny and then it was you and Malfoy, instead. I couldn’t let that happen again. I can’t. I can’t See you die. If you were going to hate me for it, I thought it’d be okay—”

“I do not hate you.”

“Please don’t hate me.”

“I won’t. I understand now. I am… I am sorry I ran away. I did not know how else to process it, but alone.”

“I thought you might turn me in.”

“Your excuse dégoûtante d’un ministre will hear nothing from me. I am sorry you thought I might tell. I am sorry, Lys, I didn’t mean to- to look down upon your suffering. I did not know. And I do not blame you for the secret, but please- please don’t do it again.”

“What again?”

“Secrets. If I have to allow you into my head to make it fair, I will, but no more.”

“I don’t want to expose you like that.”

“But if it will make you feel safe, then I’ll allow it.”

“Even I’d never let anyone look in my head. Stop copying my creepy loyalty.”

“It is no copy. I am loyal to you for my sake. Stupid, stupid girl, do you not know what I was before you? You saved my life, Lys.”

“Hardly.”

“I was miserable and you made me happy. I am loyal because of that.”

“You’re going to suffer. To be a Seer is to suffer and if you want to share that, you’re going to hurt. I don’t want that.”

“As if I care. You are the soeur de mon coeur, and unlike your brothers, I chose you.”

“I don’t know what that means.”

“Sister of my heart.”

I tightened my hold on Dietrich. “That’s a lifetime commitment, do you hear me? You know everything about me and you want to be my brother. Second for life. Do you understand how terrible this could all go?”

Dietrich pulled away, taking me by the shoulders. His eyes were full of tears, but he wasn’t letting them fall. I failed in that regard, but we met eyes anyways.
“I know how it will go,” he said, accent lightening, regaining a bit more control, “I will be better. I will not obsess so much on protocol. I will not blind myself with obsession. Que c'est embarrassant... And you will do better, too. You and I will work something out to tell the others. And as you prepare for whatever is coming, I can only assume bad, I will be there as well. Yes, to argue, but also to support. No more interrogation, no more secrets, no more- no more fear. Not you and not me. We will do what we must, because your interests are mine. And if I should have any interests arise, they will be yours. I know you. And- And it is not because I owe you, or you owe me, but because you are my friend and I chose this knowing it might end badly. Mes yeux sont grands ouverts maintenant. Perhaps I will die, but I expect you to carry on for me. Perhaps you will die, and I shall do the same. Or, more likely, we shall suffer Fate together and at least lean on one another for it. That is what will happen. Do you hear me, Lys?”

I sniffled. Valiantly resisted saying something stupid, like, You’re not even French, Dietrich.

Sometimes emotional things just had to be emotional. No matter how I disliked it.

I was learning that, with all these people visiting me this week.

“I hear you.” I said.

Dietrich’s lips stretched into a smile, faint but real.

“Then… I suppose it would do for you to tell me everything.”

I wiped my face clumsily. “After you hear about this bullshit, there’s no take-backs. Especially after your fancy speech.”

He snorted, sitting back and folding his hands. Pretending he didn’t just hug me and almost cry and wax eloquent. Occlumency-strict bastard. If he weren’t built so solidly with his heavy, grey eyes and his dark, thick brows, I’d call his perfect fucking hair and skin Malfoy-ish.

…He was my family now, wasn’t he? He said so.

So it was okay to tug at his sleeve for something to hold. Dietrich didn’t even raise a brow at it, so I relaxed.

“Where do I start? The war that’s going to come, the fact that I felt a werewolf bite because of a bunged up Legilimency ritual this year, or all the stupid things I have to do and will have to do to keep my Clairvoyance a secret while also befriending or comforting the others?” I suggested, trying to keep a lighter outlook for the moment.

Dietrich, to my surprise, threw out another smile. “At the beginning, my friend. Toujours le début.”

(What does that mean, I asked Dietrich later.

Always the beginning, he said.)

Chapter End Notes

AAAAHHH! I always forget to post the fanart, I swear. I got some GOOD SHIT from a really cool artist fan! LOOK AT THIS AWESOMENESS!!!!
Anyways, unpleasantpink and their fan art was key in getting the chapter done because I legit was putting off until I saw this. So. GO CHECK IT OUT!!! Thank you, friend, for the art!!
Chapter 43

Chapter Summary

Hehe... Yeah, sorry I missed last week. But! Here is an extra long chapter and the end of the longest damn arc for you! Just wrapping up some loose ends, likely not all of them, but all the ones that matter to our girl here. :)  

Bear with me, because I've just started my new job right after I got used to my new schedule, so I might use the opportunity this end of the arc presents to rest up and try and write more in advance... (lol it's never gonna happen, I've tried for almost a full year to get a backlog and it never happens RIP) :D But yeah, probs gonna take a break after this for a bit. Rest my poor brain and get ready for the fourth arc which was, in my old draft, the most intense arc. :)  

Thanks, as always, to readers and commentors, old and new! Y'all keep a writer going!  

Yup! That's all, I think? Enjoy!

...  

Madam Pomfrey locked me up for two days and gave me enough potions to practically put me in a coma again. After being worried about my shock, then relieved that Luna snapped me out of it, then pleased to hear Dietrich was told of my Clairvoyance and accepted it wholeheartedly... Well, Madam Pomfrey was pissed that I'd injured my hands and reopened the wounds.  

Thus, I woke up two days after Dietrich was kicked out, groggy and the taste of something rancid in my mouth, with my face burning quite a bit less than before.  

“When can I take the bandage off?” I asked Madam Pomfrey as she fussed over me.  

“Not for weeks, yet, Weasley,” the Healer said, measuring out the very specifically small amounts of potions for me; enough to help, but not enough to cause a negative reaction with the werewolf wounds, that is.  

“But… I’m leaving at some point, right? The feast is supposed to be today.”  

Madam Pomfrey glared at me. “And you would be attending if you hadn’t clawed your hands open, along with aggravating your extremely deep lacerations, knowing you were anaemic!”  

I shrunk down at the might of the Healer. “Sorry.”  

She sniffed, handing me a concoction I’d learned to dread, looking disapproving and unsympathetic as I gagged, swallowing it down. “You’ll likely miss the feast, but Albus insisted you ride the train with the rest of the students.”
Setting down the vial, I resisted the urge to beam. “You mean I’m still getting out today?”

“Yes, yes. Your mother and sister have already packed up your things and I do believe Molly took your trunk with her that first time she visited. Your old clothing was thrown out, on account of all the blood… I think your sister has a set of clothes for you, to ride the train.”

“Wait. I’m going straight from bed to the train?”

Madam Pomfrey sniffed again. “If you don’t, you’ll talk and smile your wounds open again, and with how deep they are, I’m certain you’ll make the scars worse if I let you!” She scolded, waving her wand to clear everything from my bedside table. “No more adventures for you, Miss Weasley! It’s a wonder I haven’t been driven back to Firewhiskey because of you and Mister Potter! You will leave when your clothes have been delivered, I will be sending you out along with a letter for your mother about caring for your wounds, and that will be that!”

“I hope I’ve driven you ‘round the bend by the time I’m seventeen, Madam Pomfrey. We could go drinking together!” I called as she left.

She didn’t even turn back. “Have a pleasant, injury-free summer, you headstrong girl!”

I snorted as she left in a huff. Good old Madam Pomfrey.

Turning my head to the side and already bored out of my mind, I blinked at the sight of a large, creamy envelope left on the bedside table. It was Madam Pomfrey’s chicken-scratch handwriting, addressed to my mother.

Opening it — wasn’t even sealed, tut tut, that was practically an invitation — had me looking at helpful charts and What To Do’s in regards to facial lacerations. Particularly my facial lacerations. There were notes on the potions, the amounts needed, all calculated so I could wean off of the pain-killers slowly. Her Floo address was near the end, letting Mum know that if anything untoward happened, give her a call.

I almost grinned at the sight.

A soft POP! noise caught my attention. Folded neatly at the foot of the bed were some clothes — my patched-up jeans, a pair of socks with flying helmets sewn into them, one of Fred’s old T-shirts, and my indigo Weasley jumper — neat and laundered and topped by new Muggle trainers. The laces were rainbow-colored and the pattern was dark and floral; looked like Tilly got to my things, then.

(Looks like Madam Pomfrey was being nice. Or had just given up — either way worked.)

But the best thing, I think, was my wand, sitting in the left shoe, gleaming and familiar. My core gave a pleased, warm thrum when I took the dragon heartstring and elder into my fingers. A quick Tempus told me the feast was just about to start.

“I wish I had my toothbrush, though.” I muttered.

Another POP! and a new one was sitting where my wand had been.

I chuckled. “Thank you, Tilly. I’ll see you next year, luv. Have fun with the feast, okay?”

Then I started to change, wondering if I might find some sort of present for Madam Pomfrey when I went to Knockturn this summer. Merlin knew the woman needed a bloody break, especially since I think I was going to make it my goal to drive her to alcohol one day. Stuff tended to taste worse
when you were alone, right?

... 

There are certain things about me that’ve changed from last life to this one.

Besides the obvious, of course, I was once a moderate introvert. On the verge of true self-confidence, made friends easier when drunk, submissively polite, cautiously exasperated with the state of things.

Ha! A submissive, lazy introvert would’ve been *crushed* by Slytherin.

And she certainly wouldn’t be endlessly, *hilariously* amused by the looks she was getting as she entered the Great Hall, silence brushing through the chattery students with every step she took, every eye she drew.

Must’ve been the bandages. They *did* cover half my face, after all.

The boys’ faces were especially funny. Dietrich was stoic as usual, his brow ticked up the only sign of surprise, but he looked as amused as I did. Next to him, Harper’s mouth was wide open, eyes round as plates; Lu had a similar look, sandwiched between the more gracefully shocked Nate and Jay. I made a beeline for Dietrich and stood near him, hands in my pockets and mouth threatening to split into a grin. Not even the fact that Gryffindor won the House Cup again — their damn banners were all over the place, honestly — was putting a damper on my mood.

“There any toast?” I asked.

Dietrich had already gone back to eating, not even looking at me now, scooting over to make room for me and pushing a plate heaped with buttery toast to the empty place.

“Oh, thanks-

“LYSSIE!

I didn’t even get to sit down; Harper leapt up across the *entire table* and scrambled to hug me. I yelped at the sight of him *barreling over the feast* to welcome me back, but he latched onto me and nearly knocked me over, and I started snorting in laughter as his happy cry descended into indecipherable babbling.

Which broke the shocked quiet, because all of a sudden Jay and Lu and Nate had swarmed me, and then Adaline Mercer and her two closest friends had drawn near, along with Nicolette Beaumont and Ariadne Lynwood, and I think Silvester Cornfoot had sidled closer, pulling Basilia Carrow and Gertrude Betteridge (from Hufflepuff, and where the hell did she come from?) with him. Lu’s stupid brother was a little closer, too, and so was Josie and her potesta, and all of them were clamoring over one another with as much decorum as they could muster — but not really because the entire Great Hall had exploded with conversation all of a sudden, loud as it usually was, and maybe a little louder, considering the pack of redheads marching over from the Gryffindor table, dragging along a certain Harry Potter and Hermione Granger, and being joined by Luna as they passed Ravenclaw.

“LYS YOU’RE ALIVE!”
“Get off, Harper-”

“Weasley, are you okay?”

“Didn’t know you were getting out today, Weasley!”

“What happened?”

“LYS I WAS SO WORRIED!”

“Cher Dieu, je savais que cela arriverait.”

“Shut up, Dietrich! You’re not even French!”

“I hate you.”

“Weasley, you look a little blue there-”

“Did you really fight Professor Lupin?”

“Did you really get bitten?”

“Are you a werewolf?”

“Lyssie, are you okay?”

“Get off, Harper, you’re killing our parvus potesta!”

And then my family and everyone else who knew about Clairvoyance got here and it all really went to hell. Dietrich had warned me, two days ago, that the tensions between Slytherin and Gryffindor were pretty high because I’d gone on a Gryffindor adventure — where only the Slytherin had been injured by a teacher who favored Gryffindors. And my boys weren’t helping, seeing as they were pissed at the Golden Trio — and, therefore, all Weasleys — for taking up all the visitation slots in the Hospital Wing. It had probably only gotten worse over my little forced coma stint, via Madam Pomfrey, which probably canceled the rest of the time slots.

Anyways. Point was, without me mediating, Slytherin and Gryffindor were getting hissy with each other.

“Harper, I demand you stop suffocating my little sister!”

“He doesn’t have to listen to you, Head Prick!”

Oh crap. Lu wasn’t even bothering to act nice while I was here, that meant he was really irritated at Percy. That descended into unhappy chaos really quickly…

“Don’t aggravate Lyssie’s brother, Lu.”

“What are you Gryffs doing here anyways?”

“That’s my sister, Lynwood, if you’re stupid enough to not have noticed.”

“Maybe I forget that my fellow Slytherin has an uglier older sister because you happen to be so forgettable.”

Wait, since when the fuck did Ariadne Lynwood not get along with Ginny?? Last I remember, all
the Slytherin and Gryffindor girls in my year were coolly polite with each other…

I abruptly found myself in one of Fred’s headlocks: gentle, injured-sister edition.

“Hey! Fred, you git!”

“We thought you weren’t getting out of Pomfrey’s ’til the train!” He laughed.

“ Heard you put yourself into a coma again, Lyssie.” George added.

I rolled my eye. “That was Madam Pomfrey, because I was yelling at Dietrich so hard my scratches burst open and she decided I’d be safer unconscious.”

It was a joke, but my entire sibling collection turned accusing eyes on Dietrich, who looked vaguely annoyed.

“She did not mean that.” He stated flatly and accurately.

“Yeah, but it is your fault my sister reopened her bloody face! Luna had to yell at you, too! You snakes aren’t the only ones who know how to find things out!” Ginny shouted, getting louder with each word.

I glanced at Percy, who looked just as angry. He definitely told the other siblings after abusing my portrait spy network which, as I was discovering, was not mine at all. It’d be like my sneaky brother, getting all the siblings to rally against a common enemy by using me.

Harper had somehow extracted me from the demon twins, holding my arm to his chest possessively. “You’ve all seen Lyssie already and you’re going to have her for the whole summer to put in danger! It’s our turn with Lys.” He said stubbornly.

Ron twitched, flushing red. “We told you, you damn baby snakes! She’s our sister, why the bloody hell would we get her injured on purpose, one of your parvy-things or not! S’not like any of you were there!”

Nate smirked. “Oh, but if we had been, I imagine Lys wouldn’t have had her face torn open, hm? And I wager we knew more about the situation than you did, prior to your allowing our parvus potesta reigning to be injured by one of your own House members…”

Ah, shit.

Hitting my brother right where it hurts, Nate: Ron’s protective nature being stomped all over by the fact that I was the one who suffered the worst injuries, besides Sirius. Among other things, of course. It was an insult to all of my family, really, and you could tell by the way their ears started reddening and their faces fell flat.

A glance at Dietrich and he nodded.

“Enough,” he announced calmly, a stoic voice in the heightening tension, “Slytherin is better than picking fights at the end of the year. At its feast, even. Sit down. We do not glean information through poorly-hidden interrogation.” He looked at me. “Lys, are you sitting with us or with your family? I do not think it is a good idea to… mix Houses at the moment.”

I nodded, and smiled — maybe a little too proudly, but Dietrich had just parvus potesta’d for me! He was good at it, too! That was my Second! My Slytherins were listening to him, too! A little sheepish, or as much as their pureblood sensibilities could allow, the crowd started to disperse and
return to their seats; must’ve been embarrassing, to see us all aflutter, drawing the curiosity of the ‘Claws and the ‘Puffs when we were normally all snorting at whatever spectacle the Gryffs were making.

“I’ll be with you all the entire summer,” I murmured to my Gryffindor family, “Let me end the year with my House, hm?”

Percy looked put off. “You’re hurt…”

I tilted my head to one side. The injured side. “I don’t think there’ll be any dangerous magical creatures hiding under my toast, Perce.”

“But- But what are you going to tell them?” Ron asked, still irritated by Nate’s needling.

Oh. Oh, well. That was cute. They didn’t want me to face interrogation by myself, knowing a lot of my adventures this year were tied to my Clairvoyance. Had… Had Alby or McGonagall or Madam Pomfrey not told them that Dietrich knew? Did my parents know? Ergh.

I grinned, trying to be reassuring. The pull didn’t hurt my wounds too much, but I wouldn’t be able to keep it up.

“I’ve got a good Second on my side, don’t worry. We’ll get it figured out. Go on, the Slytherins aren’t comfortable with this many Gryffs in our territory. Barring the insult, Harper’s right — you can all wrap me in cotton the entire summer, my snakes only have until the train’s dropped us off.”

As I’d hoped, the argument coming from me mollified them slightly. With stern declarations that we’d all be talking later, Percy and Ron gave me hugs and dragged the demon twins away from ruffling my hair too much (not that they were, since they had to be careful not to dislodge any bandages). Ginny shot dirty looks at my boys and particularly Lynwood before she hugged me and grabbed Hermione and Harry, who waved in brief goodbye and looked a little displaced as they did. As I sat, Luna sat down with me, ignoring the speculative looks from my snakes (and Nate’s disgruntlement, on her other side) with every bit of serenity she had. Which was a lot.

I gratefully bit into my buttered toast and knew my boys were waiting for me to at least have a slice before I started talking. The rest of the Great Hall was to its normal, booming volume; but the Slytherin table was subdued, all of the students keeping their ears sharp and conversations simple so they could eavesdrop. Not subtle, but at least they were trying; the magnus potesta reigning were a bit smarter about it, though.

The curiosity was rolling off of my boys in waves. Harper was always fidgety, and Lu more active, but when even Jay was twitching, I knew I had to say something.

“I know the rumor mill’s been at it, you know,” I said, amused at how their eyes eagerly jumped to my face — Lu and Harper’s gazes kept wandering away from my eye to my bandages, though they tried their best — “Tell me what you all know and I’ll fill in, yes?”

I was surprised when Lu gave me an incredulous, annoyed look.

“Lyssie, we’re not going to interrogate you over your bloody breakfast.” He said.

“She probably already had breakfast, Lu.” Harper piped up.

Lu rolled his eyes. “We’ve gone over this, Harper. Toast is breakfast. Every meal she eats that’s just toast? Breakfast. Doesn’t matter, anyways.” He turned accusing eyes on me. “You really thought we were gonna demand an explanation right this second?”
“We just want to know if you’re alright,” Jay said softly, getting to the heart of the matter (which Lu would’ve danced around for a while, yet), “There were only so many slots for visitation, and your family claimed most of them.”

“I took one,” Luna interrupted dreamily, making most of the boys glance at her in disgruntlement. “And stupid Dietrich took the last one, and he wouldn’t let us come with!” Harper cried.

“And apparently you yelled at him so hard that your face split open again and Madam Pomfrey canceled the visits we scheduled after Dietrich’s, since she was putting you in a bloody coma. What the hell, Lyssie?” Lu said flatly.

I wanted to laugh.

They were all dying of curiosity, but more than that, they wanted to know if I was alright. Slytherins — the nosiest bastards in the school — were putting aside the questions I knew they wanted answered in order to find out if I was okay. Funny that Lu was leading the charge, though… Or maybe not so funny? He had noticed, the night of the first full moon, that something was wrong; he’d noticed I was nervous about it, but there’d been no time for him to actually dig — not that Lu would’ve, as distasteful of emotional confrontation as I was.

God, I loved these boys.

“Facial expressions,” I sighed, “If I smile too much, talk too much, it aggravates the wounds. It’s better now, with two days of healing behind me, but… well, Dietrich and I had a lot to talk about, and it ended up with me reopening two of the scratches.”

“So it was your fault,” Nate drawled, looking at Dietrich lazily.

“Here is an idea, Wilkes,” Dietrich drawled back, “Ferme ta gueule.”

Harper turned wide, concerned eyes on me. “But you’re healed now?”

Lu smacked the back of his head lightly. “Harper, don’t be stupid. Lyssie was attacked by a werewolf. Those wounds don’t heal for weeks! Maybe months. I dunno… they heal as slow as a Muggle.”

“And since when were you a paragon of Healer wisdom?” Nate asked, obviously goading Lu for some reason.

“Since I asked my stupid brother,” Lu replied through gritted teeth.

Harper laughed. “See, Lyssie? Lu must really like you, if he talked to Edward for you!”

I rolled my eye. “My hero.”

“Shut up, Harper!”

“No, shut up, Lyssie! You can’t talk, you’ll never heal and then you’ll only ever have one eye!”

“Shut up, Harper.”

Luna giggled as my boys descended into their usual chaos, simultaneously warding off attempts to eavesdrop and making me feel at home. She grabbed one of my hands, ignoring the crumbs, looking pleased as she swung our hands between us, taking slices of tomato and cheese from Nate’s plate nonchalantly, with Nate apparently ignoring it.
“I told you the grey lieutenant wouldn’t leave.” She sing-songed.

Dietrich on my other side straightened slightly.

“Which is good,” I said quietly, to both of them even if I were only looking at Luna now, “I would’ve been lonely if he hadn’t come back.”

Luna beamed at me. “You still remembered my birthday even though you were off dancing under the moon with the dogfather-man.” She frowned to herself. “Though I suppose he isn’t much of a dog anymore, is he?”

“No, Sirius was bitten to protect m- us. And of course I hadn’t forgotten your birthday… which was months ago.”

She looking at me knowingly, but ignored my slip. Dietrich, who had stiffened, did not. “I started learning how to crochet, that’s why I thought of it,” Luna said pleasantly, “Do you like cheesecake?”

“I don’t hate it.”

“Cheesecake pattern socks, then.”

I pulled my hand from hers and patted her shoulder fondly. “I’ll look forward to it, Luna. Thank you… in advance, I suppose, and for speaking up for me. With Dietrich. I heard you talked to him after you visited me.”

She pouted. “Your lieutenant didn’t want my cork necklace to ward away the nargles so I had to brush them off his shoulders myself! They were filling up his ears with nonsense. But don’t worry, Guinevere, he would’ve shaken them off eventually.”

Dietrich snorted. “I think I am beginning to understand Lovegood.”

“She was always perfectly understandable, you all are just stupid.” I retorted.

“Watch it,” soeur de mon coeur,” grumbled Dietrich half-heartedly, “I have become a very good duelist this past term. I think you will have trouble defeating me now, with how you… danced in the moon, these months.”

“Yes, well, I did get a very nice ally out of it.”

“One who would be bitten by a werewolf for your sake.”

I shrugged. “Mine and Harry’s, I think.” Then I couldn’t resist a grin. “And he’s loaded, so guess who’s buying an international Floo pass and a shit ton of Floo powder to visit her very favorite fake Frenchman~”

Dietrich’s eyes brightened; it was a testament to how excited he was, that he ignored my jab at his nationality. “You will visit Schwarzvogelschluss?”

I nodded. “Soon as Sirius is free to spoil me.”

My best friend let the smallest of smiles touch at his lips; it made me surprised and giddy to see it. Did this mean Dietrich was going to smile more often? Yay!

“I look forward to the summer, then.” He said.
Nate had reached around Luna to poke at my shoulder before I could reply. He had been eavesdropping, of course. “But before that, we will all be talking on the train, yes? I so do want to know how you put our translations to use.”

Jay, Harper, and Lu had all paused in their own conversation, glancing at me.

Eavesdroppers everywhere.

I gave a solemn nod. “I promise. I’d tell you after the feast, but you all need to pack. So on the train, alright? I’ll tell you what I can.”

“That’s not everything.” Nate pointed out.

I met his gaze steadily. “No, it’s not.”

He stared at me for a while, then nodded shortly. “Alright.”

Dietrich bumped at my shoulder as Nate turned back away to snark at Lu and Harper. I glanced at him, slightly nervous.

“They will understand.” Dietrich murmured. “They do understand, even if they do not like it.”

There was a time I’d fret more, need more convincing. But back then, I hadn’t had all my important secrets aired, and Dietrich didn’t have half a year of parvus potesta leadership experience. There was strength and understanding in my friend’s every line, and it calmed me down considerably.

“I know they will.” I replied.

“It is good to have you back. If only for a short while.” Dietrich said with finality.

I half-grinned. “I’m serious about that Floo pass. Pretty soon, you’re going to be sick of me.”

He snorted. “We have all stuck by you these past two years, Lys. Tired of you… Je me demande ce qui se passe dans votre esprit, parfois. That is not going to happen.”

My Mage Sight rituals were fading, and my eyes were at the point where everything had a vague outline of color, soft and faded. The end of year feast had only just ended, the sun was still pleasantly high and dipping in and out of fluffy clouds, but the world was rimmed with gold. The effect was hazy and dreamlike, and the lake was so clear and calm that I felt like I was up to my knees in rippling, golden-tinged sky.

A cloud of rose color shifted the water, making the noonday reflect like sunset-time, and I chuckled when one of the Giant Squid’s tentacles popped out of the water and poked at the air around me. I had come down here often enough with Harper to play with him, so the fact that the tentacle probably could’ve crushed me wasn’t too anxiety-inducing. I reached out to pat the slippery, smooth skin gently.

“No Harper this time, sorry,” I murmured, “I just wanted to get away from the staring and the colors for a bit. Calm down before I had to talk to my boys. Say goodbye to Hogwarts. And you, of course, even if I know you like Harper better than me.”
I had to turn my face so the Squid didn’t slap at my bandages and get them wet or open the wounds again, but it clumsily knocked my head around, almost pushing me right the hell over; a bunged-up version of a pat on the head, I think. The Giant Squid was really, worryingly sentient, to be honest. Who the hell had put him in the Black Lake?

…Now my mind was running rampant with images of a baby Giant Squid fighting off Grindylows and merpeople, adventuring in a fresh water lake (somehow), becoming the conquerer of the water. This was why I wanted the Giant Squid to love me.

(In my head, a wolf snorted, eye half-lidded and lazy, dark fur gleaming in the starlight, chin on crossed paws. Incredulity and amusement. Always watching over me, and him, the both of us. The fireflies glowed all around him, amber flickering in the black grass.)

(i'm glad you're doing well i'm glad you're okay)

Tendrils of sharper, clearer colors cut through the rose and gold. Violet-purple and faded blue and mauve and deep orange and red twisted together, bold and fierce, and the water rippled. I didn’t look up from scratching the Giant Squid’s tentacle, which it kept pushing at me insistently — kinda like a puppy, y’know? — but I felt someone stop next to me, dark reflection in the water taller and broader than mine.

“Can’t stay out of trouble, can you?” Josie asked, voice brimming with exasperated amusement.

I half-smiled wryly. “I didn’t really expect to get scratched up by a werewolf.”

I expected to be bitten, actually.

Josie snorted, but she went quiet, and she was patting the Giant Squid as it realized there was a new person to bother. For a moment, it was peaceful and calm. The rose and gold was slashed through with her sharp colors and my indigo was tinged less blue and more red, with the crimson edges blanketing over the water, turning the peaceful image into more of a bleeding sunset. I wondered if, next year, I could visit Alby and we could paint together again, because these were the moments I wished everyone could See the way I did.

“My wedding is in a month.”

Startled, I snapped my face up to look at Josie. Her eyes had a hard edge to them, now, mouth a grim slash. She was still pretty, though; dark hair piled on her head and dark, pureblood features enhanced with golden-toned makeup.

“A month?” I repeated, a little stupidly.

Josie looked at me, searching me for something, and my respect for her rose at least three notches when she didn’t linger on the bandages, imagine what sort of twisted scars would be underneath. She looked a lot less tired and stressed, much more put together this time. N.E.W.T.s had probably done a number on her. I hadn’t really spoken to her since she taught me how to befriend the Giant Squid.

Back then, too. She’d talked about her betrothal, then, too.

“So… you’re going through with it?” I asked, disappointed. And not just because I did have a crush on her — who wouldn’t? — but because Josie was such an amazingly intelligent and driven witch, and she was going to go be a pureblood wife.

“Josephine Properzia Derrick née Zabini,” she said with a chuckle, “Aloysius has already picked
out his father’s name for our firstborn son. His mother’s got a hold of some fertility potions or rituals or something like that, told me so herself, like I should be excited about that. How lucky and rare I am, to have access to those kinds of magicks!”

Following the mocking tone, I rolled my eye. “Those rituals aren’t even illegal, how hard could it be to get them?”

Josie lifted a brow, smirking. “Got an interest in fertility rituals, Guinevere?”

I gagged. “Not on your life! But I study rituals, and I know at least that much about them.”

She grinned, wide and threatening. “Oho… I’d think you hardly need them, if you take after your mother, Guinevere. Eight magical children is a rare thing indeed, and all of them full-blood siblings? That’s strong blood, you know, no matter what the Twenty-Eight say.”

I shook my head at Josie’s teasing layered with true compliments. “You’re going to tear Aloysius Derrick apart.”

Her eyes glinted. “Damn straight.”

I looked at her. She looked very... defiant. Confident. Not unhappy. A glance into her colors showed me peace, excitement. Normality.

“You’re not going to get married in a month.”

She grinned. “Damn straight.”

(Thank Merlin.)

I mirrored her grin perfectly. “Where are you off to, then?”

“My aunt’s — Blaise’s mother’s, that is. She knows more than anyone about how to gather power in this society, despite being a woman. I’m taking a different route than her, but she’ll help me nonetheless.”

“And why tell me?”

“Because you are the only friend I have — sad as it is, Weasley — that will remain my friend after I’ve been disowned by my parents and cast from the tree for refusing to marry the idiot,” she replied simply, giving a last few pats to the Giant Squid before nudging it none-to-gently back towards me.

I gave her a flat look. The Giant Squid poked at my shoulder until I started petting him again, the needy little baby.

She smiled. “I’m not lying. You’re a lucky one, little Guinevere, for finding friends like yours — don’t even care you’re a bloodtraitor, don’t care that you’re as mysterious as a Boggart’s true form, don’t care that your pretty face isn’t so pretty anymore.”

I scoffed. “Nothing’s perfect, so Fate deigned to mar my face before I proved that wrong.”

(There was something about Josie being your friend that made you confident. That was the sort of leader she was, why she rose to power. She inspired confidence in her followers. I was happy that she wasn’t going to waste her potential on pleasing some stupid fucker — because Aloysius had to be stupid, to be related to Peregrine Derrick — and being some delicate, obedient, child-bearing
She laughed again. Josie always sounded much nicer when she laughed for real and not to mock someone. “Don’t ever change, Guinevere, you’re much too fun this way. I know Malfoy’s going to take my seat when I’m gone, leaving you uncontested, but please, kick his little arse when you’re a fourth-year.”

I saluted. “Yes, Ma’am.”

We didn’t stay at the lake for long after that, both of us climbing out of the water and chatting pleasantly about different things. Sometimes we looped back to the DMLE, to Josie’s acceptance of her position under Amelia Bones, and I laughed when she told me she’d accepted already and I’d been the first one outside of her family she’d told. Apparently Blaise Zabini was aware and had gone pale with horror at the notion of living with Josie even after she graduated from Hogwarts.

We walked back to Hogwarts, two different colored sunsets bathing in gold, with our feet bare and shoes dripping from our hands — there may have been an incident with the Giant Squid trying to drag us back into the lake to play with him even after we’d put our shoes back on — and the barrier that was always present between magnus and parvus leaders seemed broken.

When I’d walked back to Slytherin dorms with Josie, we bumped into Malfoy.

He looked nastily delighted to see me, looking at my bandages especially.

(And if we both paused for too long when we recognized each other, both of us likely thinking of our last conversation, where we’d actually been quite civilized with each other, well… no one had to know that.)

“Why, look at this, it’s the disfigured Weaslette. Finally done hiding your ugly face from the world?”

I smirked, knowing it would throw him off if I didn’t scowl at him. “Well, if you can walk about in public shamelessly, Malfoy, I think I’ll manage quite nicely.”

Parkinson’s face pinched up, and Crabbe and Goyle looked confused. They were trailing behind him, like little ducklings. If looks would kill, Parkinson probably would’ve gutted me by now, really. The other two seemed generally indifferent to most everything, including me.

I gave Malfoy a pitying, maddeningly condescending smile. “Oh. Is this why your insults are so elementary, so that your little henchmen can understand you? You should’ve told me, I’ll have to practice dumbing down my words.”

“Shouldn’t take you much effort, all you’ll have to do is regress.”

“I’m sure you’d know, Malfoy. And as much as I enjoy our time together, I think looking at your face too long might make mine uglier.”

“Hard to imagine,” he sneered, “That might be the ugliest it can get.”

I gave a cold smile. “Have a pleasant summer, Malfoy. Though it’s also a bit hard to imagine anything pleasant when it’s your name involved.”

As we passed by each other, Josie chuckled. She didn’t get to full-blown laughter until we were safe in the dungeons of Hogwarts, nearing the common room.

“Guinevere, you and Malfoy have a problem.” She cackled.
“Don’t I know it.” I muttered, rolling my eyes, “I can only imagine what’ll happen next year when we’ve got both controls under us. Spells’ll be flying like mad, I bet. I better improve my warding...”

Josie snickered. “I can’t wait until you’ve both grown into puberty.”

I made a noise of disgust. “Please don’t make a comment on sexual tension.”

She gave me an innocent look that was obviously fake. “Me?”

I groaned a little. Josie loved teasing me. “I can see it now: every letter you send will ask if me and Malfoy have killed each other or passionately snogged yet. You’ve a sick mind, Josie. A sick, sick mind.”

“You said it.”

“You were thinking it.”

“And you have a ridiculously mature mind. Dirty jokes at twelve? Merlin me.”

Ah. Right. I’d forgotten, so pleased to be talking to Josie this much and this casually — like actual friends instead of allies — that I was supposed to be twelve. Unconsciously, I matched Josie’s seventeen-year-old mindset, bringing more of that nineteen-year-old part of me out. It always happened with her, but we’d never spoken so long that she’d pick up on it this bluntly. I was a little bit of an idiot, and out of practice with interacting with older people who weren’t my family or under my protection.

We were going to part in the common room, though, so we paused in front of the mirror-portal. The grimy glass blended right in to the oddities in the dungeon levels of Hogwarts, the old Celtic designs of intertwining vines and serpents drawing — as always — the Slytherin eye. We made an odd picture, the dark-skinned, model-like, impeccably-dressed Josephine Zabini side-by-side with the short, contrastingly pale, messy, half-blind Guinevere Weasley.

“You will write, won’t you?” Josie asked casually.

I nodded. “I think you should be writing first, since you’ve actually been doing some work for Amelia Bones already. You’re involved in Sirius Black’s trial, aren’t you? I’ve got a vested interest in that, as you know.”

She chuckled. “Yes, you do, don’t you? If you do me a favor, I’ll quietly spread the Ministry report to the school as we leave. That should clear up the loads of questions you’ll be receiving.”

“And I’ll be less harassed on the train. Alright, sure — what favor?”

Josie put on that vampiric smile she was famous for. “When Sirius Black is cleared, direct him to Nicolosia Zabini.”

I felt the blood drain from my face. “What? No! I’m not going to send my well-earned new godfather to your man-eating aunt!”

She threw her head back and laughed as I panicked at the imagery of Sirius being killed for his fortune. Josie crossed her arms and grinned at me. “Dear Guinevere, you don’t think my aunt’s only income is from her late husbands? She’s a lawyer, Guinevere. She specializes in inheritance, wills, and dueling contracts. Your Sirius Black will have a difficult time figuring out his accounts now that he is the Black Paterfamilias, yes?”
What Josie wasn’t saying was that this was her way of repaying her aunt for taking her in, giving
her sanctuary from her parents, who were likely going to disinherit her after she ran from her
wedding. This was her way of telling her aunt ‘thank you’, because if Nicolosia Zabini could help
Sirius through the legal matters of heirship transition to lordship, then Sirius would pay her back
with strong, loyal endorsement; that was something you needed, badly, to stay in business in the
pureblood circles. Crazy Sirius might be, but he was Lord Black — or he would be, with Nicolosia
Zabini’s help.

Hm. Well, I had nothing against Nicolosia Zabini, and I very much liked Josie, so…

(Honestly, this showed a very honorable, good side to Josie, one that I knew was there but she
didn’t display all too often…)

“I’ll suggest it to him.” I said, “But I don’t know if he’ll listen.”

Josie rolled her eyes, scoffing. “Guinevere, I’ve read the reports. Even if it reeks of a coverup by
our beloved Head of House, I don’t doubt that you nursed Black back to health and sanity for all
these months. You’ve got the ear of who’s soon to be a very powerful political figure, and I would
like to capitalize on that.”

I nodded. It sounded cold, but Josie was business-minded. End-goal oriented. That’s what was
admirable about her. “I’ll talk to him, but I don’t control Sirius — he’s my friend. But I’ll do what I
can. Look out for him on your end?”

Josie smiled, just a little. “As much as I can, if you’ll really talk to him. The Ministry is going a
little insane — Skeeter somehow found out that Black never had a trial, and some other reporter,
Flores or other, started digging up the lack of trials from that time. The Ministry’s running around
trying to arrange compensation trials and re-trials and, like Black’s case, trials at all…”

I sighed. “Ah. That’s what Mum meant, me throwing a wrench into the Ministerial order.”

“That you did, Guinevere.”

Shaking my head, I glanced at Josie. “So… you’ll do your best, as long as I do the same?”

Josie stuck out her hand. “Deal.”

I shook it firmly. “Alright. Deal. And, er… call me Lys, won’t you?”

At once, Harper had clambered up on his seat and was rummaging through Dietrich’s trunk, above
Jay, who had slumped back into the mildly comfortable train seat cushion, a second away from
copying Lu and burying his face in his hands to groan. Nate, beside me and next to the window,
was strangely enough not smiling as he looked at my good side, incredulity coloring his features,
and Dietrich was stoic next to me, reading a book.

“Harper… what are you doing?” I asked hesitantly.

He craned his neck around to give me a pitiful glare. “Looking for Dietrich’s copy of Greatest
Magic: Your Child and You!” He yelled hysterically at me, “Because you need a child tethering
spell or an infant monitoring spell and if I can cast a Patronus, I can cast that!”

Dietrich flicked a Stinging Hex at Harper, who yelped but *did* set Dietrich’s trunk back to rights with an apologetic and accusing look towards him.

My Second raised a brow. “I am reading it right now, Harper, you do not need to make a mess of my things.”

I did a double-take, peering over Dietrich’s shoulder to see, yes, he was totally reading a parenting book and looking at the *Helpful Spells* section. There was a ritualistic diagram of the breakdown of the spell glaring out at me. I sent Dietrich a withering look.

“Don’t you dare.” I said.

Harper scrambled over to take a look at the spell, beaming as his eyes roved over the components of the magic. He made an impressed sound. “It’s Grey magic, you’ll probably get it faster than me, Dietrich.”

“Lys.”

I looked up at Lu, who’d pulled his face from his hands and had only managed to croak out my name.

“Yes?” I asked.

Lu leaned forward. “Let me get this straight: Peter Pettigrew, Marked Death Eater, was a rat animagus. He was your brother’s rat. You let him pretend to be a rat because you didn’t trust that he wouldn’t hurt someone if you revealed him.”

I nodded. “Correct.”

He mulled over this, then shrugged. “Right. I’ll take that, since you’re crazy protective over them. I guess I’d rather have an enemy close than not, even if I wouldn’t have the patience you did. Right. Okay. But then… But then you met face-to-face with Sirius Black and, instead of a *Stun and run*, you decided to *help him*?”

My shoulders squared defensively. “He needed help!”

“…Lyssie, what the hell. He didn’t have anything to offer you, why-”

“Correction,” Nate interrupted, “He had a lot to *potentially* offer, so our dear *regina* made a gamble that she could turn that potential into action.”

“What the hell does any of that mean.”

Nate sighed. “I knew you were an idiot, Lucas, but this is just sad.”

“I’LL KILL YOU-”

Jay took advantage of everyone else being busy, catching my eye. “Lyssie,” he started hesitantly, “I think… I think what Lu’s trying to say is that you were very, very careful all these years… And then suddenly you were very, *very* reckless. Regardless of Pettigrew’s guilt, you- you still allowed yourself to be isolated with a crazy, adult *male* wizard. What if he hadn’t been as good of a person as he is?”

I successfully did not glance at Dietrich; *he* knew why I trusted Sirius, since I attributed most of my
actions to my Clairvoyance, but my argument was a bit weak without that context. All I could do was sigh at Jay, shaking my head a little.

“He met me in Hogwarts, Jay. I had my wand, I have my bits of wandless-”

“She may have colors, Lyssie, but Hogwarts cannot protect you the way you think she can,” Jay cut in, voice cold but expression still sincerely worried, “You were alone and isolated and no one knew. Wand or not, he was still a grown man, much bigger than you. The only thing you knew about him was that he broke out of Azkaban, for Merlin’s sake!”

I winced at Jay’s rising voice. He was really pissed about this. Harper and Lu and Nate had quieted, staring between the two of us; it was a rare day when Jay thought he had to speak up like this, and everyone hated being at the end of it. Genuine worry and concern paired with Jay’s mass of deep, shadowy magic rumbling with anger and frustration… No one liked being scolded by him. He didn’t like doing it, either, but he would, because Jay was Jay, and he wanted what was best for everyone.

And then I started getting irritated, because anger was easier — better, sometimes — to feel than fear, and I didn’t like all these lectures when, by most accounts, everything turned out as well as it could’ve.

Not wanting to snap at Jay, I said slowly, “He didn’t attack on sight, so I decided to give him the benefit of the doubt. He could’ve, but he didn’t. I didn’t trust him immediately — I’m not stupid. But we had similar goals and I would’ve reaped quite a bit of benefit by going along with him — he was going to act whether I wanted him to or not, the Gryffindor he is — so I did.”

“Spur of the moment,” Jay accused, voice somewhat returning to its usual soft state.

“Maybe.” I granted, “But the situation was there, and I saw an opportunity to capitalize on it.”

There was a silence.

Then Jay sighed, brushing one of the loose locks of hair behind his ear with more grace than he had right to have. “Sorry,” he said, voice now as soft as ever, “I just… don’t like it, Lys. What you did. But you did what you could’ve, in that situation, and I really am glad you’re alright.”

Guilt rushed in as my previous irritation was forgotten. “Don’t apologize because you thought I was an idiot,” I said, “You have a right to think that and scold me — of course you do. I wasn’t thinking as straight as I made it out to be, anyways; I felt bad for Sirius, so I helped him. Which, yeah, is pretty stupid.”

Jay smiled serenely. “As long as you know.”

Harper and Lu laughed, glad that the tension had dissolved. Nate, for his part, leaned forward eagerly.

“And?” Nate asked, “Did the Memory Ward work?”

“Memory Ward?”

“What’s that?”

Nate looked impatient at Lu and Harper’s questions. “The Legilimencic ritual she told us about. The one our dear leader used to seal Pettigrew’s memories of her Mage Sight, among other things, away.” He answered quickly.
Jay narrowed his eyes. “Was that what you two were working on in that illegal book?”


“Sollertia Augurium,” I clarified, “part memoir, part research journal, by Helvynya Prevett.”

Nate grinned. “She’s brilliant. How you managed to get a copy with your family, Lyssie, I’ll forever wonder…”

Lu paled. “Th-That’s the bloody thing you bought from the cambion, isn’t it?”

“Cambion?” Nate asked, interested.

“You don’t know about it?”

“Unfortunately not… Do tell, Lucas…”

So that led to all of us having to explain to Nate that I’d bought Sollertia Augurium from a Legilimency-based cambion in the depths of Knockturn Alley with blood and memories. He was quite excited to hear what a fucking criminal I was, disappointed that I did more sneaky, shady things than he did at the moment. And then, turnabout, Nate and I had to explain to the rest of them the particulars of the Memory Ward and its translation. It was lucky that no one thought I was a little paranoid, locking Pettigrew’s memories of that ability and other things away; once Jay had added that the Department of Mysteries really did keep track of Seers and Soothsayers, requiring their mandatory cooperation after making them sign secrecy contracts, even the easy-going Lu had agreed that the Memory Ward was a good choice — even if the Ministry knew I was a Soothsayer now, them not being able to access the details of my ability was always a good idea. My boys were Slytherins; they had a healthy respect for secrets.

So now there were five versions of the story of June’s first full moon: (1) the Ministry one, (2) the true one I’d given to Alby and subsequently my family where I’d fudged the details of the Memory Ward, (3) the truest one that I, Sirius, and Dietrich were aware of, (4) the truer version without Clairvoyance but with a proper Memory Ward, for my boys — and (5) whatever was for the rest of the school, or at least Slytherin, that Josie was spreading right now. God, this was so much simpler last year with the Chamber of Secrets. There was the truth and then what everyone else was told, and the rumor mills took that from there.

“And because I’m tired of dramatics over secrets, I’ll tell you this right now: yes, there are things I’ve hidden from you. No, I’m not disclosing them. But trust me, I’ve got Dietrich’s approval this time, so rest assured, I’m not keeping more secrets just for the hell of it.” I finished off dryly.

They all had bits of tension melting away when I finished; Dietrich looked smugly pleased with himself, still reading the damn parenting book, Lu and Harper’s shoulders slackened, Jay actually put out a relieved sigh, and Nate’s smirk widened into a more genuine grin. These little shits. How much had I worried them, going off on my own and coming back more hurt than ever?

It was Lu that broke the more pleased silence.

“Er… Lys?”

I nodded to him. “Yeah?”

He hesitated, reluctant to pull out his words. “Er… You said… You said you know wandless pretty good now, don’t you? And when you go see the cambion and get your head fixed, you’ll probably be even better.”
I quirked my lips up. “Yeah. Sirius and I messed the ritual up really badly. Bet a Legilimencic cambion’s the only one that’ll know what we did and how to fix it, if we can.”

Lu nodded determinedly. “Right. Right, so, er… Will you and Dietrich start tutoring us? Dietrich on dueling — ‘cos no offense, Lyssie, I’ve seen him practice and I know he’s better than you now — and you on wandless and rituals and such? Or whatever.”

Dietrich had looked minutely pleased to hear that first part, but we glanced at each other in confusion.

“You do not even like schoolwork, Lucas.” Dietrich said, testing the waters.

Lu grimaced. “Yeah, well, the bloody magical characteristics of Wormwood and Bloodroot-Valerian aren’t exactly exciting, are they?”

My Second’s eyes flashed. “Wormwood and Bloodroot-Valerian are the strongest examples of magical crossbreeding, Lucas—”

Lu groaned, cutting Dietrich off. “Oh, bloody hell, I forgot he actually likes Potions.” He turned to me, near-pleadingly. “Lyssie, wandless magic! Wandless magic versus Potions!”

I snorted. I wasn’t that big of a fan of Potions, either. “Yeah, I know. I mean, I’ll be happy to teach all of you what I know, but… Well. Why? And will you all be able to meet with me? Bloodtraitor and the trials and all, remember?”

“Yeah, that might be a problem… But, er… I mean… Well, Lys, it’s just that- that I know I’m not as reliable as Dietrich, yeah, but I think I’m going to lose it if you bloody run off without the rest of us again. I had a bit more warning this year than last, but, er, it’s just—”

Jay, thankfully, saved Lu’s botched attempts at an emotional conversation. “You should be able to rely on us, too.” He said, Lu and Harper nodding enthusiastically in agreement, and Nate tilting his chin in a likewise agreeing nod. “It’s…”

“We want a chance to help you, too!” Harper piped in earnestly.

Jay nodded. “Yes. We want to help you, as much as you help us.”

Nate snorted. “You’ve turned us all into Gryffindor hybrids, Lys. Look at us, a room of Slytherins wanting to pay someone back.” He looked out the window thoughtfully, squinting at the bright sky and fields. “I suppose it would be honorable, pureblood to pureblood, for me to do more to help you than just translating a chapter of a book.”

“What honor do you have, Wilkes?” Dietrich sneered out of reflex.

Nate snapped out a grinning reply, “The kind where I help my liege lord dutifully and quietly instead of running after her and making her split her face open.”

Dietrich colored, and it wasn’t that embarrassed, light pink I had seen a few times.

“You are reading my letters,” he hissed.

Nate smiled innocently. “Hm? Letters?”

“Fils de pute!”

Unlike their normal spats, this one had Dietrich actually chucking a book at Nate, who dodged it
and looked just as surprised at the rest of us, sans Dietrich. Dietrich looked like he was going to murder Nate for good this time. As such, the rest of us turned away from them and let them snarl at each other in a mix of French and English, Dietrich’s language rife with swear words, and Nate laughing at him intermittently.

I caught Lu’s eye.

“Well, if even Nate is asking for you all to be included in my ridiculous drama, how can I say no?”

Lu took a moment to figure that out, then grinned, bright and childlike. “Wandless magic!” he demanded.

I laughed at the eager looks on his and Harper’s faces. “Sure, sure. But… thanks. All of you. I’m really… I really am sorry that you felt like- like I didn’t trust you, or left out, or any of that. I didn’t mean for that.”

“We know you didn’t,” said Jay softly, reaching over to touch at my shoulder, “but you didn’t think about us. You didn’t even weigh our skills and perspectives in to your decision. That’s what we want to fix, Lyssie.”

“I did think about you,” I muttered defensively. Then, seeing Jay’s raised brow, I sighed. “But not to that extent, I suppose. The only person I thought of for help was Nate, and it was him who gave me the idea anyways.”

Nate beamed, eavesdropping as he argued with Dietrich.

“Accidentally,” added Dietrich flatly, obviously also eavesdropping.

I shook my head at their antics. Then I looked at them all. Lu and Harper, side by side, attention focused on me even as they twitched and fiddled their hands, unhappy to be still and focused for so long. Jay, across from me, patiently waiting and sweeping his braid back behind him every so often. Dietrich and Nate, murmuring French (insults) to each other, keeping an eye on the rest of us just in case. The window brightening their faces, the English countryside blurring by that none of them were watching; they were looking at me.

For a moment, I felt ridiculously small and humbled at how they trusted me, still. At their loyalty. Neither of which I ever really expected to get once the Sorting Hat placed me in the den of snakes. But I had it, and even with the physical manifestation of my mistakes and my thoughtlessness and my secret slashed into my face, a beacon of bandages, they were here and waiting for me. And beyond that, Harry and Hermione and Luna were somewhere on the train, none of them my blood, all of them with my secrets in their hearts and their lips sealed shut. And somewhere, in London, Sirius was sitting and awaiting trial and coming home and making up for more than a decade of prison, our minds strung together with red comets and golden fireflies and wolves. And even further, in the warm and cozy and cluttered Burrow, my family would be there, my father and my mother and siblings, waiting to scold me and worry over me and hug me in one breath.

(Stars fell like rain, trailing crimson veils after them, lighting the sky up with red. He looked at the sky with grey, flinty eyes, dark hair tied back from his rough face. The wolf lay by his side, massive enough that its head was near his waist, even laying down. His hand twitched in the dark, like he wanted to lay it on the canine head. The clearing smelled fresh and clean and wind blew on our faces. I could also smell something stale and damp, sweat, the disgusting Potions he had to drink, drying on our lips and running through our veins. )

( not yet. i don’t trust you yet. you can’t ask for trust just because you’re jealous of Lyssie’s
I swallowed at the sudden thoughts, then smiled at my boys.

“We’ll do better next year,” I promised them, promised myself.

“We’d better,” Lu muttered, somewhat to himself and somewhat to all of us, “If we’ve got to fight a bloody dragon or something next year, we’re going to need more than ritual wards for that one.”

Harper grinned. “Maybe it’ll be dementors again! I can help all of you with the Patronus, it’ll be easy. Lysie’s just got to do more Soothsayer helping things and I just have to ask Mum for tips, I’m sure I’ll have a corporeal by next Christmas!”

“Or I can learn Fiendfyre,” grumbled Dietrich, “Not even putain de détraqueurs can withstand Fiendfyre. And they’ll be rightly dead, banni de l’existence, as they should be.”

Jay grimaced. “You’d make me learn it first, and I told myself I wouldn’t teach you anymore fire spells, Dietrich.”

Dietrich’s eyes flashed with panic. “Vous avez dit que vous ne diriez rien!”

Jay winced.

I whipped my eyes up to him, betrayed. “You too?!” I exclaimed, “Do all of you damn people speak French?”

Lu brightened. “I don’t!”

“That is not something to be proud of,” Dietrich drawled. Then glancing at me, he shrugged apologetically. “No offense, my friend.”


Dietrich looked stunned. “You speak Deutsch?”

I gave him a disgusted look. “You knew I spoke a little!”

“Ich hatte vergessen,” muttered my friend grudgingly.

“‘I forgot,’ my arse!” I rolled my eyes. Then I glanced at Lu and Harper who were practically bouncing up and down with all their pent-up energy. Harper was especially looking twitchy. I had to take pity on them. “Alright, you two, you’ve both got the largest cores besides me. ‘Bout the same size, actually. Means you’ll take to wandless more easily than the others.”

They both brightened, Lu more so than Harper.

“We’re starting now?” he asked gleefully.

“Yep. Why wait ‘til next year? I’ve been teaching Harry, too, you know, and we don’t talk all that often. I bet you’ll all shoot past him for a bit.”

“For a bit?”

“Potter’s magical core is crazy,” I told them flatly, “That kid’s going to be powerful.”
Lu clicked his tongue, narrowing his eyes in challenge. Because of course he'd take that as a challenge, goddammit, Lu. “I can take him,” said Lu, not surprising but still surprisingly, "Let’s start, Lyssie! I’m gonna beat Potter's scar in!"

I had to laugh at that, all my boys' sudden rivalry with my Gryffindor friends, and went on for the rest of the train, teaching them all the basics of meditation, finding their core, breathing into it properly, expanding it bit by bit since they didn’t have the benefit of Seer core flexibility like I did. My boys were very attentive at first, which soon dissolved into yelling at each other and laughing uncontrollably and at one point I had to sit back and just braid Jay’s hair to calm down, but it was good. They were going to be strong; strong enough to protect themselves from whatever was coming, strong enough that I wouldn’t have to brush them aside in an effort to keep them safe.

Lu wasn’t too far off the mark, after all. There’d be dragons next year. Dragons and merpeople and Sphinxes, and perhaps I wouldn't be the one fighting them, but it was just another level up in the slow escalation. And at the end, there'd be the Dark Lord, hiding and sneaking with his wand at our backs, at my family's throats. There’d be all sorts of things next year, and I was going to be ready for it. We all were.

END OF ARC THREE :: THE PRISONER OF AZKABAN
Chapter 44

Chapter Notes

so, uh... happy Tuesday, everybody... and New Year...

...Yeah, so my 'little break' became, like, four months. Yeah... My bad.

BUT! News and updates and other things below, if you'd like to read 'em! If not, go right ahead to the chapter, I've kept y'all waiting long enough. :'}

Still reading? Okay. So. I'm really, really sorry it took me this long to finally start up arc 4. I can't say it'll really be more quality because of the wait since I did not work on it at all this entire 4 month period of silence. :'D Yeah. I DID, however, post a 3-chapter long thing in the outtake series, and the reviews thus far have been positive, so if you haven't seen that yet, check it out. :D

I got some major (MAJOR) writer's block and managed to shake the most of it off with that 3-part outtake, thank god, and the rest of my inactivity is due to me being sick, having a lot to do, and then packing up all my stuff and going abroad for a semester. Uh-huh. You read that right, fellas: I'm in a different country! XD With that in mind, I hope I'll be able to update at least twice a month, sometime on a Tuesday in my new timezone, but if I don't, well... this is why. I'm studying abroad and trying to learn another language, among other things.

Anywho. I swear this chapter wasn't going to be this dramatic, but... eh. I had to cut out a lot of winding down stuff from last arc, so I've pushed some of it here. ALSO. EXTRA LONG CHAPTER YAY!

...

It was the only chance I’d have, and we all knew how I was with gambling.

Ginny was peaceful in her own bed, the rise and fall of her chest rhythmic, echoing in her colors. She was normally a light sleeper — my fault, I think — but I knew how to sneak about. I was careful to close our door and miss the creakiest step, padding to the bathroom with barely any trouble; only a near miss with the banister, since it was in my blind spot.

Contrary to what Lu told me a few weeks prior, the healing didn’t take quite as long as a normal Muggle injury would. Even if Healers’ magic couldn’t affect the wound directly, there were a number of things they could do — potions they could make — to increase my natural healing. Not too much, since that stuff was highly addictive and dangerous in large doses, not to mention expensive, but enough to help me along. My St. Mungo’s Healer, Healer Fortinbras — who I
didn’t like nearly as much as I did Madam Pomfrey, of course — had Floo-called yesterday to tell my family that my bandages could come off… well, today.

We’d all gone to sleep with the unspoken agreement that we’d all get a look at my face tomorrow morning. Thing about unspoken agreements, though?

Well. If you didn’t like the way they were, you could break them with almost no consequence.

Or with consequences you could live with.

God, I don’t think I’d been alone in weeks. Three weeks, actually. Incidentally, it had been three weeks since I’d left Hogwarts and my boys. And three weeks since I’d been able to send more than the cursory ‘Hi, how are you’ to Dietrich and Harper with a subtle message that it wasn’t safe to talk about Real Stuff (e.g. *Sollertia Augurium*, Slytherin *potesta* plans, dueling tips, experimental spell crafting stuff, *Clairvoyance stuff*). Three weeks since I’d been able to see out of my left eye, or just about.

Three was the canine’s number and it sucked, because I really liked canines of all sorts, but I was really starting to hate the number 3.

I ducked into the cramped, much-too-small-to-be-shared bathroom and shut the door behind me quickly, wincing as I flicked the lights on. My reflection grimaced with me, half her face taken up by white gauze. I was tanner than I was when I’d just gotten the wounds, from running around in the sun so much, and my hair had grown past my ears and was nearer to my chin. Ergh. The wounds stung just lightly enough to remind me they were there; I had an odd feeling that it was a half-moon tonight. Maybe a few days over half. Gibbous.

(The wolf paced restlessly across the clearing, mindlessly vaulting over the growing stream. It circled around, dark fur pressing through fine blades of grass, firefly light glinting off its eyes. There was a dripping sound, the feel of sweat on my forehead and slicking my hair, a tiredness that wasn’t mine, a creeping fear—)

I touched at my bandages.

The girl in the mirror smirked, and it didn’t even hurt.

“No time like the present, Lyssie,” I told myself, pinching at my bandages and pulling.

The white was unwound from my face, and I’d forgotten how light and cool it felt without having cloth and gauze wrapped around you. Funnily enough, the first thing I noticed by the time I’d dumped the used bandages on the floor was the skin tone difference; a swath of pale skin crawled up my neck and face like I was the Phantom of the Opera, making my freckles look darker there, even though they were all the same across the two skin tones.

But then I *did* see the scars.

There were four. The longest, a central one, began at the side of my neck and carved a ragged, angry line up and diagonally, ending just before it hit the center of my eye. It was framed by parallel lines, three of them, a claw mark that dug into my paler skin and was a brighter red than my own Weasley hair. Jagged and crooked and almost blinding me, stark against my face, four lines of varying lengths where Moony had swiped my face upwards. The bottom left quadrant of my face was dominated, the lowest wound going through the corner of my lip.

I blinked at the scars, which tore through pale skin and darker freckle alike, and then gently reached up to touch the longest one. It was rougher than my normal skin, raised, but it only
throbbed when I tentatively pressed at it. I winced at the feeling, saw the girl in the mirror do the same, her blue eyes bright with all the autumn colors all around her, even the off-white of her skin.

No wonder people always remarked on my eyes. They were like neon lights, compared to the rest of me.

Now I had four streaks of angry red on my face, too; in a way, they were brighter.

“Alright. Alright,” I breathed, “This isn’t so bad, yeah?”

That was true. It could’ve gone through my eye. I could be half blind. It could be messier lines, instead of these relatively straight ones. The color could be like Harry’s basilisk scar, making the skin translucent and the veins and wound black, like scabs that’d never heal. It could be much, much uglier. And what did I care about looks, anyways? What did that matter, really, when my only business was taking care of mine, making sure we all lived through the war?

“Yeah. This isn’t so bad.” I answered myself.

But even as I said that, there was a faint sense of mourning, and I knew very well what that felt like. I wondered if Tom would sneer at my face, or if he would nod to the scars. He’d probably do something unexpected.

My boys were easy to predict, in contrast. It sent a jolt of hurt in my chest, felt like my guts were curling in on themselves. My stomach was a black hole, and my breath came in unsteadily for it. Alone in harsh bathroom lights and a tiny room cluttered with too many sibling’s belongings, it was jarring and I felt like my vision was too sharp.

I missed my boys so much it ached.

They were also easy to predict, but their reactions were…

Well.

Dietrich would get fussy but he’d ignore it. We had other things to worry about. Harper would earnestly tell me I was pretty anyways and distract me with Patronuses. Lu would raise a brow but go on, probably complain that if I didn’t care about scars so much I should be playing more Quidditch or something. Nate would grin and say something vaguely insulting or complimentary, then refuse to give me back my Sollertia Augurium. Jay would offer to style my hair so the scars were hidden, if I wanted, but he’d focus on my eyes when I said no, not the scars.

I was flooded with embarrassment and shock and, at the thought of my friends, longing. It was all mixing together in weird ways, my eyes trained on the gouges in my face still slightly inflamed from healing, the damp of the pale skin there, the way the marks sliced through my Weasley freckles… My stomach curled and my hands were clenching, wishing for something to hold. I almost felt a bit dizzy. Like I was having a bout of lightheadedness, combined with a crushing grief that I didn’t know why it was there. It was…

Merlin. I was on the verge of a breakdown or something.

Goddammit, they were just scars — why did it matter? It was obnoxiously irrational, to react like this.

(it’s not Lyssie. it’s not irrational)

Something to distract me. Someone.
(And it was clearer than ever, the voice, because we’d learned very quickly how to talk to each other, when the only company we could really keep was each other. Honestly and truthfully and comfortably, I’d only had Sirius to complain to and vice versa. About different things, but still; being in each other’s heads made it hard not to empathize.)

Oh thank god, you’re lucid.

(A smile, yellow and crooked and surrounded by five o’clock shadow, but true.)

(come on in, Lyssie. i think you need some peace)

I sighed. Another thing I had to think about. Another problem that needed to be addressed. But really, with me visiting our mindscape every other night when the nightmares got a little too rough — not purposefully, mind — and with sometimes getting flashes of Sirius’ thoughts and voice and line of sight and hearing throughout the day, which was refreshing since I wasn’t allowed out of the Burrow or my siblings’/parents’ sight… It was nice. I was getting used to the connection.

Peace? I’m surprised you, Sirius Black, even know the word.

(A laugh in my head.)

I closed my eyes.

... 

With the dark of the field and forest, lit up with flickering fireflies, and the stream having widened into something that was still and flat and smooth, silt and smooth stones on my feet and calves, it was like I was standing in the sky. The sky was dark and the stars were duller, and I recognized the cold of the breeze as something unhealthy in our mind. My river was rippling with it, even as the tall grass itched at my bare arms, trying to distract me.

The werewolf was standing in the woods, behind a barrier we couldn’t see, the woods pushed against the meadow.

Sirius was on the banks, not touching the water, looking at me.

“You’re not usually the one who needs comfort.”

I blinked at him. The sky was still bright enough that I could see Sirius as he was. Not the prisoner’s uniform I’d first seen him in — and not nearly as filthy and disheveled as he had been, back then — but his robes were plain, paired with a T-shirt stained with sweat and drawstring sweats that were loose. No shoes, bags under his eyes, and the sort of yellow-ish, green-ish tint to his surface-most veins that spoke of frequent potions. The only exceptions to that pigment were the scars, the clawmarks and ridges curving in and out, reddish-pink; nothing huge that crossed his face, like the faint ones Lupin had, but fierce, rigid marks that ducked in and out of the edges, framing his expression and looking painful.

“You look like you need more help than I do,” I retorted easily.

He smiled, because he always smiled. It stretched his new scars and I wondered what I’d look like now, because I forgot to check and smile.
“You felt like you needed more help than I do.”

I wanted to say something sassy or snarky or anything else, but it was hard to bluster about or lie or anything when your very minds were twisted together. The sky was already brighter, bursting with color that brushed across the dark gently, splattered with white stars. There were more fireflies, too, and the werewolf… well, I hadn’t realized how irritated the werewolf was until he calmed down, sitting on the border with his ears tilted back. My mind was already calming down, and I felt tendrils of Sirius’ consciousness poking at mine, his colors rolling around mine, like a cat weaving between its human’s feet. He was trying to project peace and calm onto me, and our shared mindscape wouldn’t let me hide that it was working perfectly.

Sirius’ eyes brightened with glee, and I shook away faint embarrassment.

“I think I almost had a panic attack. Is this your influence?” I teased him.

He shook his head solemnly, though. “I hope not.”

The full implications of my joke hit me. Sirius’ mental instability influencing me, just as my stability influenced him? That was not a good thought. My smile faded, and I shrugged. “I’m hitting puberty,” I said reasonably, “Panic attacks might just been a thing of mine now. I’m surprised I’m not more fucked up than I already am.”

“So am I, after having a taste of your nightmares and visions.”

“You’re not supposed to be getting those. This has got to be some sort of— I dunno, but you’re not supposed to be getting those! The entire point of a Clairvoyant having a leg up in the Mind Arts is to prevent this sort of systemic abuse!”

I would be much angrier if it wasn’t Sirius who was abusing the system.

…it if Sirius didn’t know me so well and I didn’t know him so well that I knew he’d never betray me, use my visions without my input.

…it if I weren’t so firmly rooted in his head that I’d be able to see it if he tried.

Sirius tilted his head to one side, smirk coming back. There was something a little fixed about it, though, a tightness to his eyes that I could spot and feel all at once. Ah… he’d heard that, or sensed it somehow. He was better about picking up details from me than I was with him, after all. He heard me and he disapproved. I sighed. It was hard to hide thoughts here, more than anywhere else. Even the smallest things, the things you don’t really think about, the things that are automatic.

“Sorry.” I muttered.

I felt his surprise at my quiet word. Then a sense of falling. Of regret.

I frowned at him. “There’s no need for that.”

He stepped into the water, which had been still but rippled as he found a foothold in the stones. It was easier, if your feet were bare. He was clumsy as he approached me, regret and a hint of shame still lingering in his chest and his face. I was as familiar with him as I could be, really; I knew his expressions and felt his emotions closer than anyone but himself. For example: Sirius always had a thing about putting his hands on my shoulders or on the top of my head, comforting me like a kid, because barely anyone ever did that for him when he was younger, but when they did — Uncle Sevens and Uncle Alphard, usually — it comforted him.
He did that now, a hand on my head, stooping down a bit to meet my eyes more easily.

“My parents tried to make me ashamed of being a Gryffindor for years,” Sirius said to me gently, that same tone he used to say the most important things he knew, “I don’t want you to be ashamed of being a Slytherin. I don’t want to be them. And more than that, I don’t want you to be ashamed of trying to protect yourself the only way you know.”

My mouth was twitching into a smile. A relieved smile, probably. “Distrustfully?”

“Cunningly.” Sirius corrected, gentle expression relaxing into his usual grin, which was similar to my own. We shared smiles, now that I thought about it. There were some new scars, punching through his five o’clock shadow and not quite reaching his nose, pulling and made his skin go pale around them, like mine, but more numerous and not as large. They were still healing, but we both knew they’d begin to fade; a werewolf’s body was more resistant than a humans’ to the permanence of the marks of claws and teeth. I resolutely ignored them once I realized I was almost staring.

(I didn’t want others looking at my scars, some mixture of willful ignorance and denial and shame and pride and awe for the marks being born in my chest already — why should I subject Sirius to the same thing?)

“Using others?” I prompted further, joking.

There was a hint of mischief in Sirius’ eyes. “Doing what’s best for you and yours…”

Oh. That was very familiar. I swallowed a lump in my throat. “…and what’s fair for everyone else.”

Sirius nodded. “Exactly that.”

And you haven’t peeked at any of mine?

(I remembered James’ arm swung around my neck, heads knocking together, the snow pelting down on us, stolen butterbeers in our hands, fingers warm with it. I was sixteen and it was Hogsmeade weekend and he kept chasing after Lily-flower like a moron. We snuck a bit of Firewhiskey because Madam Rosmerta liked a flirt if your name was Black or Potter, and James’ cheeks were red with cold and alcohol.)

(Stop.)

Whatever, Sirius.

“You’re one of mine, you know that, right, Sirius?”

“We’re pack, kid,” Sirius said firmly, “and just so you know, those scars… They don’t mean failure. They don’t mean weakness. And they don’t mean you can’t change Fate. It’s all the opposite, you dumb snake.”

Should’ve known you would’ve picked up on how I felt about them.

“Oh, thanks, I really needed that. Being called a dumb snake.”

Sirius grinned, and to me, his teeth seemed sharper, eyes seemed to shine with other-world-ness.
“You’re going to get coddled enough with those, kid,” he said, nodding at the left of my face, at my new scars that matched his real nicely, “Here’s what you need to know: you’re a dumb snake if you think the scars mean anything but the fact that you’re a good, amazing kid with a backbone of bloody steel and a will of dragon diamond. Got that? And no one else’s opinion matters unless they align with mine. I’m Sirius Black, after all.”

**Yeah. You should’ve.**

I laughed, reaching up to grab Sirius’ hand with both of mine and hiding my snorts with my hair, which was too bloody long.

“You’re ridiculous, Sirius.”

“Yeah, yeah, kid, we both know you love me.”

I rolled my eyes, and looked up at him. The ache was gone; the ache that wanted someone, something to… hold on to. This was all in my head but it felt real and solid and better. I wondered if this is what I was for him, normally. “Thanks, Sirius.” I said softly.

He beamed. Cheerful to my seriousness. Heh. “Anything for my littler partner. See you at the trial?”

*Tomorrow — the trial, our thoughts chimed as one, Tomorrow — the trial.*

“That’s why Alby paid for my potions, after all. Best see what Pettigrew did to me in full, huh?”

“Then your half-demon friend after.”

“If my family lets me, but yeah. Can’t have you splashin’ around in my Clairvoyance.”

“And hopefully I’ll be free by then, I’ll be able to come with you.”

“We’ll see about that. St. Mungo’s has been gossiping about how much they’d love to study you if your trial come through, which is likely, with how the Prophet has been taking our side. Alby’s side, that is.”

“Dumbledore has influence. And you’re an incorrigible eavesdropper.” We shared another smile at his rolled eyes. “See you on the other side, kid.”

“Call me if you need anything. I meditate a lot. I can be here in a heartbeat if you need me.”

He nodded as I squeezed his fingers.

“I know, Lyssie.”

…

When I opened my eyes the bathroom lights were just as harsh but there was light under the door now. Guess I’d been indisposed for a few hours? Mind magic bullshit was weird like that — sometimes it stretched time out, sometimes it felt like it was skipping tracks at a time. I normally stretched time with my meditation, but my and Sirius’ mental link thing was still new and didn’t play to the same Occlumency rules.
Well, then. The sun rose kinda quick since it was summer, but Ginny’d be sleeping, still.

I couldn’t resist looking at the mirror again as I made to leave the bathroom, as tidy as when I’d come in. Four parallel marks, curving up nearly half my face, slicing the barest side of my mouth and trying its damned best to get to my eye, bright and angry. Paired with a round, freckled face that wasn’t sure whether it was going through puberty or not, and my intense resting expression — made more intense with how piercing the blue of my eyes was — it painted an intimidating picture. Maybe this would offset my shortness; make me a bit easier to respect when I went back to Hogwarts and, more specifically, to Slytherin House.

Or maybe I’d just be a source of gossip and spiteful insults. It could go either way.

I sighed, tore my eyes away from my reflection, and snuck back down to my room.

The door opened to a blast of familiar magic, writhing and spiking and very much awake, and my sister staring at me, looking as if she were about to open the door herself. Probably to look for me, having woken up to my absence. I stilled in shock, suddenly caught and feeling very vulnerable. Probably not as much as she was, though, going by her expression.

“You took off your bandages without me?”

Ginny’s eyes were blown wide, and I was close enough that I could see how bright they were. In my last life, my eyes were dark enough that they looked black from this far away; it was only when I went nose-to-nose with a mirror that my eyes could’ve been that brown. Traces of honey in them. Shine the light just right, and they’d be hazel. Hazel-brown and freckles and cheeky smiles and Ginny, my twin, my sister, who looked betrayed as she stared at my scars.

Well. That’s a little dramatic.

But Ginny and I both were, weren’t we?

Technically, she probably took after me. I’d always been dramatic, this life and the last. Slytherin only made it worse.

“I took off my bandages without anyone.” I confirmed, tired and wary.

( except for me )

Well, you’re always the exception, though, aren’t you, Sirius? Special snowflake.

( oh, shut up )

Ginny’s expression twitched with hurt. But because she was a Weasley, and my sister, her eyes glinted with anger and her face began to redden with it as well. She would be ferocious when she was grown into herself; her anger burned as it was, but one day, it would spark, too. Ginny was as fiery as her hair.

“You said we’d be together for this.” Ginny said darkly.

“Well, you’re always the exception, though, aren’t you, Sirius? Special snowflake.”

( oh, shut up )

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“You said we’d be together for this.” Ginny said darkly.

“Well, you’re always the exception, though, aren’t you, Sirius? Special snowflake.” I countered her, trying to be gentle.

BANG!
The door slammed open fully, making me jump, my eyes drawn to my sister’s clenched fingers, to the hand that had near cracked the door.

“Why do you always do this?”

Her voice had risen to nearly a shriek, which I winced at.

I opened my mouth to reply, but she cut me off with a glare that was so Mum-like I was alarmed.

“And don’t say something like, ‘Do what?’ because I know you’d say some bloody garbage like that, when you know exactly what I’m talking about!”

Being accused was not fun. Being accused and not quite understanding why was less so. The dreadful curl of anger settled in my throat, sliding down to my stomach. This is not what I needed. This is not what I wanted, right after having to use Sirius’ mind to stabilize mine. Why did this have to happen right now?

My growing snappishness bled into my voice. “It’s not like I can go back in time and not take off my bandages.”

Ginny’s fury morphed into an exasperated annoyance. “This isn’t about that, Lyssie,” she hissed. And then it was back into anger, raw and shrill to listen to. “This is about how you don’t trust any of us! This is about how you trust your friends — your friends with Death Eater names — more than you trust your twin sister! This is about how whenever- This is- I know I was an immature brat in first year, ignoring you and- and everything, but you can’t just- I thought you trusted me again and now-”

I felt my teeth grind in my jaw as her face crumpled and her eyes went wet and glassy. I hated it when she or Mum cried. I never knew what to do. I felt cornered and out of place and I wanted to curl up somewhere and not think about this sudden confrontation, this sudden drama. Magical cores were crowding around the stairs and landings, drawn to the noise and the morning light, and I was on the spot and tired, caught on the back-foot and never affording a chance to recover, being yelled at by a barely-teenage girl for almost no reason.

And then those words.

Death Eater names.

As if my boys were lesser than my family because of their last names. As if this was their faults or something. My boys, who I hadn’t been able to talk to properly for so long. Much of it was my fault, busy with Sirius these long months, but… But I already couldn’t write Nate and Lu and Jay because their families didn’t condone their friendship with a bloodtraitor, and now I was limited in what I could tell Harper and Dietrich as well. And it was because my family was practically screening my mail, and everything I spoke to my boys of were things that would send up red flags to my Light, Gryffindor parents.

This would be so much easier if I were born to a Dark or Grey family. Not that I wanted that, but… But sometimes I thought about it, and…

Sirius, I think I want to go back.

(not this time, partner. you can’t always run away)

Says the Gryffindor.
I could either panic and start crying and pouring my heart out and being weak, or I could get angry. Because I was angry, Ginny was trying to push me into whatever the hell she wanted. I was used to giving in to her, I was used to letting her talk me into pranks on our brothers or sweet-talking Mum into more sweets or getting what she wanted from Percy and Bill or any other small, tiny things. But this? Screaming at me, eyes on my scars and nearly crying, demanding something abstract and ambiguous and impossible? Pushing me into spilling my guts, into tipping my hand?

It went against every instinct I possessed.

Fuck this, honestly.

I pulled on every experience I had as parvus potesta reigning. As Slytherin queen, playing word games with people she didn’t like. I smiled the way Josie Zabini smiled at students she thought weren’t worth the dirt on her shoes.

If she was going to lash out at me, I was going to reciprocate.

(And if part of this vindictiveness was hurt and shock and likely newly-budding hormones, well, at least I was playing the role of twelve-year-old girl really well, wasn’t I? I had always, after all, let Ginny do everything first before I followed. She was how I learned to blend in to this world, freshly reborn and instinctively terrified of discovery. But I tried not to think of that, because those were tender memories and I didn’t want to be comforted or mollified — I wanted to snarl and posture and win.)

“I don’t know what you want me to do.” I said calmly, knowing the distance in my expression and manner was more hurtful than helpful.

“Trust me!” she shouted, frustrated, falling into my trap.

(This was why pureblood heirs went through Occlumency training. Get someone else pissed enough, they’d dance to your tune as long as you were calmer. I was well-practiced in having to provoke people into dancing for me. It was easier the better I knew them. And I knew Ginny very, very well.)

“That’s not something you can demand or bully from me.” I retorted before I could think about it.

“…Bully?”

Her anger seemed to dissipate with that word. As I’d thought.

I gave her a cold look, then turned on my heel, completely unsurprised at the siblings and parents scattered on the landing and stairs, watching the show. The twins and Ron were clustered up above, looking small and quiet as they stared down at me. Mum and Dad were closest, as if they wanted to run into the bedroom to drag us both out, give hugs and talks and smooth things over. Percy looked as if he’d been downstairs and was about to come up. The house was filled with early morning light, yellow and new and summery, and I felt a black hole in my stomach again.

I looked at all of them, feeling vicious and angry and trapped.

Their eyes all jumped to my scars. Ginny could barely take her eyes off of them.

(Willful ignorance and denial and shame and pride and awe.)

(Willful ignorance and denial and shame.)
These were my wounds. These were my mistakes, my triumphs, my scars. My family hadn’t given an inch to me the past few weeks, and while I couldn’t blame them, it absolutely grated. I’d become extremely accustomed to independence, to leadership; being watched 24/7, being asked where I was going and how long every time I passed someone in the kitchen, being banned from Diagon Alley or my friends’ houses or anything else…

Honestly, I was angry. I didn’t say so to their faces, because yes, I understood — I’d gotten into trouble again, and this time I had scars to prove it. But I hated being chained down like this, playing nice like this, being watched and followed like this. Everything I did, it was eventually and initially for their sakes, why couldn’t they just…? But I knew the answer to that, too, so I didn’t say a thing.

(Why couldn’t they just trust me?)

(But I knew the answer to that, too. I was a hypocrite and I knew that. I’d always been one.)

“You can’t bully and demand trust,” I said quietly. You manipulate it. “I haven’t been able to see my friends. I haven’t been able to go to the town. If I step into the field or to the pond, I have everyone with me. You check my letters. I don’t understand why you’re punishing me when I’ve already been punished by Fate for what I did. And now I can’t even own my own scars, my own face. I’m tired of it.”

I pushed past Percy gently, my last statement ringing more true than I’d thought. I was extremely tired, suddenly, and my cold anger had faded into a twisted sort of regret and shame. I’d just treated Ginny like a Slytherin enemy. My sister, who was, yes, brattishly expecting that I’d bow to her whims and we’d be best fucking friends as she nursed me to health or something, but who was also worried out of her mind. But I shoved that down, because my words weren’t something I wanted to take back right now — maybe not ever, the prideful little snake I was — and I made to go to the kitchen, to the door, hopefully catch a bit of solitude before my family shook themselves of their shocked stupor.

“I’ll be at my stream,” I murmured, refusing to turn around to see what sort of impact my words had. I didn’t want to see it physically; I could hear it in the wilting core songs, sense the shrinking colors. That was bad enough.

Ugh.

Fuck, I lost my temper. And not in the explosive way, which was always tinted with a bit of inhibition, or the emotional way, which was heartfelt and usually made me extremely uncomfortable but did clear up the air, but the way I lost it when people annoyed the shit out of me and I wanted to put them in their place. The Slytherin way. The way that meant I lashed out and said all the things that I knew would hurt the most.

Tinged with truth, because this was my family, but still.

I started walking faster when I slipped out the kitchen door, carelessly leaving the top and bottom of it disconnected and both parts swinging wildly as I quickly tried to free myself of the Burrow. It was almost light and clean and airy in my house, despite the clutter and homeliness that seemed to just be British — or European? it certainly wasn’t a look I’d peg as American — but I felt stifled now. I’d just fucked with the heads of my own family — more than anyone, Ginny, my twin sister — and I needed to get out to process this.

Was I wrong? I called into my head.
I knew he was listening. He was always there when I was having a hard time, and vice versa.

*(hard to say, kid. i understand why you did that, though)*

He would knew better than anyone.

*But was I wrong to say those things? Act like that?*

*(you’ve been feeling as trapped as i have, Lyssie. and i’ve been in a ministry detention cell. something was bound to give. i’m not the best person to ask family advice from anyways. you know what happened with mine)*

Images of Sirius leaving his home forever when he was only sixteen flooded my head. The finality of the door slamming. Regulus’ impassive face, staring from the stairs. Mother shrieking that he’d better not come home unless he’d emptied his head of those bloodtraitor ideas and cut the Mudbloods out of his life. Feeling free and hurt and lost and hearing a cluster of motorcycles drive by as he stared at the street. The BANG! of the Knight Bus.

I saw these things and felt shadows of Sirius’ emotions — muted by the connection, the foreignness, the age of them — and had already made it through the fields of grass and into the tree line of my expansive backyard by the time he’d withdrawn the connection. It was hard to say if anything he or I did was good or bad; we were no longer objective, when it came to the other.

*God, I just don’t want to think about it,* I thought with a sigh, taking deep breaths of the light woods — upturned earth and morning dew and all of these familiar, familiar things — and feeling calmer for it.

*(excellent. we’ve got lots of things to think about. or you do, because they’re about to put me on potions again)*

Sirius’ cell was a plain square of off-white walls and stone floor — no cracks or seams to exploit, just smooth stone poorly charmed to warm his bare feet when he walked around — and a steel door with a cat-flap they used to feed him. I heard the squeak of hinges and saw the unappetising meal of porridge and a stale bread bun, a tray stained with rust and lacking utensils, four vials of potions rolling next to a cup of water. His hands reached forward, and I felt the disgust/resignation towards the potions. We figured out one was definitely a magic suppressant — it made both of us itch and feel unsuited to our own skins — one was a fast-acting sedative with a few Dreamless Sleep properties that Sirius hadn’t asked for but took (grudgingly) anyways, and the other two were probably a sedative and a terrible, cheap-grade nutrient supplement or a shitty Calming Draught.

*Going to sleep it off?*

*(well Dumbledore is representing me and we both know the man is very hands-off so i doubt i’ll be getting a visit today)*

Bitter. I understood that, too.

*I told you about Nicolosia Zabini, didn’t I? She might make a better lawyer for you.*

*(and a prettier one, too. BUT. first off, Nicolosia Zabini an inheritance and assets lawyer. secondly, i don’t want to die mysteriously leaving the entirety of the Black fortune to her and her baby Slytherin spiderling)*

We both snorted.
Oh, drink your potions, you stupid mutt.

(i resent that. and it’s wolf now, brat)

I resent that, too. Good night, Sirius. Bottoms up, huh?

(you’ll be okay, Lyssie, your family will understand, you should’ve actually told them how you were feeling trapped before, but they’ll understand)

Should I apologize?

(for lashing out. but for the manipulations? Lyssie, what did i just tell you about that?)

I paused. This… was an odd thing to hear. I seemed to live off of odd, specific advice. Don’t go out of your way to help others, little queen. Be selfish, little queen. And…

To not be ashamed of what I am.

…manipulate to your heart’s content, little queen.

(good girl. they’ll understand)

Acrid tastes in our throat, and then Sirius’ presence faded from my head for the moment — he might come back, he might not, it all depended on if he fought the effects of the potions or not— and I was sitting with my toes in the water. It was cold enough and I was bare enough that my skin was raising goosebumps. I felt my emotions doing all sorts of weird things in my chest, tugging between shame and guilt and the ferocious need not to feel those, mingling a little with some soft affection for Sirius, exhaustion, and that freshly-returned ache to see my friends and ask their advice. Dietrich, specifically.

He’d understand better, be able to think more clearly since he was removed from the situation. Whether I was looking for condemnation or gratification, I couldn’t tell at the moment, but I missed my friend. I’d been expecting to be able to see him much more while I was healing, to be able to write, but everything I wrote was being read — in case I was planning more crazy shit, my family claimed, and not in those words for most of them — so I couldn’t…

I had no doubt whatsoever that if they knew Dietrich was aware of my Clairvoyance, they’d Obliviate him. Mum and the twins and Ginny might be swayed, with a lot of persuasion, but Percy and Ron and Dad wouldn’t budge. They did what they had to do to protect me; Percy and Dad had a ruthless single-mindedness to them when I came into the picture that made sure they’d follow through, and Ron was hot-headed and obstinate enough to follow.

I’d Seen it, after all.

Maybe in the future, they’d be more accepting of my decisions… But now? With these scars?

You want to know how to cast an Oblivate?

Out of curiosity, yes. It’s Dark, which I didn’t know before. I thought it was Light for some reason.

As the Ministry wishes you to think, no doubt. You and the rest of the wizarding world. The Memory Charm, Light. No, Guinevere… Grey-Dark. Part invocation of a outside party, part Mind Arts, and much of it the will to dominate another’s hold on themselves.

Hold on themselves?
We are made of our memories, Guinevere. To take away a memory is to take away a piece of a person. An Obliviate? Simply a mental attack spell, dressed up as the Ministry’s favorite tool of protection.

Ironic, coming from the memory preserved in a diary.

Quite. Now, you’ll find its ritualistic breakdown in the standard editions I recommended before...

Stop.

Erasing a memory was erasing a part of a person. Killing a part of them, even the most minuscule amount.

I wouldn’t let that happen, not to Dietrich.

(And perhaps some of my animosity was born from Seeing such a thing, understanding such a thing. My family would go through great lengths to protect me, regardless of how I shouted at them to stop, pleaded with them to leave my friend alone. Every time, Dad and Percy pushed past me grimly, Ron on their heels with a regretful — but not nearly enough — glance my way. I feared Dietrich’s death now, right alongside theirs, and so my nightmares liked to include that what-if now.)

(Vision of my family’s deaths instilled paranoia and viciousness into me. Visions of Dietrich’s harm hardened me against them. Again, it came down to Clairvoyance and how it fucked with my mind, twisted me this way and that. If Fate had a physical incarnation, I’d spit in her face, and it wouldn’t make up for even a fraction of the shitstorm she’d saddled me with since re-birth.)

And I guess this separation from Dietrich, this implied threat towards him, bled into all other aspects of my isolation. Leaving me angry, spiteful, vengeful, and itching to get out; all things I felt I couldn’t be justified to feel, since my family was the core of me, the foundation of my life and my personality. Which just led to more frustration on both our parts, because I shut my mouth and stewed and they didn’t get why I was clamming up and sulking — in short, I guess.

Hah.

In a way, my Occlumency skills shot through the roof because of Sirius. And having someone to bounce thoughts and ideas off of really helped me focus on how to piece my mind out, figure shit out. I probably owed him as much as he owed me, for this mental stabilization trick.

I just wished my only outlet from the source of my frustrations wasn’t inside my own head.

( so do i, Lys )

There was a bitter sound of amusement from the both of us. Sirius’ thoughts were growing odd and distorted, a fog of potion-induced sleepiness spilling over the link. Not enough to affect me, of course, but enough that I could tell.

And they always said, ‘mind over matter.’ I thought gently, feeling more amused than bitter, now. Hard to be bitter when there was someone right there with you, sometimes. I tried not to bring Sirius down, too. Otherwise he’d just get pissed for my sake, and it’d be this positive feedback loop of irritation and caginess and all sorts of annoying things.

( whoever they are, they haven’t spent nearly enough time in their own heads. it starts to feel like a prison after a while )
Don’t we know it?

Sirius sighed. His vision was all black; he’d closed his eyes. (a lot of your frustration might be from me, you know. we DO influence each other equally now. i’m sorry, Lys)

No, it’s alright. Just... sleep. I’ll be alright. I can clean up my own messes.

(i know, kid. you and yours... you’re better than we ever were)

... 

The first colors I’d ever Seen in this world were Ginny’s, of course, but the ones I truly held to my heart were these ones. My unrefined, infant Mage Sight had only been able to pick out deep blue — and my hearing-Sight was much sharper, then, which I’d lost as I grew into my visual-Sight — but I Saw it now, truly. Deep, deep blues highlighted with lighter ones, teals, bright greens that almost went neon, indigo and dark red curling in the depths of the darkest blue. It all waivered together like the ocean, light coming down through the water, green to blues to purple to a red heart. Golden lines like sea foam, soft rather than metallic, swept through, ringing against my colors’ own metallic ripples, my colors a core of near-black that faded out to indigo and blue, clouds of deep teal and orange-reds and wisps of pink furling and unfurling, reaching out into a deep red. Not an ocean, but an impossible night sky devoid of stars, reflected in a lake of silver and gold ripples.

A core that was matured, interlocking with one that was nearly there ahead of my time.

“I’m sorry I snapped,” I said quietly, taking breaths deep and methodically, feeling calmer, “I lost my temper at all of you. I’ll apologize to Ginny, because I directed my anger at her more than anyone, beyond what even I think she deserved.”

“I think we have our own apology to make, little queen.” Dad’s voice said calmly, softly.

(Dad was always calm and gentle. Always. Even when I’d first come home with the bandages still bloody, he merely paled and sat down for a while, before speaking to me the way most people would coax nervous animals. I probably had the flight-risk of an injured animal when I knew I was going to be scolded by Dad.)

(Dad’s scoldings wasn’t just yelling. He lectured. He guilt-tripped. He manipulated.)

“I have a communication problem, I reckon. I did this to Dietrich, too. I didn’t tell him all the things he deserved to know, and when he reacted the way I didn’t want him to, I snapped.” I frowned to myself. “I probably have control issues, now that I think of it.”

“You have a habit, Lyssie, of idealizing the ones you call yours, and reacting aggressively when those ideals are somehow un-met.” Dad said, settling down on the grassy bank next to me.

He was clad in his pajamas and a robe, looking like he’d just rolled out of bed — no glasses and his thinning air stuck up every which way, kinda Potter-like — but alert and awake. He rolled up his pajama bottoms to his knees, hairy legs and feet joining mine in the water. I relaxed at how calm and gentle he sounded, glad that I wasn’t going to be screamed at again; I’d get pissed, and then I’d scream back, and it’d be bad. I had always been reactive, after all. Dad was calm, so I was calm.

“I think it’s a bit of that, too,” I admitted with a sigh.
“I’m not sure what happened with your friend,” he said carefully, “but I think I can piece together what happened earlier.” There was a flare in his magic, like a splash in the waves of color, alerting me to the fact that Dad wanted my attention. A very, very old signal; he hadn’t really done that — the equivalent of poking at a concentrated Soothsayer — since I’d first been training the ability. I looked up at him, meeting his eyes. “You know you should have brought it up to your mother and I, if you were feeling stressed or caged by us and your siblings. You know you should have explained and tried to reach a solution with us.” His expression, which was solemn and stern with lecture-mode-Dad, softened a little. “Did you think we would’ve ignored you?”

A stab of guilt. Damn Dad, knowing how to guilt-trip me so easily; it was practically Slytherin. It was a huge tell of said guilt, I know, but I looked away.

“No,” I muttered, studying the patterns of bark on the trees, “But… I guess I felt it wasn’t my right to complain, when I sort of brought it on myself, with all the danger I walked into during the school year. Though… at the same time, I don’t think I deserve being watched all hours of the day with my letters read and no visiting my friends and all that, just because I did exactly what I always said I’d do. Protect me and mine.”

“You see, Lyssie? Our family was pushing you, and because you feel as if the ones you love have no flaws — that it’s your fault if you’re being pushed — you refused to voice that out. We couldn’t help because you have this odd habit of thinking you don’t deserve it, while at the same time wanting it. And, as always, you do everything so intensely.”

“Can’t imagine who I inherited that from,” I muttered.

My intensely Muggle-fascinated father crooked a smile at me.

(Though, really, he only exacerbated an issue I’d had since my last life. In the before, I’d never known how to tone it down at first; because of Dad, I had huge issues adjusting to a normal level as I used to. Everything was done with a do or die attitude, and I couldn’t regulate that until something dramatic slapped me in the face.)

“So, my little queen. You know what you did wrong?”

I nodded. “I kept all my problems to myself and took out that frustration on Ginny.”

“You acted like we were obstacles when all we really want is to help, Lyssie,” Dad added gently, placing a warm, large hand on my back. I wasn’t really cold anymore but it radiated heat, seeping into my spine. “And yes, your restriction from Diagon Alley and the Muggle town are punishments, but you should have told us when you began to feel that it was becoming unfair and more restrictive than we meant.”

“Well I don’t know what you meant,” I said defensively, shrugging, “I’m still not too clear on why I’m being punished for doing what you always said I should.”

“And what’s that?” Dad asked, brow raised.

“Protect me and mine!” I said exasperatedly.

“No, I’m punishing you because you didn’t do that.”

I squinted at Dad suspiciously. “No, no, I definitely was doing that. Harry’s one of mine, too, even if he was Ron’s first. And Sirius became one of mine after a bit, too.”

Dad rolled his eyes. “Dear Merlin, Lyssie.” He snorted, and then, noticing my displeased frown at
his amusement, sobered a little. Met my eyes. “You’ve got the latter down, but you’re grounded to
the Burrow because you completely disregarded the former. Lyssie, I know your mother talked to
you about this. You are supposed to protect yourself, too.”

“Little hard to remember when she went into a rant about befriending Sirius right after,” I
muttered, recalling my mother’s tearful conversation in the Hogwarts Hospital Wing — though the
memory was a little fuzzy at this point. I sighed, “And I am, Dad. I’m still alive, aren’t I?”

“The day you nod your head at one of your brothers or your sister and decide that ‘still-breathing’
means ‘protected’, Lyssie, is the day I’ll swan-dive into the Thames naked,” Dad replied dryly,
eliciting a snort from me at the imagery.

“Alright, I suppose it’s fair. But having my siblings watch me every hour of the day? Checking my
letters? Demeaning my choices by acting like my scars are some sort of mental disability? I don’t need to be babied, Dad. I hate being babied.”

“That, I know,” he said, nodding, “You were always an independent one. Followed Ginny, sure,
but I knew you could’ve walked or talked earlier if you wanted to. Little rascal.”

And there goes my thinking that I’d had my parents tricked all those years ago. I suppose having
tried to pretend to be a normal baby sort of goes out the window when they discover you’re a
Clairvoyant-Soothsayer who was meant for Slytherin. Plus… tricking Dad? I dunno what infant-
me was thinking. Probably wasn’t. Idiot.

Dad wasn’t done, though.

“And I’m sorry you thought we were demeaning your choices. I know you sacrificed a lot to make
them. I know you don’t want to feel like your choices were wrong. I know you miss your friends
and you’re nervous for the trial tomorrow. You should’ve come to me or your mother, though,
Lys.”

“I will, next time,” I promised, “I was just… I just made a bad judgement, this time.” I took a deep
breath, dreading the next words I knew I had to say. “I’m… sorry that I let my frustration build up
like this and didn’t talk to you.”

My distaste for apologies I didn’t really believe in must’ve shown on my face, because Dad
chuckled. “Alright, little queen, I believe you,” he said looking more amused than anything,
“Now… It’s past breakfast. So let’s go back, little queen, and make our apologies and fix
everything and eat, yes?”

I nodded. “Yeah. Okay.”

Dad hefted himself up first, and then easily pulled me up when I took his offered hand. I didn’t
even reach his shoulders, and it showed when he tucked me to his side comfortably, making small
steps to allow for my shorter legs. We were quiet and contemplative, and once the kitchen’s Dutch
door was in sight, the smells of Mum’s cooking drifting all the way across the meadow, Dad
chuckled.

“So that’s what you’re like when you’re pushing the Slytherins around, then, Lys?”

I blinked. Then I felt my traitorous face heat up. Goddamn blushing. “Er…”

“It’s like watching a young Nicolosia Zabini,” Dad murmured, maybe to himself and maybe to me,
I wasn’t sure, “mixed with Lucius when he isn’t being the scum of the earth, and a bit of your
mother.” He turned back to me, grinning happily. “My daughter’s going to be terrifying when she
grows up! Just like my grandmothers!”

Now… A combination of Weasley disinterest in pureblood lineages and my parents’ own hesitance in giving my Sight more fuel to add to the nightmare fires, and I was left not knowing much besides general history to do with Weasleys, which I researched years back and only remembered the basics of… But I knew a few things. Basic things. That was why I did the research in the first place, no? To learn facts about my family. Such as the fact that Dad’s maternal and paternal grandmothers were cousins, Cedrella and Lycoris Black.

…I think I was going to be flattered that he was excited for me to grow into a terrifying, Black-esque woman.

And he probably did mean for me to laugh, because I felt better as we stepped back inside so I could face the rest of my family properly.

(Not once, I noticed, did Dad’s gaze settle on my scars. Only my eyes. It was… relieving.)

... 

Much later — after I’d repeated my apology clumsily to my siblings and mother for my outburst that morning, after they accepted with laughs and nods and hugs and lots and lots of teasing, after the day passed and I got to spend nearly half of it in my room to study and practice wards alone, after Percy and Mum fretted about whether the whole family should come to the trial tomorrow where I’d stand witness, after all of these things — I’d quietly slipped out of my bed, padding across the rugs strewn with moonlight, and sat down at Ginny’s prone side.

Her colors hadn’t been as hurt as they’d been when I first snapped at her, but she held onto grudges longer and though she’d been calm and cheerful with our brothers, I knew between us, everything was only half-healed. She was awake, warm and flushed colors curling around her comfortingly, spiking up as my own intruded.

I could tell she was trying to forgive me, but… Well, this might’ve been the first time I’d ever snapped her. I’ll admit, I fell into the trap our brothers started, treating Ginny with a certain delicacy because she was the only (normal) girl in the family and had inherited our mother’s firecracker temper, and since she never inconvenienced me as we grew up — helping her dress, helping her read, teaching her how to do some things properly, following her outside and sitting with a book as she played, helping her think up of pranks she could do with Ron, etc. — I never had a reason to snarl at her. Come to think of it, I never really showed my temper to Bill or Charlie, either… they’d moved out before I really learned how to sharpen it in Slytherin. Percy, the demon twins, and Ron had gotten little things before, like me growling at them for messing with my books or something, but never had I snapped so thoroughly.

Guess it was bound to happen eventually, right?

Maybe I shouldn’t have held myself back so much when I was younger. They’d be desensitized to it, as we were with Percy’s fretting and bragging and droning on, Fred and George’s unapologetic pranks, Ron’s table manners and periodic lack of tact, and Ginny’s hair-trigger temper. Noooo, they had to all be used to my nightmares.

“I am sorry, you know,” I whispered to her, even though she wasn’t facing me. A curl of pink-gold
wound around with my ripples like a ribbon, fluttering and hesitant. “I was already having a hard
time not being able to go anywhere alone or do anything without Percy and Ron hanging over me,
and then I was processing the scars… Well. Those are all excuses. I shouldn’t have treated you like
an enemy when you’d just told me you were angry because I was doing that already.”

Ginny shifted. She twisted a little, just enough to eye me, disgruntled look on her face. “I just don’t
get why you like your Slytherin boys better than you do me. I’m… It’s stupid and childish, but I’m
your twin. I’d understand, if you’d just explain. I’m on your side, too. I know you’ve been getting
really annoyed since you’ve gotten back, so I hoped you’d… talk to me. But you didn’t.”

It came to me, then. “Oh. That’s why you kept hanging around. Following me… everywhere.”

I could practically hear the eye-roll. “Of course, stupid. But… I guess I see, now, why you… I
mean.” Ginny sighed, and then fumbled around, sitting up properly to sit, cross-legged, facing me.
Her hair was all messed up from dozing, but she was alert and bright-eyed. “You know how Fred
and George are?”

I blinked at the non-sequitur. “Yeah? They’re our brothers…” I trailed off.

She grinned and shoved at my shoulder. “Don’t give me that look! I’m going somewhere with
this!” Her smile fell away quickly, the playfulness in her colors sobering. “Look, Lyssie, I know
we all say that Bill was my favorite when we all lived here, but honestly, you spent the most time
with him. When we were little, you know? You were always either alone, with Percy, with Dad, or
with Bill. And me? I spent the most time with Ron, of course, and with Mum and Charlie, but I was
also always watching the demon twins. It’s dumb and I was a kid, but I thought that was how twins
were supposed to be. I thought that’s how we’d grow up to be, and when it didn’t happen, I figured
it’d happen next year. And then the next year. And I guess that’s why I was so bloody pissed in
first year, you know?”

I nodded, following Ginny’s logic much more easily with her walking me through her thoughts. “I
guess you were… upset that us being in different Houses pretty much killed that. We’d never be
like Fred and George and that was the last straw?”

Ginny nodded sullenly. “I sound a lot stupider than I wish, but yeah. Something like that.”

“I don’t really think that’s stupid,” I said gently, “It makes sense, especially if you were… if you
thought like that since we were really young. For what it’s worth, ‘specially now, I’m sorry. I
always knew we’d never be like them, so it never occurred to me…”

She let out an amused snort. “I know that now, but firstie-me was sort of an idiot about these
things. You arses are so scared of getting yelled at, no one ever told me what was what when we
were growing up. I had to go make friends at Hogwarts to figure out all this stuff.”

I looked at her affectionately. “You did a lot of maturing by yourself in first year.”

“I guess, but you did help out, didn’t you?” She narrowed her eyes at me. “Don’t think I didn’t
notice how anyone who bothered me or my friends would end up publicly humiliated somehow.
Harper was getting creative at the end, there.”

I snickered, not apologetic in the least. I protected Ginny in my own way, in first year. “Harper and
Lu had a lot of fun coming up with stuff. Honestly, if me and my boys wanted to follow the demon
twins’ footsteps as pranksters, Hogwarts would be doomed. Your old bullies and Luna’s current
ones make good practice.”
“You’d all be terrifying,” Ginny deadpanned. Then she turned contemplative. “Ah. That was another thing that set you off, I think. When I talked about them, earlier.”

*Death Eater names.*

I nodded. “They’re re,” I stated firmly, “They’re all thirteen-year-old *idiots* and they’re *mine*, not Death Eaters. Harper and Bastion aren’t even part of the names.” I mumbled the last sentence mutinously.

“I get it. It’s like if you called Sarah or Nicola or Hermione a-a M-Mudblood. It’s… bad, like that?”

“Not quite,” I corrected, “They’re bad in different ways to different people, but… to me, it’s like forgetting how… how enthusiastically happy Lu can get, or how infuriatingly smart Nate is, or how utterly gentle Jay sometimes is. It’s forgetting all the things that makes them *mine*, and just thinking they’re all Muggle-baiters or murderers.”

“They *are* arrogant, though. Like Malfoy.” Ginny pointed out.

I shrugged. “And I’m not? Sure, Lu can be a prat when he thinks you’re making fun of him, and Nate is just an arse because he thinks it’s fun, and Jay doesn’t really give anyone the time of day if he doesn’t think they have something he needs or wants, but… Well. I adore them all.”

Ginny snorted. “I know you do.” She raised a brow. “You’d get that defensive if *we* were being called out, wouldn’t you?”

“Unless me or my boys are calling us bloodtraitors, no one would dare call our family bloodtraitors where I might hear,” I reported cheerfully. Then I smirked. “Unless they want a thrashing from me.”

She nodded decisively. “Good. I’d be disappointed, otherwise.”

I smiled. “So… Are we alright, now? I didn’t want to leave it as it was…”

She sighed. “Yes, we are. I think it’s just… I get mad really easily already, and now we’re almost teenagers, and… Well, you’ve always been a hundred steps ahead of me, but it never mattered until we got to Hogwarts, I feel. While I was being a bratty firstie, you were finding the Chamber of Secrets and breezing through school. While I was sleeping, you went and found Sirius Black. When I was giggling with Nicola and Sarah, you were fighting for your life against a werewolf. You’re going to go testify at *trial* tomorrow, and I’m just going to be here. *At home.*”

And she thought, once upon a time, that we were going to be a female version of Fred and George.

Ah, this makes our first year make much more sense.

“I can’t fix any of that, and I can’t promise that I won’t keep running ahead,” I said quietly, “because I know I’ll keep doing it, and I won’t regret it. I have a very good reason, after all.”

*You’re sitting in front of me, and I See the rest of them all over the house.* “But… I’ll tell Mum I want you to come with me tomorrow. You and Dad can gossip about how pathetic Pettigrew looks as me and Sirius sentence him to a fate worse than death.”

Man, I was looking forward to that.

Part of it might’ve not been my own anticipation — Sirius was awake, after all, even if he was giving me some much-needed privacy — but still. I was *so* looking forward to hammering in that
final nail in the rat bastard’s coffin. After being cooped up so long, despite all the talking done, it would feel so damn great.

Ginny widened her eyes at me. “Merlin, I’m glad you just dressed me down a little, today. If you smiled at me like that, I think I would’ve run to hide behind Mum.”

I laughed, and reached forward to hug her.

“I’ll see you tomorrow, sis. Glad we’re okay.”

She squeezed my shoulders. “Me, too.”

She pulled out first, and grinned suspiciously, which made me look at her questioningly. “What?”

“I was right, you know.”

“Er?”

Ginny laughed. “The scars are wicked!”

(Willful ignorance and denial and shame and pride and awe.)

(Pride and awe and a little affection and amusement, too. The crimson in my colors pulsed a brighter red, and Sirius Black smiled at the comets in our shared sky.)
Surprisingly enough, my siblings and I didn’t go to the Ministry very often. You’d think so, with Dad’s job, but… Well, Dad’s entire thing with me was keeping me out of the Ministry, so I guess it made sense. I think I’d been once, accompanying Mum and Dad for some sort of official thing? I blocked it from my memory, I guess, since Mum was so bloody paranoid the entire time, she practically hid me in her skirts; as if the Ministry was gonna swoop in and take me into the Department of Mysteries right then and there, honestly.

The first thoughts I had of the place brought me the words… fancy cistern. Fancy huge cistern.

The second thoughts I had were of how bloody much my scars disliked the Floo very much. Understandable, since spinning that much pulled at my newly-freed cheek — which matched the tan the rest of my face had, thanks to Mum and her nifty vanity spells. Prodding at the scars gently revealed no blood, at least, so all was well. Some wizards and witches hastening past me would widen their eyes or open their mouths when they caught sight, but for the most part, everyone was too busy trying to get to where they needed to go to pay me much attention.

(Thank goodness. I was still fluctuating between indifference, pride, and embarrassment at these things.)

Then, of course, I had to take my eyes off of the extremely huge, fancy cistern-ish place crawling with witches and wizards and get out of the way so Ginny could come through. The fireplace — very gold and black and deep, bottle green, a combination of my two favorite Houses, I liked it very much — flared with Floo-green and Ginny stumbled out, looking harassed, her hands stuck in her jeans pockets rebelliously and her hair static-y with too much brushing. Mum, of course.

She did brighten when she saw me waiting for her, and hurried to join me.
“I haven’t been back here since I was a kid,” she said, looking at the high ceilings with interest.

The colors of the bricks and how small they looked from down here, it reminded me of the skin of the basilisk. We were huddled together, both of us in our Hogwarts robes, Ginny in jeans and a T-shirt while I was in a slightly more formal combination of Fred’s black slacks from his first year — rolled up at the ankles and roomy around my legs — and a faded blouse. I felt small with the taller, more matured crowd flowing around us like it was all coordinated, only a few off-notes in people shoving through with panicked or irritated looks on their faces or workers obviously dragging their feet. The entrance hall (one of many, I assumed) opened to the left and right, and the right seemed to be one the main chambers, since I spied some golden statues that way. This must be the Atrium, then: the entryway to the Ministry of Magic.

I nodded in that direction. “Dad said he’d meet us by the fountain.”

Ginny nodded, looking a bit more excited now she wasn’t being fussied over by Mum. “The Fountain of Magical Brethren,” she named off, taking me by the wrist and dragging the both of us there while chatting cheerfully about how our brothers looked pissed that she got to go while they were going to de-gnome the garden with Mum, and how that made it worth the panic Mum had gone into with a last-minute trial-attending daughter.

(Poor Mum. It was going to mess up her budget again. A single pinch of Floo powder cost a bloody fortune, really. Never knew that Floo powder available in popular Flooing spots was all government-issue, paid for with taxes…)

There was some sort of artificial sky up in the ceiling’s openings, which were less like skylights and more like oculuses. They were numerous and square and large, lighting up the entire place with a sort of harsh, bright tone.

( certain ones open up into hallways with fireplaces. usually used by aurors if there’s an emergency, they’re password-locked, the floos, and there are wards all over the place. a ‘just in case we need to sneak into our own ministry, if you will )

I’m almost entirely certain you shouldn’t be allowed to tell me that, I mused.

( all the aurors — past initiate stage, that is, the real aurors — are told, but they bring in some creepy blokes from the department of mysteries to put some safeguards around the information )

I hummed in interest. The Mind Arts were absolutely fascinating, really. Like a Memory Ward, but with the target mind being able to recall the warded memory. And ONLY the target mind.

( exactly. but you’ll never find a trace of it. the unspeakables made it themselves and don’t appreciate when people try to get around them. all the little kiddies are told that trying to reverse-engineer the ward begins with stupidity and ends with a hit wizard )

I winced. Oh god, we can bypass it, can’t we?

Sirius laughed in my head. ( see for yourself )

I felt Sirius’ thoughts brush against mine — it sounded like everything he was thinking, his memories, were being played down a very echo-y corridor behind a muffle of some sort, coming closer, the sounds a touch so gentle and light that it only just tugged at the hair on my arms — and I was blinking at the oculus Ginny and I were about to pass under. If you took a broom up, or Apparated on that very specific gold-green tile there, you’d be in a cramped little room no bigger than a closet, filled with dust, and you’d have to write an Auror-ID number on the wall with your
wand. If you failed, it booted you down the oculus unconscious, and you’d probably break your neck if someone — the Auror guard walking around the Atrium, probably — didn’t catch you. If you succeeded, it would pull a Diagon Alley and there’d be a fireplace and a pot of Floo powder waiting for you. OR the anti-Apparition ward went down, too, so you could do that.

Good god. Whatever the Department of Mysteries came up with to make it impossible — or nearly — to steal Ministry secrets, Sirius and I had broken it with a botched ritual and a werewolf bite. Holy shit, this was so illegal. Holy shit, if anyone found out, we’d be assassinated.

And the bastard was just cackling.

“Lyssie! Ginny!”

We both perked up at the sound of Dad. I’d put the issue of my and Sirius’ far-more-illegal-than-I’d-thought activities away for the moment, since I was, after all, here for the upholding of justice.

The irony was practically tangible… but hypocrisy was the heart of Slytherin: we didn’t play by the rules unless it suited us.

Dad smiled at both of us, looking neat and comfortable in his only slightly patched-up robes, painstakingly shined old shoes (it didn’t work too well, the leather was still soft and scuffed), and his wire-frame glasses slipping down his nose. I suppose Ginny and I didn’t look too formal either. Dad hugged both of us to his sides, letting us wind our arms around his waist and crane our faces up to grin at him; Dad was tall, even after all these years of us two growing. My and Ginny’s movements were oddly in sync, and I felt extremely twin-like for it.

“No trouble with the Floo, my girls?” Dad asked.

(‘Note to self: the way Dad said ‘my girls’ rung the same as when I was talking about ‘my boys’.)

We shook our heads.

“It was fine,” I said.

“Mum wouldn’t stop trying to touch me up,” Ginny complained, “as if I’m going to be the one on trial.”

“I’m not on trial, I’m just a witness,” I countered.

She stuck her tongue out at me. “Same thing!”

And she wondered why I always thought of her as my little sister. Then again, I think — after learning so much about my sister yesterday — that Ginny acted up with me on purpose. It was familiar and somewhat relaxing, that Ginny was childish and happy. It made me hope that I was doing my job as the elder (mentally, at least) sister and the Seer of the family right.

Dad chuckled, the sound making his chest rumble. “Come on, you two. Courtroom ten.”

Ginny frowned. “Isn’t that near the Department of Mysteries? The stairs to the tenth floor, I mean.”

“It is,” Dad said, his voice just a slight more terse than usual, “But we needn’t worry. Albus pulled some strings so we could have all of us go through the Floo, no need for security. Of course, only you two came along, but at least there won’t be a wand inspection or a random inspection. Come along, girls.”
The level of paranoia my family had when it came to me and the Ministry was honestly concerning and new to me. I guess they kept me away from it, since me being taken away by the Department of Mysteries was one of their worst fears — which was a little extreme and odd, the more I thought about it — just as they did their best to limit stories about their families to me. I only knew the barest facts and names, just in case I got as attached to them as I did to my family and subsequently dreamed of their presumably violent deaths.

“So you can’t just Floo in from the house, usually?” I asked, feeling oddly ignorant of the Ministry despite Dad having been working here since before I was born.

“That would be expensive, my dear,” Dad answered, guiding us gently through the crowds, towards the elevators, and pointedly looking at anyone who stared at his littler daughter (he cleared his throat when/if they didn’t notice), “The wards are updated and changed every month, so maintaining a subscription to a direct Floo, which you’d also have to pay a permit for, is rather… out of our budget.” Seeing my dismayed expression, Dad smiled cheerfully. “Not to worry, Lyssie! I used to Apparate before they implemented the anti-Apparition wards, before the war, you know, of course, but now? I commute quite comfortably through our Diagon Alley entrance. And I get to pass through Muggle London and see all of the wonderful uses of electricity! This summer, I’m sure we can figure out how to build an electric fan like you wanted.”

Back in the days of pre-Hogwarts, me and Dad had been messing with technology much more than now. He taught himself the basics of electricity — open systems and closed systems and whatnot, my wizard father who’d never used a light switch in his life — after all. We liked doing little projects, when we had the time. Dad had chosen the car — which was loose and wild and sentient, somewhere in the Forbidden Forest, now — for his project. I’d just wanted an electric fan, so that I had a noise at night… but this was years ago, I think, and I honestly had thought he’d forgotten about it.

“That’d be nice,” I said thoughtfully, “but I thought you were busy this summer.”

“A bit, yes, but we’ve put it off long enough, I think. Ah, here girls, into the lift.”

The elevator was large and very pretty, but it became crowded soon enough, wizards and witches bunched together with paper airplanes darting inside and floating neatly above our heads. The elevator chimed and emptied and filled and chimed and emptied and filled and emptied again until it was mostly clear — everyone was gone by the second stop, really, and we were going down to the ninth. The car was interesting, since it was big enough for dozens of riders and styled like one of those old elevators with the metal gates — it was one of four, apparently, all of them in the walls of the Atrium, in between the large entrance corridors and Ministry offices, facing the Fountain of Magical Brethren.

Everyone else had gone onto Level 3, save a few airplanes bobbing in place patiently. I remember Fred told me he tried to poke one, once, and it started to attack him, along with all the rest of the swarm present. He didn’t like going to the Ministry anymore because he swore they remembered him and were always flying close enough to give him paper cuts.

“How long is this going to be, again?” Ginny asked.

“Well, first they’re going to try Black for the murder of twelve Muggles; the trial he was supposed to have in ’81,” Dad answered, “And it’s highly likely he’ll get away with a judgement by acquittal, since it is true they threw him into Azkaban based on conjecture, and it’s more likely Black got the life-sentence for that than just for being a Death Eater. And after that will be the trial of Peter Pettigrew and Sirius Black for their actions against Harry as Death Eaters, which is where Lys will be standing as witness. And since this is likely going to be the first correction in a long
line of judicial mistakes left over from the war, they’re going to make a good showing and give Black a compensation hearing immediately afterwards, provided Black does get the acquittal and is declared innocent for the second trial. So… the whole day, my dear.”

Ginny groaned, and I shook my head.

“He’s going to get the acquittal for sure, Dad,” I told him seriously, “All they have to do is check his wand against Pettigrew’s — and we know they didn’t snap it, because they don’t snap the wands of pureblood criminals.”

“But they do for Halfbloods and Muggleborns?” Ginny asked incredulously.

“Depends if the Halfblood belongs to an Ancient or Noble House. Supposedly, it’s so that the wand can be passed within the family or saved for the ancestral tomb, but it’s probably for if the pureblood gets released.” I said, drawing the knowledge straight from Sirius and feeling his grudging relief for the fact. Highly stacked against non-purebloods and thusly very unjust, yes, but also helpful in this case…

( it really pisses me off that i’m thankful they didn’t snap my wand )

Come on, Sirius, be a little Slytherin — pureblood privilege is good for something here, at least! I teased him.

( at least i’ll be able to see fudge embarrass himself. fifty galleons he’s going to fight the acquittal, Lyssie. he’ll never admit that the ministry made a mistake or else that fancy inauguration speech he made where my name was dragged through the mud back in ’90, that one? that inauguration speech’ll make his entire term of office look like a joke, which is it, but still… )

Fancy that, a man in power who refuses to admit he made a mistake.

Sirius laughed.

The elevator chimed.

“Level Two, Department of Magical Law Enforcement, including the Improper Use of Magic Office, Auror Headquarters, and Wizengamot Administration Services.” Announced the neutral-sounding female voice.

“Here we are, girls,” Dad announced, “Ready?”

( you better be ready, Lyssie. hurry up! they’ve got me in the damn chair, which is a sight better than the bloody cage they used to put death eaters in, but it’s still damn uncomfortable. chains are digging in places that really oughtn’t to be messed with, if you get my drift )

Shut up, Sirius, I sighed internally, rolling my eyes at his dramatics — not that I had much room to talk, but still.

( then hurry up! you’ll be in, you’ll talk, dumbledore will talk, and then i’m home free!)

There was a giddy anticipation in my chest, bubbling up from Sirius, and he shifted against the chains and I felt the cold of them and suppressed a wince. He’d just been strapped down into the hard-backed chair — it was tall and pew-like, very utilitarian and uncomfortable — so it wasn’t too bad, but all day in that thing would chafe, and I bet with our proximity I’d feel it more strongly.
After today, though, Sirius would never have to sit in one of those fucking things again…

( unless i do something monumentally stupid )

Yes, so you should get used to your new favorite chair, Sirius.

He practically squawked in outrage, the sound echoing in my head and making me smile.

I looked to my father and had his hand in mine, Ginny’s in the other. “I’m ready, Dad.”

... 

The room was large and filled to the brim. We walked onto a marble-tile floor where one chair was centered, wrapped in chains and facing the dark-wooded podium that towered above it imposingly. The stands rose up on the sides of the room, all dark wood and aged stone and brick, probably a hundred or more people squished together, including a woman in the back next to a man whose camera continuously went off, loudly and blindingly. There was a section of the front of the seats reserved for us already, Alby standing nearby and nodding for us to follow, which we did; Ginny and I had both shrunk down a little at the size of the room and the full attention we’d gathered, edging closer to each other.

Maybe it was self-conscious of me, but I felt a lot of them were looking at me. There was a stark silence, then rounds of whispering started. I saw more than one finger point at me, which meant it wasn’t entirely my self-consciousness, but then again… Well, the scars were hard to miss, and I had always been an odd fit into the Weasley family: too short, hair and skin too dark, too quiet, too Slytherin, etc. Now the scars were added to that number.

She gripped my hand firmly, leaning over to whisper, “Aren’t you glad you brought me now, Lys?”

I snorted, knowing she had successfully figured out what I was thinking and was now proceeding to distract me. “Don’t you wish you’d stayed at home? The whole day, remember, Ginny.”

Ginny flashed a smile at me, but my eyes were drawn to Alby as we neared him.

He was the brightest space in the room besides the camera, opposing plum-colored Wizengamot robes and the somber-dark robes of the rest of the audience with his bright blue robes, patterned with candy-apple red diamonds. At least seeing his eccentric clothing was a good sign; Alby only really went for the dumb-looking clothes when he was safe and comfortable and confident. He smiled at me, muttering something to Dad, who shuffled Ginny into the stands and left me with my old mentor. His expression when he turned to me, though, was a little tense… I bet if I threw off my Di-konden An-drixťă (goddamn I needed to renew the Brightstalker-based ritual soon, this was so bloody inconvenient) his blinding colors would be rolling with something less than confident even as his expression remained genial.

“Everything alright, Alby?” I asked, voice low.

He didn’t give away anything, but his answer was more than enough explanation: “Last night, the Ministry produced some… unexpected questions.”

“For the first or the second trial?”
“The one that matters, of course, my dear. But please, take your seat for now, Lys. Do not Occlude as strongly as you usually might during your cross-examination or when the other witnesses are brought out. I am counting on your natural reactions to help sway the jury.”

So it was something either very good or very bad. If Alby wasn’t having an off day, I was willing to bet it was something bad. Now I was more thankful than ever Ginny was here; excluding yesterday’s drama, I did try to reign myself in around my siblings. I gave a nod to Alby. “I suppose I’ll wait with bated breath, if that’s what you think is best.”

Alby eyed me, then nodded back, much more politely and significantly. My Alby-translation was slightly rusty, but I was getting something like, Thank you for trusting me. It was more significant than ever, since he’d spoken to me in the Hospital Wing those weeks ago. I was truly looking forward to being able to hang around Alby more.

“You’re speaking for Sirius, right?” I confirmed, making to walk up the steps to join Ginny and Dad.

The Headmaster nodded.

I smiled, the expression sharp and confident and hinting at something nasty. It was an expression I likened to Lu more than anyone: somewhat arrogant, somewhat friendly, and getting ready for something that’d be amusing for me and painful for someone else.

“Bring him home, Alby. You owe him that.”

Alby smiled. “I will do my very best, my dear Lys. We both will, I do believe.”

Damn straight. Hear that, Sirius? We’re bringing you home. I thought, settling next to my father and my sister, watching the room try to comport itself into something ready for a trial.

He didn’t answer, but there was a deep-set longing in his chest — enough that it hurt a little — at the word. It made me sad, to feel and to think about.

I watched Sirius in his chair, unsurprised at his appearance but also a little bit weirded out that I was seeing him from my own eyes rather than his. He shifted and the chains around him clinked together; he looked supremely uncomfortable, eyes darting to me a few times, just as slightly bothered at seeing each other while also seeing ourselves as each other. I was getting an odd sort of feedback, seeing Sirius in the chair then seeing me in the stands, looking at myself in the chair. We’d gotten something like this pre-werewolf bite, right after the ritual, but today was the first time since then we’d been in the same room like this.

Sirius, however, focused on the important stuff. (i’m more worried about what he needs your reaction for. it’s something that’ll make you cry, isn’t it?)

I quirked my lip up, intrigued by how the small movement stung my face a bit and also crinkled the scar just slightly, making it stand out. Tears aren’t the only way to garner sympathy, Sirius. (maybe he doesn’t want sympathy, but i can’t think of anything else dumbledore would need your genuine reaction for…)

I was about to answer, but I startled when someone sat down next to me, appearing almost out of nowhere with how extremely distracted I was. There was a flash of surpriseddisgustreliefdisgustgrudgingrespectfinally! from Sirius, and it was actually through his eyes that I saw that my seating row of Ginny and Dad and me had been joined by a sudden
Professor Snape. I blinked Sirius out of my head and turned to smile at my Head of House politely.

“Hello, Professor.” I greeted.

Snape nodded, not taking his eyes off of Sirius, expression set into that intimidating ‘you-are-a-bug’ look he preferred. I think he’d been chatting with Alby, but I’d been focusing too much on playing with my and Sirius’ double-vision, poking at our suddenly-strengthened mind link. Not surprising, really, but still; that was kinda dumb of me.

Constant vigilance and all that, no?

( ergh please no i can’t believe you know that from moody that man was a slave-driver at the academy )

“Weasley,” Snape replied boredly, “I see the wolf didn’t hold back.”

Oddly enough, Snape drawing attention to my scars didn’t irritate or shame me. Probably because one always had to sort of expect an insult from him? Plus, I was the troublemaker child of the Slytherin House. I got used to it, and I’d bet there wasn’t even a drop of anger/glee/anything else in his colors, if I dared to look — which I didn’t, because Alby was in the room and I couldn’t adjust my Mage Sight yet.

I shrugged a little. “Might’ve gotten my neck or my eye if Harry hadn’t pulled me out of the way, actually, Professor.”

“Saved by Potter, then.” Snape snorted contemptuously.

Makes two of us, right, Professor?

( you’re bloody right it makes two of you, James saved that greasy git-! )

Down, Sirius, for Merlin’s sake. I sighed to the man, who was gritting his teeth and looking much more irritated about the chains than he was before. His pride was a bit hurt, being locked up while Snape watched rather smugly. I turned to Snape, saying, “I’d assumed that Harry was going to stand witness as well…”

My statement trailed off questioningly; Snape eyed me.

“Your testimony is the most important of the minors present that night, and what you do not or cannot remember, Pettigrew’s recollections under Veritaserum will suffice.” The rat’s name was said as poisonously as Snape could get it, which was quite a bit.

“But I won’t be getting Veritaserum?”

“You are not a suspected enemy of the Ministry, Weasley.”

( is dumbledore doing the questioning? )

“Is Alby doing the Veritaserum questioning?”

“The Headmaster, Weasley, will be doing Pettigrew’s questioning, yes.” Snape replied, stressing Alby’s title — he disapproved of my casualness with the man, of course — and still spitting Pettigrew’s name.

I nodded, knowing Sirius heard that through me. The man relaxed internally, a relieved sigh
breathed out of my lips instead of his. Which immediately made both of us alarmed; that was a near possession, wasn’t it? Or an empathic connection strong enough to mimic possession.

Merlin, we have to get this sorted out. We probably should figure out what on earth we actually did in the first place. I thought to Sirius, watching as a rather short, portly man in a bowler’s hat with long, flowing, black robes made his way up to the judge’s podium thing. I only faintly recognized the man as our very own magical Minister.

“Order! Order, I say!”

I crinkled my nose. That’s our Minister?

(depressing, isn’t it? i miss bagnold. she was one tough bitch, let me tell you)

Both Sirius and I were only half-listening to what Fudge was saying, really, since neither of us cared much about the first trial. It was little more than a neat and tidy way to politely clear Sirius of the murder charges that got him the life-sentence.

“For Sirius Leothrace Orion Saros Black III, who was unlawfully given a life-sentence to Azkaban twelve years, seven months, and—”

Leothrace Saros???

(shut up, Lyssie, the more uppity the pureblood House, the more middle names they insist on giving you. it’s a curse)

Oh, poor you, an entire THREE middle names.

(this is harassment. soon as we’re out, we’re going to that creepy cambion bloke. which i still disapprove of, by the way)

I know the cambion’s extremely threatening, but the thing’s more Slytherin than anything. I’m providing him very rare and wanted payment, discreetly and willingly, and it gives me knowledge — uncensored, un-romanticized. It’s a fair trade, you know.

“-twelve years ago, it was heard — on-site — that Black confessed. He said, and I quote—”

“That was an illegal confession, Auror Stevenson.”

“We-Well, you see, everyone knew that Black was the Secret-Keeper, so—”

“No interruptions, Dumbledore!”

“Ah, my apologies. Do forgive an old man for being a little mixed up with all these courtly laws.”

Sirius rolled his eyes internally. I couldn’t really blame him for the resentment, really. Even I couldn’t really offer a good justification for Alby not having fixed this lack of trial rubbish over the twelve years he’d been the Wizengamot Chief Warlock and the ICW head. ‘Too much to do’ was an excuse; if one was aware they had too much to do, they should probably… find a way to do less? Prioritize? Delegate? That’s what I was trying out, after all.

Another little pang of wanting to see my boys. Even with my family agreeing to back off and Ginny squared away and my punishment lightening up, I still very much wanted to see them. Maybe by the time I came home, Dietrich will have sent a letter back after my nice, lovely, un-checked letter was sent out with a really exhausted Errol.
(you’ll see them soon, Lyssie, don’t worry) Sirius soothed me, sounding fond.

I know. But this is the first year I’ve had so much to do that they should be a part of. Dietrich knows my secrets and I really, really need his level head… He was really pissed to hear that you and I had a mind link, by the way.

(as he should. honestly, Lys, it’s a much bigger deal than either of us make it out to be. if i ever found out you formed a mind link with someone else, as intense as this one? i reckon i’d go ballistic. you’re a young witch, Lys, it really isn’t right. as it is, i’m wary of the cambion we’re going to have to see about this)

“-whereupon our examination of the defendant’s wand… was not reported…”

“Which can be rectified right this moment, can’t it?”

It was a Wizengamot member who’d spoken, and though I didn’t recognize them, no one scolded the old man for his interruption; he obviously had a lot of pull behind him somehow. Sirius didn’t seem to know who he was, either, or didn’t remember very well.

“Well-” Fudge began, only to be interrupted by the speaking Auror, who had apparently been present at his initial arrest:

“That’s not procedure-”

Another Wizengamot member spoke out, an old woman with an extremely intimidating glare for how small her stature was, “Oh, bloody get on with it! You should’ve examined Black’s wand prior to the criminal trial, what’s a bit more out of line with your ‘procedure’, eh, Stevenson?”

(that one’s Augusta Longbottom, I know that, at least)

Neville’s grandmother, then? …He has her eyes. Bloody hell, he’s going to be terrifying once he stops stuttering, isn’t he?

(his father was, so i wouldn’t be surprised. good man, that Frank. odd, though, that my wand wasn’t checked before this, it’s procedure, i think)

My Clairvoyance stirred a little, and I got a few flashes of-

-stepping into the hallway, smiling. She still held the same air of command, disowned and everything. “You’ll let me take care of that, won’t you?” “But-” She laughed — the room was crowded, yellow and black everywhere — Cho Chang was sulking on the field — Josie raised a brow at the Priori Incantatum in front of her. Then she smiled, slow and cruel and scheming — Oh, this is going to be good. — “I still have the pictures from that Hufflepuff Quidditch Victory Party last year, you know, Dominic.” “…Fine. Hand ‘em over, I’ll just… ‘forget’ about the Priori, then. Damn Slytherin.” — “-Madam Bones, I’m not sure if that oaf Dominic did his paperwork really, I’d have a word with Auror Stevenson about it, since Black’s trial is in a few days- Ah! Apologies, Lady Longbottom, I was unaware you were visiting…” — a shrewd look, she knew how Slytherins worked, and no Zabini woman worth her salt was anything but a Slytherin-

Stop.

-Josephine Zabini arranging a hell of a lot of shit to make Sirius look good. Oho.

“Prior Incantato!”
I saw Auror Stevenson casting the spell at a dark wand held out by another Auror, one who looked quite young and nervous. Snape muttered, “Pavlovic,” irritatedly under his breath, and I vaguely remembered that my visions implied Pavlovic was the Auror who’d taken Snape’s interview of the events of Pettigrew’s arrest.

Sirius wand shuddered in the man’s palm, then threads of misty gold — not unlike my Mage Sight, actually, but much more solid and tangible — spilled out of the wood and formed the image of a wand flicking something at a… at the ghostly, undefined image of a baby swaddled in a blanket. The facsimile of a child didn’t cry or anything, it just sighed contentedly.

A Warming Charm. The last spell Sirius had ever cast was a Warming Charm for Harry.

I could feel the tides turn in the entire courtroom, and there was the furious sound of a camera shutter and a quill scribbling from behind. Public opinion was going to be so geared towards Sirius with that, I reckon the man would barely need a second trial.

“Deletrius,” Stevenson cast quietly, his aged face looking rather like he knew he’d lost already.

My smile was barely suppressed, and Sirius didn’t even bother. I sort of wanted to snort at it all; Minister Fudge was looking twitchy, the Wizengamot was whispering amongst themselves, the jury across from me were shifting in their seats, and no one in the entire room believed Sirius Black killed twelve Muggles, let alone attempted to kill Harry. And though betraying your charges as a Secret-Keeper was not illegal, no one believed he’d done anything to James and Lily Potter maliciously.

_I think you’re getting your judgement of acquittal, Sirius._

He was chuckling in my head.

(A wolf howled to the moon triumphantly.)

“-motion for directed verdict, I think, Cornelius.” I heard Alby say cheerfully.

The Minister fumbled. “Er, ah, yes. Er… Th-The court rules th-that the evidence presented by the state i-is insufficient to sustain a conviction…”

_(you’re damn right i am)_

...

“We still have need to address the crimes Sirius Black is accused of committing against one Harry James Potter, one Guinevere Lysandra Weasley, one Ronald Bilius Weasley, one Severus Tobias Snape, and one Hermione Jean Granger, many of whom for safety reasons are not present today, in a- in a conjoined fashion with one Peter Pettigrew. As… As per Mr. Black’s request, the court w- will conduct this case immediately, se-seeing as it has been ruled that his twelve-year tenure in Azkaban s-seems to be… a-a-a grave mistake, a-and his return to the island for imprisonment or for execution by Dementor’s Kiss is… is hinged upon the judgement of the court today.”

Funny that Lupin wasn’t mentioned. I guess one couldn’t really commit a crime against a beast, hm?
That spiteful thought was accompanied with the face of a woman near Fudge’s side, a woman who was squat and fat and had an unpleasant sneer on her face, clashing deeply with the pink bow in her hair. I didn’t need any other clue both those to know that must be Dolores Umbridge. I was really not looking forward to her as the Defense professor next year.

Luckily, Sirius was distracted enough that he didn’t pick up on those thoughts.

(merlin, look at the man sweat! he’s going to be under fire from the public for months because of this and he knows it, ha!)

I leaned over to Dad.

“Are they going to bring in Pettigrew, then?” I asked.

Dad nodded tightly. He was still pissed about the revelation that the Animagus had been under our noses all this time; I think a lot of his anger was also because he’d made the somewhat correct assumption that I was tied up by Fate about it, and that having a threat so close did influence by Clairvoyance a little. Somewhat correct, really, because I only periodically remembered about the bastard — he was certainly good at doing the whole harmless schtick — and I’d mostly been counting on Sirius’ spectacular escape to drive him away for all these years.

(which i did)

“Yes, yes, I’m very proud of you, Sirius.”

“It’s a bit of an informal thing, now, since the press is watching this all closely,” Dad explained in a quiet voice to both Ginny and I, “Ceremonial, because the Ministry does need to keep appearances, but informal, because there’s a lot of red tape being crossed as an exception. Black’s case is being rushed along, since the Ministry wants the world to know they’re trying to correct their mistakes.”

“But the rest of the trials won’t be like this?”

“The rest of the trials will take weeks, most likely months to process, Ginny,” Dad answered, “Even I was pulled from my department to help out in the Archives. Lots of people are. I daresay your brother’s main duties as Crouch’s assistant will be heading the archive-diving.”

“If he gets the job.” Ginny retorted. Percy’s been bragging about it, back at home, when he wasn’t hovering over me. He’d conveniently forgotten his application was still under review, since he didn’t apply in the initial Hogwarts wave, like Josie had.

(a zabini woman in the ministry, merlin save us all)

You’ll be meeting Nicolosia Zabini after this, you know that, right? I told Josie I’d do it if she helped us out. Dunno if you saw or not, but Josie was the one who made sure the wand check didn’t happen so the reporters and the court would get it instead.

Sirius’ gratitude was apparent, despite his childish protest of: (i don’t have to do anything you tell me to, i’m a grown man)

I fed you for how many months, and this is the thanks I get...

I sent Sirius a bunch of memories from my point of view, starting from that first night when I’d forced him to go take a bath and eat while I patched up his clothes clumsily, to the later meetings
when I’d have to ground him after he’d get flashbacks to dementor torment, and then to the very end, when I handed him my wand and refused to take it back in front of Snape, my brother, Harry, and Hermione.

(dammit, Lyssie, you don’t play fair)

Despite the pouting tone, I felt my fondness for those memories being reciprocated. I felt a wave of gratitude and bits of embarrassment and shame, still. There was a shudder at how he looked when he was overcome with terrible memories, unable to remember where he was; something he was thankful he didn’t have to go through alone anymore, since every nightmare and flashback alarmed me, and I’d be in our mindscape in an instant to push my good memories at him and help him bring out his own.

But. Well.

I didn’t need to dwell on Sirius’ emotions to know he was feeling them. I knew him well enough, by now.

Slytherin! I sang in my head, laughing at Sirius’ very fake disgruntlement.

“-your brother’s getting that job, Gin,” Dad was saying, grinning, “I’d bet my weight in Galleons on it. The Ministry’s just… busy. I’ll just have to drop word to Barty at some point, you know, and he’d jump at the chance for assistance with how many trials he presided over back in the day. That’s a lot of archived records, you know.”

“Pulled ‘em yourself, did you, Dad?” I asked, amused at how Dad kept bringing it up.

(Perhaps he had a grudge against the archives for it?)

“I suggest you quiet down, Weasley,” I suddenly heard from my other side. I turned a sheepish look at Snape, whose voice was just as cutting even when it was as lowered as it was. He glared daggers at all three of us. “If you were paying attention, you’d know the next case is about to begin.”

Which meant witnesses.

Which meant me.

(show time, Lyssie)

There’s a lot of ways they might be able to pin everything on you, Sirius, I warned him, our previous joking tone fading away with how imminent the second trial was. In fact, they’d just conjured up a chair identical to Sirius’ — or maybe they summoned it, because there was likely some sort of restraining runes or something in these chairs — and had scooted Sirius over so both chairs were centered. They were likely fetching Pettigrew right now, actually.

(i know. Fudge is doing his damned best to get me executed)

I bit down a very frustrated sound. If Sirius were human, Fudge would probably just be trying to toss him in Azkaban again — justify the Ministry’s treatment of him and the other criminals, basically, and save his own reputation — and likely some sort of tragic happening or convenient mountain of red tape would block Sirius from really getting back out again… But Sirius wasn’t human. Sirius was a freshly-bitten werewolf, and werewolves didn’t go to Azkaban. Werewolves were “put down”, as the Ministry called it. Disgusting.
Makes me worry about Lupin, actually, I thought grimly.

( that’s why we’re gonna do our damned best to try to pin the bite on Pettigrew )

Will that really save him? I… I’m ashamed to admit that I didn’t think too hard about it…

( you had other things on your mind, but don’t worry, it will help… technically, we can claim that remus was baited into it. baited biters have a much higher chance of getting a wolfshawk pulled for them, which is exactly what i’ll be doing once i’m free )

…There were a lot of terms in there that I wasn’t familiar with, nor did I really want to take the time to coax the information out of Sirius’ head, because right then and there, the doors of the courtroom were slammed open and three figures were making their way to the floor. Two of them were red-cloaked Aurors, faces straight and solemn, though the one on the right had a crinkled brow. The third was dragged between them, a Potions-addled — the only reason he was so calm, no doubt — Peter Pettigrew, dressed in the same nondescript robes and plainclothes as Sirius.

( though you have to admit that i wear it better )

You’ve had regular meals, sleep, and socialization for half a year, I pointed out.

Sirius made some sort of affronted sound, which echoed through my head softly. ( you make me sound like a dog! )

I snickered in my head, the amusement bleeding through to make me smirk a little on the outside as well. Our Occlumency was a little shot when we were talking to each other mentally, I’ll admit, but at least my expression could just be attributed to how much I disliked Pettigrew and was looking forward to his conviction. A glance to either side showed Snape’s eyes glittering with malice, his signature sneer just beginning to show, and Dad’s eyes sharpening into pinpricks of anger and disgust, his face paling and making his eyes look almost like they were glowing. I hoped the panel of Wizengamot members were observing everything, even if taking in this sort of background information wasn’t entirely constitutional.

“So now that Black’s co-conspirator is present, we shall begin—”

That’s my title, dammit, I complained.

Sirius agreed mentally, ( i haven’t been Peter’s co-conspirator since school, how rude )

I snorted. Rude was the kindest and tamest word Sirius could have used. The man wasn’t a big fan of the Ministry, that was for sure; made me wonder what on earth he was going to do after he was freed, since before imprisonment, he’d been an Auror on the force. Or, more likely, he’d take a long break from any of that, using the school year to recuperate so that he was mentally and physically able to adopt Harry properly by next summer.

Speaking of mental health. By the way, what do you mean you’re wary of the cambion? I thought we agreed to see it?

( i agree that it’s probably the best thing to ask about what’s going on between our heads. there are no better legilimenses than those with magical creature blood, or magical creatures themselves — boggarts, murmurers, the like. but what you’re doing with that cambion is dangerous, Lys, and we’ve got to draw a proper contract out soon. you won’t like how demons deal with loopholes, i assure you )
I cringed. That was really, really stupid. The more I thought about it, the more stupid it seemed. Making deals with the devil... Being as blasé about it as I was... Merlin, I was just asking for death and/or dismemberment, wasn't I? Dietrich and Harper said similar things, though it's been long enough that I've sort of... put it out of my mind.

He was uncharacteristically grave as he said, (Lyssie, never let a demon stay in the peripheral without insurance. promise me you’ll take care of a contract as soon as you can, and have me, Dietrich, and Harper look it over. maybe even that Wilkes kid, too) His eyes narrowed thoughtfully, mind whirling fast enough that I wasn’t able to keep up and decipher without help from him. Another way we’d figured out to keep shit private, even between us. (i wouldn’t put it past the thing to have somehow influenced you to think of it as harmless, or to cast some sort of weak Notice-Me-Not on itself in your head. they’re sneaky, cambion, and i say this without a hint of prejudice)

I nodded, just slightly, and Sirius caught the movement out of the corner of his eye. Fudge was listing the crimes and another Auror was up in Stevenson’s place, presenting the state’s evidence for conviction. Oddly enough, I hadn’t known that Pettigrew’s wand had been checked and there’d only be a sham of a trial for his murder of twelve Muggles, later; he was bound for Azkaban, life-sentence, no matter what. But being a co-conspirator with Sirius for endangering minors, werewolf-baiting, attempting murder and kidnapping, holding a minor hostage, casting an illegal spell on a wizard, etc... Pettigrew might honestly get a Kiss.

Damn, this was wild. If Sirius hadn’t had so much support from me and Alby (and, peripherally, Snape and my family), he’d only have the insanity card to play. Which might get him institutionalized — just another kind of prison, really. Thank bloody goodness we were going to get him out of pretty much everything but trespassing, squatting, and petty vigilantism. That last one, we might be able to spin as Rightful Vengeance, though, since Sirius was the Lord of House Black.

“Due to the overwhelming evidence, we cannot rule this case with a motion for directed verdict.” Announced one of the Wizengamot members in Fudge’s place, the same old man who held a lot of weight in the room — even over the Minister himself.

Who the hell IS that? I wondered, as the courtroom began to prepare for witness reports and cross-examination. The man had gently-wrinkled, olive-toned skin and sharp, black eyes. He had a facial structure that spoke of handsomeness in his youth, but I couldn’t rightly tell you how old the man was; wizards and witches aged really oddly, and I was already terrible at judging this sort of thing.

(wish i knew. he’s not wearing any crests so i can’t even i.d. the house. though he sort of looks like...) Like who?

(nicosia zabini. she was the zabini english branch’s lady back before my little stint in azkaban, because she was twenty-two years older than her next brother and her father was killed before he named the brother heir instead)

I blinked. Another Zabini... A Zabini who was on our side, or at least, saying things and doing things that were rather favorable for our side. For which I sensed some Josie-style meddling here. She really was looking out for us, wasn’t she? But also, with that backstory...

I felt a little shudder. Why are Zabini’s so damn scary?
(there was a saying in the force, Lys: never cross a Zabini woman. you'll die. merlin bloody help your soul if she's from the main branch because those women are even scarier. we used to say that the only reason italy hasn't given us a dark lady zabini is because they're all so busy killing each other)

What the fuck.

(used to be close with the weasley family, actually. your… great-great grandmother was a zabini woman, but i heard something about her being disowned for being a bloodtraitor, so)

What the hell.

I’m related to the Zabini’s. That is bloody terrifying.

(explains some things, i think. your mother was terrifying in the war, too, no doubt about that, but you’re a different sort of scary when you get going. you’ve got a lot of your dad in you, and the man’s my second cousin, you know)

“Sirius Black committed only two of the crimes listed that night, which happen to be trespassing on Hogwarts grounds — for which I, as Headmaster, seek no reparations for — and squatting in the Shrieking Shack for a period of about nine months — for which I, as the owner of the property, also do not seek reparations for.” Alby was saying once I focused on the trial again.

I probably should’ve been paying attention to the trial, really, but… Well, maybe it was lazy of me, but I trusted that Alby had everything in hand, and that my part was all I really had to focus on. At this point, nothing I could do would really help Sirius’ case — only my testimony would do anything. Delegation, see?

“Putting aside those two offenses, then,” Fudge was saying testily, “Black still attempted to kidnap and murder several underage witches and wizards, one of whom he’d been manipulating for nearly five months, and then cast a Dark curse — invented by You-Know-Who himself — on one of your own professors! The other of whom, being a werewolf you failed to register with the Ministry, was baited into attacking your students, foiled only because Black himself got in the way of the bite!”

“Now, Cornelius, that’s not what happened. I have witnesses to swear against that, in fact.”

“Then present them, Dumbledore.” The Minister sneered.

“Well, those are quite a lot of accusations, so I’m afraid I’ll need quite a few witnesses. I find that Peter Pettigrew under Veritaserum would do very nicely in clearing up all these misunderstandings. I trust you still have the list of questions we both approved of?”

The Minister smirked, but then…

That same, maybe-a-Zabini Wizengamot member stood. “Not to worry, Headmaster, all of the jury members have the copies you provided. Geminio. Wingardium Leviosa. For you, Minister.”

Ohohoho. Something had happened there. Something Fudge thought was going to happen didn’t. I was curious as to how that was pulled off…

Now stiff and red-faced, the Minister looked over the parchment — a roll of parchment that was very, very long and which I doubted Fudge even really looked over, given the expression he had on his face as he gazed at it — that had been floated down to him.
How does Zabini have this much pull in the government? I questioned.

“I call to the witness stand… Peter Pettigrew.”

( foreign relations, mostly. they’re not so big a house in england, but in italy, the zabini’s are the government. the branch house started here as a diplomatic move, you know. it's practically the italian wizarding embassy, their manor )

That… was a lot of power to hold. That was a LOT of power to hold over Fudge. An entire country’s government… There hadn’t been a war of wizarding nations in centuries — in millennia — since the latest Dark Lords never really succeeded in taking over a single country, but… Holy hell.

“I shall perform the questioning myself, Cornelius, not to worry.”

“As… As you wish, Dumbledore…”

Merlin, I thought faintly, they half-run us, then.

( nah, they usually don’t care about our politics, s’long as their own interests aren’t touched. most of them fled to italy during the war. seems your zabini friend pulled something off for us )

Sirius laughed in our heads. He somewhat couldn’t believe that this was happening; I suppose Zabini getting this involved was odd, since a lot of other people in the room were giving the man funny looks as well. ( guess i have to go see the crimson widow after this- oh! they’re putting peter under veritaserum, goody! )

Like a child in a candy shop, really. I rolled my eyes at Sirius’ glee, but focused my attention on the Aurors dropping something into Pettigrew’s mouth and then standing back, waving their wands over the chair to make the chains slide back into the floor. They hauled Pettigrew up, dragged him towards the witness stand on the opposite side of Fudge’s podium. He sat there, dazed and rigid, and Dumbledore approached him, the tiles on the floor groaning and shifting into a spiral staircase, creating a neat, lowly-fenced platform so that Pettigrew and Dumbledore were eye-level.

This, I wanted to see. Sirius did, too. Anticipation was burning gleefully in both our stomachs.

“Please state your full name and birthday.” Alby said cheerfully.

Pettigrew didn’t even attempt to fight it. Animals were always good at sensing death, weren’t they? He probably smelled the end all over himself. “Peter Osbert Pettigrew. November 29, 1959.”

Pettigrew answered dully, eyes glazed with Veritaserum.

“Good. Now, then, Peter: was Sirius Black your co-conspirator during the events of June 6th, 1994?”

“No.”

Murmurs swept the courtroom. The camera flashed over and over.

Alby nodded. “At any point from October 31st, 1981 until today, were you and Sirius Black co-conspirators in any crime punishable by law?”

“No.”

Another round of muttering.
“Who cast the Waking Nightmare curse on Severus Snape on the 6th of June, 1994?”

“I did.”

“Why?”

“I was afraid. Severus is powerful, he would’ve been able to stop me. But I was afraid to kill him, because Lys is a Slytherin and Slytherins are protective of the git. The Waking Nightmare curse is technically a charm. I am skilled at those. It was easier for me to perform, to get rid of Severus so I could run away.”

I felt a lot of eyes turn to me. Pettigrew was pathetic, but to be afraid of a little girl…? Then again, when they found me, they’d see the cold smile on my face — Sirius and his wolf were howling in laughter in our mindscape, their triumph was hard to contain, really — and the scars besides. Perhaps it wasn’t so odd, for a coward of a wizard to fear a girl who faced a fully-grown werewolf and walked away smiling.

“ Sirius did not cast the Waking Nightmare curse, then?”

“No.”

“Does Sirius know how to cast the curse?”

“I do not believe so.”

“Why?”

“The Dark Lord invented the spell himself. He taught the curse to his followers when he favored them. Sirius Black was never a follower of the Dark Lord. So Sirius Black should not be able to cast the curse.”

Alby nodded to himself. “I see. What was your goal the night of June 6th, Peter?”

“To survive. To run away. I did not want to go to Azkaban.”

“Did you attempt to kidnap, murder, and/or harm anyone in accomplishing those goals?”

“Yes.”

“Who and how?”

“I cast the Waking Nightmare curse on Severus. I forcefully transformed into human form, which caused the explosion of the metal cage that Hermione was holding. The shards of metal also hurt Harry. I took Ron Weasley hostage to barter for my escape.”

“But you did not attempt to murder anyone.”

“No.”

“Did Sirius attempt to murder anyone?”

“No. He said I would wish I was dead in Azkaban soon enough.”

“Did Sirius attempt to kidnap anyone?”

“No.”
“Did Sirius bait Remus Lupin into biting anyone?”

“No.”

“How was Sirius bitten, then?”

“Remus got out of the Shrieking Shack. He was in a blood frenzy. He had smelled Lys’ blood. He was hunting her. He scratched her. Harry, Hermione, and Ron attempted to hide her. It did not work well. Sirius transformed into human form and injured himself to draw Remus’ attention. He was bitten.”

“So Sirius was bitten in trying to protect you?”

“No.”


Pettigrew’s answer killed Fudge’s hope right away. “Sirius was bitten because he was trying to protect Lys, Harry, Hermione, and Ron. I am unsure if he was trying to protect myself or Severus.”

“To your knowledge, all of this is true?”

“Yes.”

“No further questions.” Alby said, descending the stairs and letting the floor sink back into a flat mosaic once again.

What do they need my testimony for, after all that? I wondered.

(three different points of view of that night give a story a lot more credit)

Well, I can’t really dispute that, now, can I?

“I would like to ask the witness a few questions as well, Minister,” said someone.

Is there much to cross-examine? I wondered, watching an Auror replace Alby and lean forward to question a dull-faced Pettigrew as well.

“Sirius Black never attempted to harm or kill anyone on the night of June 6th?”

“No.”

(if it’s not in the approved questions, it’s out, and i’ve got a funny feeling that the minister somehow thought the questions were different from what dumbledore gave the wizengamot. the state isn’t ready for pettigrew at all)

“But there were injuries. The Weasley boy had a broken leg, and Harry Potter and the girl were injured as well. Is this true?”

“Yes.”

“Sirius Black caused these injuries?”

“He caused some of the injuries.”

So this is all on the fly.
“Did he intentionally do so?”

“No.”

(merlin, listen to how desperate they are, trying to pin assault on me)

“How can you claim that unless you were in league with Sirius Black?” demanded the Auror.

I nodded to myself. They really want to get you, somehow.

“That is not on the list of approved questions. It’s too vague for a witness under Veritaserum!” Alby interrupted.

“As another question, Auror Cox. The Wizengamot will dismiss the previous question.”

(after snape, i think it’s going to be you)

I smiled a little. The trial was going great, honestly; how on earth they’d put in an execution order for Sirius after all this, I’d have no idea. He’d be a free man within the bloody day, and by how pleased he felt, he knew it. It put both of us in a good mood. Best for last?

Sirius barked a laugh. But then, he warned, (but don’t forget that apparently you need to cry)

I’m not looking forward to that-

“No further questions.” Said the Auror tightly.

By the looks of the Wizengamot and the paleness of the Minister, that had gone very, very badly for the state’s case. They didn’t have the right questions approved, the Wizengamot wouldn’t let Fudge get away with anything — or, at least, Zabini wouldn’t — and so they were wholly unprepared for this. What did they think was going to happen, we wouldn’t call Pettigrew up? For fuck’s sake.

After Pettigrew, Sirius himself was taken up to the stand. Somehow, however, Alby got him out of Veritaserum — how, I had no clue — and he gave his own version of the events of that night with Alby’s prompting. He smelled Pettigrew with Harry and panicked, dragged Ron and the rat into the Shack as gently as he could while Ron was fighting against him. In the Shack, Harry and Hermione also tried to fight him, and he tried not to hurt them, using Ron’s wand to disarm them first. When Lupin showed up, all wands but Lupin’s were tossed to the side, and the professor had been hostile until Sirius convinced him that Scabbers was Pettigrew.

I watched snippets of memories through Sirius’ eyes, understanding how the situation was built up from before I’d shown up. Snape showed up, furious and concerned for his students, and had been on the verge of killing him and Lupin… until I’d burst in, defending the two, placing myself in front of them and demonstrating no sign of possession or Imperio or any of that.

“And Professor Snape was more willing to believe Guinevere Weasley than yourself or then-Professor Lupin?” Alby asked.

Sirius nodded. “They all were,” he said solemnly, glancing at me briefly. “She’s a Soothsayer. She’s Ron’s sister. She’s Harry and Hermione’s friend. She’s one of Snape’s snakes. Lys- Er, Guinevere made them all stop to think, at least.”

“So she had more credibility than you, and it was using this that you managed to persuade those present that night.”
He was formulating his words very carefully, trying to make a good argument for himself, there. I mentally nudged him, encouraging. Sirius took a breath, then, slowly, “Yes. It’s… Well, it was the truth. The pieces were… subtle, but they were there. You just needed time to- to put it together. Guinevere made them stop, gave them time to think. I can’t thank her enough for that.”

“Disregard that last statement.” Fudge fired out immediately, “Sentimentality.”

Sirius threw a dirty look at the man, but Alby went on without pause:

“And they believed you eventually?”

“We revealed the rat as Peter, and that, I think, was when everyone was won over. It was the most unbelievable part of the truth, after all. Once that was proven, the rest made more sense. Or… I’d like to think so.”

“And after that?”

“He was put in a cage and we were going to take him to the castle. Then… Well, Moony- Remus’d forgotten his potion that night, chasing after wayward students, and Snape didn’t have it with him either, so… I got Lyssie her wand back and then I tried to buy her time. All of them. I hoped they’d get to the castle while I was keeping Remus busy, but he- Well, he takes his Wolfsbane religiously, so the blood frenzy was strong. Stronger than I’d ever heard of.”

( i’ve never heard of a werewolf that determined to hunt, you know. you and snape and harry transfigured a LOT of silver and moony went through all of it to get to you )

I hoped it slowed him down, at least?

( it did. you did good that night, lyssie. you know that, right? )

Sirius was still talking about the night, talking about the bloody, vicious fighting he did to protect us from Lupin in a blood frenzy. I looked at the junction of his neck and shoulder, the left side — just like my scars, too — where he’d been bitten. I let myself gaze at Sirius’ scars, a reddish sort of shade and jagged and striking against the rest of him; thinner and smaller and more numerous than my own, but there and only a base that would be built upon, filled with more scars from more moonlit nights.

He noticed, of course.

( it’s okay, lyssie. i’m a werewolf and that’s okay )

I know. But I wish I could’ve done better.

( fate wouldn’t give an inch. we both know this. if you’d wanted to avoid everything, you would’ve needed to prepare years in advance. your sight wasn’t nearly as strong as it is now, not years ago. it was an impossible situation and you know it )

Alby was finishing up. “No further questions.”

“And the cross-examination?”

The same Auror stood across the room. “Yes, Minister, I have additional questions.”

“Please proceed, Auror Cox.”
Part of me will always regret it, no matter how long it’s been or how used to the scars we both become.

(understandable, Lyssie. just don’t dwell)

I try not to. But I am just becoming a teenager, you know, we do the brooding thing.

“-necessary to break the boy’s leg, and injure both the girl and your own… godson?”

“I regret that they were hurt while I was trying to disarm and calm them down. If I could’ve done that without hurting them, I would have; but I needed the rat, and then I needed them to listen to me.”

“So you would do it again?”

Sirius’ mind spiked with annoyance. (watch out for this one, Lyssie. he’s a persistent bugger)

“If I could do it over, I would’ve taken only Peter, and I would’ve brought him to the Headmaster and pled my case.”

“All by yourself?”

Sirius hesitated. “I likely would have waited until Lys- er, until Guinevere came by with food, and then asked her to… help. She’s a trustworthy figure at Hogwarts. I… I guess it’s shameful, that I depended on her for so much, but I swore that I would make it up to her once I was free. I owe her and her House a debt that I’ll be hard-pressed to pay back.”

“…Hm. So you were aware that your actions were illegal and damaging.”

I hate him, I deadpanned.

Sirius smirked physically. “I’d say illegal and inconvenient, I think.”

“You injured Harry Potter, Hermione Granger, and Ron Weasley. Guinevere Weasley was forced to cater to your every need. Is that not damaging?”

I felt that sense of shame flood Sirius’ chest, together with a desperate horror and guilt.

Don’t! I snapped into our link, tugging on his mind sharply, Don’t you dare let that bastard get to you! I was happy to help you! You’re family, remember? You’re pack. You’re one of mine and don’t you dare think otherwise!

Sirius sat up a little straighter, eyes narrowed. He was grabbing onto my outrage and irritation and taking it for himself. “I won’t pretend that I never hurt anyone, because I did, even if I wished I didn’t have to. And I won’t pretend that my dependence on Guinevere wasn’t shameful, because it was, even if it was necessary at the time. But I did what I had to, to bring Pettigrew to justice and to protect the people I cared about.”

There was a tense moment of silence, Sirius staring down the Auror — Cox, right — and the Auror doing the same. For a moment, I joined my mind to Sirius, giving him my unspoken and unconditional support, and for a moment, a fierce sense of protectiveness made his eyes flash werewolf-gold. The Auror saw it just as easily as we felt it, and I smirked as he backed away first, unnerved.

What a fucking bastard, I scoffed as the man muttered that he had no further questions, and
retreated.

( thanks for having my back, partner )

That’s what I’m here for. You know I didn’t mind helping you. I wanted to.

“I call to the stand, Severus Snape.”

( yeah. well, we both have our regrets about not doing enough last year, eh? )

Just don’t dwell, I echoed to him.

Sirius chuckled in my head. ( knew that was going to come back ) He frowned, outwardly and into our link. ( be careful of that auror, Lyssie. he’s utterly shameless and he really wants me back in Azkaban. i didn’t like the smell of him )


I was curious. What did he smell like?

( …trickery )

“We’ve heard much of that night of June 6th, so I won’t ask you to repeat it. I would like to ask, however: Do you believe Sirius Black is innocent?”

“You’ll have to elaborate.”

Doesn’t every Slytherin?

( it’s hard to describe. better if you experience… but it’s… it’s as if he’s stale, and i smell dried sweat, but he’s also… sort of predatory? prey pretending to be a predator. it’s not right, i don’t like it. a parasite, maybe? he smells like a parasite pretending to be a hero. that’s the best i can describe it without you taking some of my senses )

“-certainly, I was angry when my Slytherin stood in front of him. I suspected some sort of mind-altering spell at first. I demanded that Black remove it, or I would remove him. When it became obvious that no such magic was present, I decided it was better that I wait for an explanation.”

That’s really specific and abstract.

( he’s just not someone i’d trust. when he was challenging me, and then you were in my head, i reacted the way a werewolf reacts when one of their weaker packmates is behind them. he backed off right quick, after that )

I noticed. He practically fled.

( as he should. a werewolf’s eyes go gold, Lys, you better backtrack )

“I do not claim to understand the machinations of someone such as Peter Pettigrew.”

“Thank you, Severus. No further questions.”

“Auror Cox?”

Snape threw a poisonous, derisive look at the Auror. The man shook his head at that, looking to the
Minister, “None, sir.”

I snorted. Everyone’s afraid of Snape.

(or the bastard would be less helpful even if he was cross-examined)

You’d think they’d jump on the chance, really. He hates you.

( but he’s loyal to dumbledore, people remember that, you know )

“-call to the stand, Guinevere Weasley.”

Oh… that was faster than I thought.

Snape was already descending from the witness stand, robes billowing.

(snapecidn’t take long, really. man’s probably itching to get back to dissecting babies in his basement or something)

Leave my Head of House alone, Sirius, or I’ll tell them you cried on me and I felt so bad I had to help you. It’s not like it’s too far from the truth, I reminded him firmly, getting out of the seats and shuffling down to the floor. Snape helped me down the stairs, the very picture of a good Slytherin Head of House, and nodded to me; his version of reassurance, I think. Maybe I looked more nervous than I felt?

Sirius met my eyes as I passed to the witness stand, giving an encouraging nod. I smiled a little.

Alby made a show of helping me up the stand. I suppose it was best to make sure I looked as harmless as possible? Or weak, somehow? To help Sirius’ image a bit more. I sort of wished I’d paid more attention to Snape’s testimony, but Sirius distracted me, dammit!

(sorry. we’ve both gotten used to it, i think )

Too used to it. You distracted me back then, too, and it’s why I got scratched. I bet you got more injured, too, while I was struggling with Pettigrew.

(yeah. this link isn’t good for that sort of thing, is it? let’s stay out of each other’s way until you’re done being questioned, alright? )

“Are you ready, Lys?” Alby said, having ascended to the platform already, preparing to question me.

I nodded.

I can agree to that. Let me know if I’m edging into dangerous territory, though.

(i’ve got your back, partner )

That was very reassuring.

“Alright, my dear. Please tell the court your full name and birthdate.”

I swallowed. It was a little nerve-wracking, up in the center of attention all of a sudden. Glad that I wasn’t under Veritaserum — because, Merlin, that’d be a little awkward, what with the reincarnation thing, which I allowed to rush through my mind too fast for Sirius to look at — I
answered clearly, “Guinevere Lysandra Weasley. I was born August 12, 1981.”
Chapter 46

Chapter Notes

Aaaaaaand we're back to normal-sized chapters. This chapter got finished as soon as I posted the double-update, 'cos I got SUPER motivated reading all your comments! You guys are so damn nice, I swear, I've got the coolest readers in the world. :')

Thank you for being patient and for being so understanding about the break... And I'm really happy to be back and writing. And I'm sorry about the cliffhanger... I've told a lot of commentors, but it was extremely accidental. I've posted earlier than planned to make up for that, so the next chapter might take a bit. Maybe a couple weeks?

Finishing up the trial in this one... Then we get to the fun summer stuff!

ALSO! Below are links to some cool shit:

AWESOME FANART!!!!

More fanart that I haven't been linking bc I haven't been bloody updating!!!!

Another fanart that I've been meaning to link but haven't because I'm ACTUALLY THE WORST!!!!

My RL friend's fanfiction, please check it out!!!!

I like... told people it'd be up in a few hours, but then I realized I already had the draft ready on ao3, so I guess it's here early. So. Basically. Have fun and enjoy the chapter!!! Sorry my notes are long, they'll shorten up as I run out of shit to say. :D

Also guys this arc is gonna be really, reaaaaally long. I can feel it in my soul. I haven't done half the shit for summer I need to and it's already been three chapters... I hope y'all are prepared...

... 

“At any point during June 6th, did you believe Sirius Black was going to intentionally harm you?”

I shook my head. “No.” I smiled a little. “I was more afraid of Professor Snape that night, really, and he’s my Head of House — the man's bodily carried me to the Hospital Wing before. I trusted everyone there but Pettigrew.”

“You trusted Sirius Black enough to allow him to use your wand.” Alby prompted.

“Yes,” I said quietly, “I have asthma attacks often. I taught Sirius how to help me after the first
time I had one in front of him. He’d panicked really badly, and asked me if he could do anything. I taught him a few spells… they’re harmless ones. Healing spells.”

“Which ones?”

“Anapneo, Strenudas secaelius, and Uklidnisera,” I recited, “I could’ve used them on myself, but… I was sort of panicking that night. I thought Professor Snape was going to kill Sirius and Professor Lupin.”

“Why?”

“Well… it doesn’t look too good, does it, when Sirius’ wanted posters’ve been everywhere, our werewolf professor is with him, and they’re both trying to convince my Head of House, and my brother and his friends, that our family rat is a murderer?”

“And that’s why you stayed near the two professors? To convince Professor Snape?”

I smiled a little. “Leverage. Even if I knew neither of them would harm me, as long as Professor Snape believed they would, I was effectively Professor Lupin’s and Sirius’ human shield. Solidarity, too. So as they explained, I could offer my own evidence.”

(very Slytherin. they’ll be less likely to think you’re lying if you have a bit of Slytherin in your story)

I know.

(where did you learn that from?)

Josie.

Alby nodded. “Yes, I see. How did you know that Peter Pettigrew was an Animagus?”

“I’m a born-in Soothsayer. That’s why I’ve got the asthma, see. The colors of an Animagus in their animal form and an animal and a familiar are different, even if it’s hard to see at first.”

The Headmaster chuckled. I imagined he was thinking about how he was the one to have taught me that; not that we were going to reveal our closeness to the Ministry, of course. “So you knew Pettigrew was an Animagus and you believed Sirius Black when he claimed that Pettigrew was the murderer, and your brother and his friends were in danger because of that.”

“I did.”

“And you trusted Sirius enough to allow him use of your wand throughout the night?”

“If he needed it. He gave it back before he transformed into a his dog form to… well, to fight Professor Lupin off, once he transformed. I used it — my wand — to Transfigure some of the roots of the Whomping Willow into silver, buy us more time.”

“But you were bleeding before this?”

I hummed in confirmation. “Pettigrew didn’t like it when Sirius, Professor Lupin, Ron, and I started to convince everyone else.” I said vaguely.

(oh, very nice. they’ll think he did it)
“And then you were scratched?”

“We all ran out of the Shrieking Shack, with Sirius staying behind to keep Lupin away. But then, Pettigrew — well, we’d put him in a cage, you know, and figured he was too weak to really do anything about it… Our mistake, I think, because he got out and was fighting everyone, cursed Professor Snape, got my brother… We were distracted when Lupin finally got through. I guess we could’ve made it back into Hogwarts if Pettigrew hadn’t held us back for that long, and I got scratched while the bastard was flailing around.”

(ah, sorry, that was I)

“Language, Miss Weasley.”

Language, Sirius.

“Sorry,” I said, not contrite at all, “I got scratched while Pettigrew was flailing around.” Should I play it up a little? ...Eh, why not? My expression went a little reluctant. "It's why I've got the scars."

Pettigrew was why I had the scars, that is. The room heard that, even if I didn't say so.

“And then Sirius sacrificed himself for you all.” Dumbledore concluded.

“Hermione put me under some sort of sensory dampening ward? Or a charm? I'm not sure, but they were trying to make it hard for Lupin to figure out where the blood was coming from. He was trained on me, though, so the next best thing was for a new source of blood to tempt him. Sirius knew that, so Sirius did what he had to do. I got away with only a few scars because of him — it could’ve been a bite, but it wasn’t, and I’ll remember that. My Family will remember that.”

(nice touch)

’Specially since I pointed out that I inherited the Prewett Soothsayer gene, eh?

(oho, I didn’t think of that. very nice indeed. also… what’s a gene? you mean the pants? jeans?)

I’ll explain later.

“-perform a cross-examination.”

“As you will, Auror Cox.”

That same Auror took Alby’s spot, a red-robed wizard with a flat, doughy face and a balding head. One of the older Aurors, but he didn’t look to be a Blood War veteran. Maybe a paper-pusher that was promoted after everyone else died, or someone who really let himself go after the war ended. I didn’t have many charitable things to say about him, with how he blatantly looked at my scars and sneered a bit at me. Like I was a lying little girl, trying to gain attention. It didn't help, either, that his eyes flickered more often to my scars than to my eyes; in fact, he barely looked at my eyes at all, eyes roaming from my scars to my clothing with a slight expression of distaste.

(be careful. I don’t like him and neither does the furry bastard)

You should probably name your wolf at some point, Sirius.
( when i’m done being pissed off at him for killing Padfoot. seriously, Lyssie, i don’t like the way he’s looking at you )

We both snarled in our heads.

Like I’m prey.

( like you’re prey )

“When did you first interact with Sirius Black, girl?” Auror Cox asked.

I narrowed my eyes in annoyance. That was a tone I didn’t like. Or maybe I was just predisposed to thinking the worst of him, with Sirius’ influence in my head and the previous questionings. “Probably in January or so.” I answered.

“How did you discover him?”

“He was in his Animagus form at first. He approached me, transformed, and then asked me for help.”

“You allowed yourself to be approached?”

“I was alone at the time. I take a lot of walks through Hogwarts, when I can. It’s relaxing.”

Auror Cox’s eyes were shining. “So he cornered you.”

I grimaced. “I suppose he did, yes. But he never made a move to hurt me — he only wanted to talk.”

( don’t be afraid to out Septimus Weasley as why I went to you, if he asks. Uncle Sevens would be proud to help )

A pang of grief, the shuddering of the connection at the mention. But Sirius and I suppressed the dementor-memories, burying them deep. We’d address that later. That was a skill that Sirius had learned from me, after all. I was good at pushing things back, procrastinating.

“And why you, Miss Weasley?”

I blinked. “Do you mean, why did Sirius choose to talk to me?”

Auror Cox glared. “I’m the one asking questions here. But yes. Why did Sirius Black choose you? Because you were young? Vulnerable? More liable to be sympathetic? More liable to take care of him due to your… gender?”

This motherfucker…

Josie would flip her shit if she heard this sexist bullshit. As it was, Ginny looked pissed in the stands. Augusta Longbottom looked like she’d swallowed a lemon. Auror Cox, however, seemed to ignore the rising outrage in the women of the Wizengamot — there were not many, however — and kept his beady eyes trained on me.

“He told me that Septimus Weasley urged him to find me, when he needed help the most. The girl descended from the Mind Eater’s blood. I suppose that left only myself and my sister, and Sirius chose me because I was a Slytherin, and I’d be less likely to rat him out.” I said sharply.
As if I’m going to reveal my proclivity towards illegal texts, right here, right now.

“I see… How very coincidental, that Sirius Black received a weak Clairvoyant’s vision. An unregistered vision, as well. And this occurred in January? You went that long, silent about the fact you’d met a mass murderer?”

(shit. they checked the Department of Mystery’s archives for that, didn’t they?)

Can’t say I blame my great-grandad, though, I murmured, calming Sirius’ little spike of panic, I’m hiding from the Ministry myself. I wouldn’t want them to have records of all the things I’ve ever Seen. What a bloody nightmare, honestly, that would fuck up the choices so much.

“Sirius was proven innocent for the Muggle killings,” I answered coldly, beginning to slip into parvus potesta mode, dampening my annoyance — turning it into something useful. “And when the first thing he asked after was whether I didn’t think there was something funny about Scabbers, I was inclined to believe him when he said it was the rat who framed him.”

“Why did you not report him to your beloved Head of House?” the man asked mockingly, clearly referencing how I praised Snape previously.

(remain calm)

I am, I assured Sirius.

“Because I believed him, and I knew Professor Snape would not. Not without concrete proof. To me, my Mage Sight was proof enough. To my Head of House, I did not think it would be.” I spelled out carefully, not wanting to give this man an inch to spin out of control.

"So you thought you knew better than everyone else." Auror Cox stated flatly. "And now you bear the price of those thoughts, right on your face."

You’re an arrogant little girl, he basically said to my face. Bastard. And I think he called me ugly to look at, too.

(he’s treading on dangerous ground, here. the weasley name isn’t as important as it was before grindelwald and esperaunce, but insulting a mainliner pureblood is never a good idea)

I glared. "I chose to trust my instincts with Sirius, and didn't think anyone else would do the same, so I decided to wait until I had enough evidence to convince everyone. It's a logical decision, in the face of a seemingly illogical choice."

"I find it difficult to believe that you would cover for a criminal such as Black if you were so terrified of Peter Pettigrew that you kept your silence for years... No, no... Perhaps Sirius Black threatened you into submission?"

A flash of rage took over, from both Sirius and me. Cox here was so very sure in his accusations, wasn’t he? So very sure that Sirius had somehow manipulated me, tricked me, gotten me so well that I was lying for him. The implication that Sirius would do something like that to a packmate had him bristling, his werewolf instincts and what was left over from his previous dog Animagus snarling at the thought. I was outraged that anyone would think I’d let something like that happen, or, after three weeks, my family or anyone else wouldn’t have fixed me from that.

I had to unclench my jaw. “Sirius never threatened me. If anything, I was the one making threats.”
(you made a very terrifying adversary, let me tell you now, Lyssie. i was sure you were going to hex me to pieces, just like your mother in the war…) 

What? Mum hexed people to pieces in the war?? Dammit, I’m busy now- You’re telling me that story later, Sirius!

We joked at each other, but we were both tense because of the questioning. Neither of us liked where this was going…”

“In… what did you do for five months, then, Miss Weasley, before Pettigrew came to light?”

“I’m a Hogwarts student, Auror Cox. There’s plenty to do.”

Cox twitched. “You and Sirius Black, Miss Weasley.” He clarified.

I looked at him coolly. “I’d bring him food and help him clean himself up a little. He wasn’t in good shape after Azkaban. Sometimes I’d have extra Nutrient Supplement potions that I’d give him. I’d try to help him clean the Shrieking Shack, too, so it was somewhat liveable while he searched for Pettigrew, or other evidence to clear his name. I also tried to keep my eye out for the rat, but he disappeared during the school year. We were sure he’d stay near Hogwarts, however, so we kept searching.”

“You brought him food every day?”

“If I could manage it.”

“When?”

“Usually late. When the common room was emptier, you know. I didn’t fancy trying to explain to my friends why I was suddenly eating like a starving person and disappearing all the time.”

“So you visited Sirius Black in a private location every night. And he made no threats to you, hm… Well, then, Miss Weasley. What really happened during those nightly visits?”

(WHAT THE FUCK-)

“Excuse me?” I hissed.

In the corner of my eye, Dad and Ginny were beginning to flush with anger as they began to realize what Auror Cox was saying, Snape looked more dangerous than ever since he’d picked up on it immediately, Sirius looked like he was about to thrash against his chains, and Dumbledore’s face had gone blank. Blank, but his eyes were apologetic when I caught them, and I knew that these were the questions I wasn’t going to like, that he’d barely warned me about. The court’s eyes were wide, watching with intense interest as this pathetic excuse of an Auror made the implication that Sirius and I-

That we-

(I’M GONNA KILL HIM)

“Perhaps you think yourself special? In love? Young girls are all the same. Perjuring yourself for the sake of self-delusion is pitiful. Or if you’re scared… Well, there is no need to hide here, with Black in chains and the Ministry behind you. Come now, girl. Why did he choose you?”

Auror Cox turned to look at the Wizengamot.
He continued, addressing them, “What are the odds that an illegal vision would point Sirius Black to the Weasley girl, hm? What are the odds that Septimus Weasley, a weak Clairvoyant, could see so far beyond his own death? He chose Miss Weasley for a reason! A young girl, alone, vulnerable, weak — the second daughter of a fallen House, a Slytherin… A girl aching for attention, obviously, by her stunts as a Hogwarts student, and in need of some sort of prospects, with how many siblings she has and how badly off the Weasley House is!

“The girl,” he said, turning back to me, pointing at me, “refused Veritaserum. As did Black. They have something to hide, and it’s this! He promised — just a few minutes ago, he said he swore to you, that he would ‘make it up’ to you, if you hid him and aided him throughout those five months! Admit it, little girl: it was not Sirius Black and Peter Pettigrew who were the co-conspirators, it was Sirius Black and yourself; however unwillingly you were or weren’t, Miss Weasley.” He turned again, dramatically, gesturing to the Wizengamot and the crowd. “And may I remind you, ladies and gentlemen, that such crimes fall under sexual assault of a minor, line theft, conspiracy against the Ministry, and, perhaps, even illegal Dark Arts performed to manipulate a minor of an Ancient House!”

I was so stunned that I only stared blankly when Auror Cox faced me again, smiling nastily. The room was buzzing with noise.

“You aided a criminal, either determined to take him as a husband, or afraid that you would have to. It’s hard to tell, when you’re a Weasley girl in Slytherin.”

…

“How dare you accuse my daughter-!”

“Sit DOWN, Weasley!”

Dad had stood up, furious and looking like he was going to leap over and strangle Cox. Fudge had been the one to shout at him to sit down.

I was as still as stone, mind whirling with too much information.

The more chaotic this became, the more the press would jump on it. The more the public would jump on it. Fucking hell. I was pissed about this — I was more than pissed about this — but I had to take a step back. What was the angle, here? Why accuse Sirius of pedophilia? One: to annul my testimony, because I couldn’t be trusted not to lie for someone I was… apparently in love with. (I was going to vomit in my mouth.) Two: to paint both of us in a bad light, which would be whatever for me, but might really hurt Sirius’ chances to adopt Harry even if the other testimonies were enough to get him out of Azkaban and/or further imprisonment.

Three: there was also the fact that Sirius might be forced to marry me if the accusations held and he wasn’t put into Azkaban, to save both our faces… though that would only further degrade us. I was getting some sort of feeling that it was some old, out-of-date law left over from the fucking Arthurian period or something, but I couldn’t remember where I’d read that. Marriage would ruin both our reputations. God this was so gross, this was so gross, this was so gross, I was literally nauseous at the thought of…

Nope. Not thinking about it. But there was also the fact that they were attempting to pin some
crimes on me — or was line theft one of Sirius’, too? I dunno — and pin more on Sirius. Illegal Dark Arts performed to manipulate a minor of an Ancient House didn’t sound good… very Azkaban-like… at least a life-sentence, if not an execution, but it was all mixed up with Sirius also being a new werewolf.

Basically, they attacked us on every front they could. Sirius could go back to Azkaban or be executed with these new crimes. Sirius could be freed, but he’d have to marry a child, and that would still degrade him and make the Ministry look good. We needed to get to the third option, which was: Sirius doesn’t go to Azkaban, we don’t have to get married or whatever convoluted bullshit the Ministry’s old laws demand — maybe Josie had told me about it previously? — and everything’s fine, he gets to adopt Harry, I get to go home and tell Mum and watch as she tears the Ministry to shreds with her bare hands.

Right. So I had to calm this shit down and kill that idea immediately.

Right.

(In my mind, a certain Auror Cox was so high up on my shit list that I swore to torment him every possible way I could, and if I had to sign my life away to Josie to do it, so be it. But then again, Percy’d be hired soon, and there was no way my brother’d take this lying down…)

“ORDER! ORDER IN THE COURT!”

Holy shit what am I going to do here?

( LYS )

DEAR GOD, why are you so loud?

“MISS FLORES, RETURN TO YOUR SEAT! THE COURT IS NOT ADJOURNED, YOU CANNOT TAKE INTERVIEWS AT THE MOMENT!”

( Lyssie, i’ve been calling you for a while! the bastard’s still talking. and yes, we might have to get married, because that’s the only way to prevent line theft punishment. which is execution, by the way. unless you’re an expecting mother, in which case, you’re confined to a detention cell and then executed after you’ve given birth )

“I WILL NOT SIT DOWN, NOT WHILE THIS- THIS- THIS PILLOCK CALLS MY DAUGHTER A SLAG-!”

That is so fucked up, I don’t even know where to start.

( no one bloody calls for line theft anymore, everyone knows how to work it out privately. but now that cox the bastard here’s announced it… )

“YOU WILL SIT DOWN, WEASLEY, OR I WILL HAVE PAVLOVIC ESCORT YOU OUT!”

Am I the line thief or are you??

Sirius groaned. ( it’s me. i’ll explain later )

Images terrible enough to be my nighttime terrors were flashing through my head. Sirius in Azkaban again, Sirius getting a Dementor’s Kiss, me going mad at the constant feeling of being near one of those abominations... I wasn't hyperventilating yet, but it was a close thing.
If you get a later, they're going to BLOODY execute you-!

(OI. calm down, breathe)

Sirius was breathing slowly in his chained seat. I felt it, the air coming in and out of our lungs, and I struggled to match him. The court was in chaos, my father about to go bloody insane, Ginny beside him, silent but ready to follow him into bloody battle or what have you. Alby was trying to get everyone to calm down, Augusta Longbottom was screeching in outrage at the sexism of Auror Cox, the Minister was trying to get everyone to shut up, and a reporter was attempting to hop the enclosure gates.

Mostly, though, it was the Minister and Dad roaring at each other.

“THAT’S MY TWELVE-YEAR-OLD DAUGHTER UP THERE, HOW DARE YOU-”

“YOUR DAUGHTER IS AN ACCESSORY TO CRIME AND A VICTIM OF ATTEMPTED LINE THEFT, YOU SHOULD BE GRATEFUL SHE’S ONLY TWELVE, THEN BLACK WON’T HAVE BEEN Able TO-”

(one, two, three, four, in… one, two, three, four, out… just like that, Lyssie)

I taught this exercise to you.

(you need it right now)

We breathed out.

Right. Yes, thank you. Alright. So I need to shut this accusation down and shut everyone up.

(dumbledore’s got a wand)

Right.

The courtroom was still in a state of mild chaos, but I managed to make eye contact with Alby. The man looked at me inquisitively — still apologetically — and I blinked at him slowly, nodding. In my head, Sirius helped me draw my shields up, strong and stable as two Seer’s minds, and we let out a little thread of, I need to be heard. Alby obviously read the surface thoughts right out of me, and nodded.

Being at the end of the Elder Wand was a little weird, but I saw Alby mouth the spell, Sonorus.

I smiled very, very politely. A vampire’s smile.

This one’s for you, Josie.

“So,” I said pleasantly, eyes cold as anything, “You’re attempting to pin the rape of a minor on Sirius, is that it, Auror Cox?”

The bluntness of my language and the icy calm of it silenced the room; it was loud enough that I echoed, my alto filling every corner and reaching every ear. Auror Cox blinked, taken aback by my lack of Weasley temper, which my father was displaying in spades. Good. He was expecting me to lose my shit; withholding that was important, then.

Alby canceled the spell as soon as everyone was quiet, and gave Dad a look that made him sit down, slowly and grudgingly.
Auror Cox sought to discredit me. I would just have to make that impossible.

“You are attempting to intimidate and confuse me so that you can claim that Sirius Black repeatedly raped me, damaging my psyche enough that I would believe myself to be bound to him? Or that I am somehow stupid enough to think that an older wizard paying attentions to me in that desperate of a situation surely means true love? That I would perjure in front of the Wizengamot for him? You refuse to believe that I am not protective of my family enough to keep my silence on Pettigrew, that I am not intelligent enough to make judgements of innocent or guilty, that I am not honorable enough that when I saw a hunted man struggling, I would attempt to help him clear his name? This is what you believe, Auror Cox?”

( holy shit you’re terrifying, Lys, this is fantastic )

He wants to paint me as a stupid girl who wants the Black fortune? I hissed inwardly, He wants me to be a martyr to the cause? He wants to make me a victim with no voice, or a shrewt with no intelligence? I’ll give him the fucking parvus potesta reigning. I’ll give him a descendent of Black and Zabini and Weasley and Prewett, the girl with the Mind Eater’s book.

“See here, girl! I’m the one asking the questions!” Auror Cox blustered, turning an interesting shade of purple-red and looking pressured. The entire courtroom seemed to be leaning in, entranced by how deceptively tranquil my voice was and how sharp my words were in contrast. “You admit it, then, eh? You admit that you had intimate relations with Black against your will, and-”

My smile curved wider. I hoped Josie would hear of this. I hoped she’d laugh. “I will submit to a Veritaserum questioning about it, if you wish. I will submit to a Mediwitch checking, if that’s what it takes. I’ll even submit to a mind scan, if that so soothes your soul, Auror Cox. But when you give me that potion… when the Mediwitch returns with no proof… and when Albus Dumbledore finds nothing in my mind to indicate that what you’re claiming is true…”

Dad stood up suddenly, face contorted in rage, finishing for me, “Then I hope you’re prepared to duel me, Cox, because you’re accusing my blood of impugned honor, and I won’t have it.” I’d seen a lot of terrifying things, but I’d never seen Dad look as viciously furious as he was, right then. I could really believe he had Black blood in him, now; I could even see he might have the Black Madness, really. “I won’t have it, do you hear me? The Ancient House of Weasley and Prewett won’t have it.”

“See here! That sounds to be a threat, Weasley-”

( don’t let this chance go! )

“That’s Miss Weasley,” I interrupted Auror Cox, at once drawing attention to myself again. Not by my own will, mind; Sirius had practically said the words for me. Though I did agree that we couldn’t let the court descend into chaos again; I’d chosen to control the room, so I had better damn well control it.

Not sure what you called out to Cox for, Sirius, but I’ll make the best of it, I thought to him.

( trust me Lys, your dad just gave me an idea, give me a moment to pull the memories up )

I was still smiling, and the expression was not a very pretty one, not with the scars, and not with how I was a twitch away from setting Cox on fire wandlessly. I leaned back, hands folded in front of me, legs crossed lazily. Not that it had the full effect when I was in a witness box, nor with my secondhand formal attire, but it was a posture that spoke of confidence, cool-headedness, elegance, and superiority. Josie favored it, and she’d told me once that it demanded attention because those
were traits pureblood nobles were *supposed* to have naturally.

There was a reason purebloods thought they were automatically better than Halfbloods or Muggleborns. The eldest of our names were friends to Merlin, Morgana, Mordred. The most ancient houses were the first druids, contemporaries of Circe, descendants of Grímhildr, servants of Ceridwen. There was Hecate’s blood in our veins, history carved into our bones, Nicnevin’s breath in our lungs. It didn’t excuse the blatant discrimination, the undermining of new blood, the inbreeding, or the abuse of power, but purebloods could trace their lineage to ancient heroes and villains, and the weakest ripples of that world-changing magic still seeped into their magicks today.

This was the reasoning behind the bigotry. I wouldn’t call it justification, but purebloods were dangerous to mess with because of this. People often forgot that the Weasleys and the Prewetts were just as old as the Blacks and the Notts and the Travers, older than the Malfoys and Lestranges and Parkinsons. People often forgot that Dad had more Black blood in him than Draco Malfoy did, that Mum’s House was once the Prevett, a name which rung true with Helvynya the Mind Eater, Seraphina the Seditious, Mordecai — younger brother to Helvynya, called the Merchant of Death.

People often forgot that, though we were not nobles, our blood sang of it.

Sirius called for my attention mentally, prodding at the connection. (*the old traditions! arthur practically invoked them, use it!*)

*I don’t know the old traditions, Sirius-

(*no. you don’t.*)

We smiled together. He was chuckling rather evilly in my head.

(*but i do*)

“You forget,” I said softly, Sirius whispering information into my head, our memories blending together just enough, “that the Ancient House of Weasley and the Ancient House of Prewett can still invoke the old traditions, Auror Cox. We’re too few to reinstate ourselves as a Noble House, so we cannot hold Wizengamot seats, but my blood is old and you insult it with your accusations. You dare spit at the feet of our ancestors… The Φερτ(ι) and Βλισκά druids, the Prevett and Wealse lords… By Ministerial laws, I can invoke any of my male relatives to duel you to death.” I smiled, and let everyone remember that Bill Weasley was a Gringotts-employed Curse Breaker, Charlie actually and voluntarily worked with dragons, and my father had enough Black blood in him that if he hadn’t been removed from the line of succession, he probably could’ve claimed Lordship. “It’s an old, old tradition that barely anyone uses, really, but since my besmirched honor could mean the execution of my cousin and the Lord of House Black… I do hope you know what you’re getting into, Auror Cox.”

Cox swallowed.

The room was remembering, suddenly, that the impoverished and friendly and Light and bloodtraitor Houses of Prewett and Weasley weren’t just that. The room was remembering, suddenly, that we were descendants and opponents of Dark Lords. The room was remembering, suddenly, that Auror Cox had just insulted two of the oldest names in the European wizarding world by claiming their youngest daughter was a stupid whore.

Imagine that: calling Helvynya the Mind Eater a stupid whore. I hadn’t translated even an eighth of her book and I knew she’d make whoever dared say such things *scream.*
I knew all that research into my genealogy would pay off, one day.

( why on earth did you go all the way back into the druidic ages? )

Rituals.

( you're honestly insane. honestly, though, do you think we could convince your parents to name me your godfather? )

Soon as this is over. What do you think is going through Cox's head, hm?

( he's probably wondering where the hell you came from. weasleys and prewetts don't put out purebloods like you anymore, you know. the ministry was counting on that. if it were your sister... )

I wanted to destroy something at the thought. If it were Ginny, she'd either start roaring in anger or crying; both of which would've lent more credence to Auror Cox's claims. Hysterical little girls and all that rot, never mind that I wanted to scream and if Sirius hadn't calmed me down, I might've started crying. In front of the entire bloody wizarding world, the man'd called me a bloody... But it wasn't Ginny, thank Merlin. It was me, and I could handle it better. Unfortunately for Auror bloody Cox.

Is this enough credit for you, Cox? Can you truly afford to drag the names of some of the strongest purebloods in history through the mud? I taunted inwardly, enjoying how the room was silent and the Minister and his were horrified at the turn of events. Sirius and his wolf laughing weren't helping matters, of course. There was a sort of primal, vicious glee bubbling in our minds; the same sort of dark happiness we derived from threatening Pettigrew just before the Memory Ward ritual, or how I felt when I shattered his arm to keep him from transforming into a rat again.

The barest, barest touch of Madness. Blacks were always closer to that edge than others of Dark allegiances, and I had quite a bit of Black blood in my veins and a Black who'd been in Azkaban for years in my head. We of the Dark were always a touch more sadistic, a half-step more cruel than we needed to be. It was good, in this case, because I was so utterly un-Weasley, so set apart from what Cox and the Ministry expected, it hurt them and their attempt to discredit me, shame me and mine, undo everything I'd been working towards.

I tilted my head and smiled. I tasted victory and felt gold in my eyes. “So, Auror Cox? Shall we call for the Veritaserum? I assure you, when you ask if I’ve fucked my cousin, my answer will remain negative.” I leaned forward, just a little, daring the man to speak. "I have not previously entered and will never enter a sexual relationship with Sirius Leothrace Orion Saros Black III, Auror Cox. Is that good enough for you? Is that clear enough?"

( shit, that was great. the bastard will be scared now )

He better be.

The man looked like he was constipated. And, to my satisfaction, a bit cowed. “I… apologize, Miss Weasley. I did not... I... ahem, I do not believe you, er, had any... er... inappropriately relations with... Sirius Black. I do not... question your honor, nor the- the honor of your, er, Houses. There is no need for...”

I gave him a very cold look. ( befitting a snobby pureblood ) “I should hope not, Auror Cox. Did you have other questions?”
If he had more questions, I had a feeling Dad was about to start a blood feud.

Cox probably had the same feeling. “Er… no. No, I think… Your testimony… That will be all.”

I made to leave the witness stand, still pissed as hell, despite feeling better after threatening the man into backing down. I suppose this was the shit Alby wanted me to have a natural reaction to. No tears necessary after all… He’d just needed me to put some asshole in his place. Across the room, I gave Alby the stink-eye for not warning me that I was going to be called a little slag in front of the entire court. As flattering as it was that he trusted I’d get out of that situation — or maybe he’d been ready to rescue me if I’d panicked instead — it was still damn infuriating to listen to.

( that damn man is not allowed near my house if this is the sort of shit he pulls nowadays )

Cox? Or Alby?

( cox will find it very hard to do anything, after this. i’ll make bloody sure of it. dumbledore’s banned from my presence, and if i had any control over you, i’d say from yours, too )

Oh, don’t worry, I thought viciously, returning to my seat stiffly and sitting next to Dad, who’d immediately put an arm around me; he meant to comfort, but he was a bit too furious to pull it off as he normally did. I’m going to chew Alby out for this one. A little warning would have been LOVELY, I think.

“Alright, Lys?” Dad asked tersely.

I gave a short nod. “I will be.”

Ginny hissed across Dad, to me, “How dare that stupid, fat bastard say that about you! You should’ve humiliated him more! You should’ve punched him in the face!”

I grimaced, hoping the irritation rolling off the Weasleys in the room was obvious. We might’ve been decimated in the wars, and we might be bloodtraitors, but we weren’t witches and wizards to be trifled with. I hope the Ministry remembered that, for next time. I’d have to make sure the Ministry remembered that. If it was Ginny up there, her life about to be ruined with scandal and marriage to someone she didn’t want to marry and all those things…

If it was Ginny, I think I would’ve killed someone. Probably Cox.

This won’t happen again, I hissed, None of my siblings will ever go through that. If it hadn’t been me, if we hadn’t had a mental connection to cheat off of… That was too dangerous. This cannot happen to me or mine ever again.

( it won’t. we’ll figure it out, Lyssie )

“When do that and a lot more, once the Wizengamot doesn’t have its eyes on me.” I answered Ginny, making her smile viciously; she’d be a willing assistant, I was sure. She continued to hiss very painful-sounding threats under her breath to me, making me snicker at how utterly furious she was.

How’s the mood of the courtroom?

( not against us. with how many damn purebloods there are in the room, your little act really impressed them. doubly so since they knew there’s no way a weasley or prewett has that education anymore. that zabini bloke looks like a cat who got the canary, though )
He’s a Zabini. They love this shit.

(you’re not wrong)

One would think they’d all be a bit more suspicious of how I knew all that. If I hadn’t done so much genealogy research as a kid… And if I didn’t have you feeding me all the old traditions… And if I hadn’t looked up to Josie so much, emulated her…

(pureblood arrogance, Lyssie. we think we’re born with the noblesse oblige shoved up our arses, and get all impressed when it actually happens)

Right. Well.

Now I could at least bask in my victory a little. I’d gotten what I wanted, after being thrown a curveball so hard that I think my brain short circuited up there for a moment. Good god, I basically almost got thrown into a betrothal up there. Thank fucking god I was ready, and thank Merlin for Sirius keeping his wits about him enough to calm me down. Sitting down with my father on one side and my Head of House on the other, Sirius in my head and Alby speaking… it was soothing, after those minutes of keeping my panic and shock and terror inside, using them to make my anger cool and my tongue sharper. My energy was drained after that, and I didn’t think anyone would really blame me for leaning into Dad's shoulder a little, taking deep breaths.

One, two, three, four... in... One, two, three, four... out...

(hey) Sirius called gently, (it’s over with. you did good. just a bit more, then you can go home)

He sensed how utterly exhausted I was, after that. It felt like I’d been running marathons all day, when all I’d done was sit up there. At least I hadn’t started bleeding out my nose or gotten an asthma attack or had an anxiety attack. Sirius didn’t mention any of those thoughts running lazily around my head, though, merely reaching forward and sending comforting, warmth pictures into my head. Just like I’d do, when he was having a hard time.

But you’re coming with me, you know that, right?

(hm?)

I meant it when I was talking to Alby. I told him to bring you home.

Sirius smiled. (well. after that, how would dumbledore dare go against you? )

Just a bit more, Sirius. Then we’re both going home.

...

Fudge was fumbling around, up at his podium.

“Er… Right. So… Closing arguments, if you please…”

Thank you, by the way, Sirius. For helping me out, up there.

(no need. s’much as i adore you, kiddo, i really don’t want to marry you. ergh)
Likewise. I’m nauseous just thinking about it, honestly…

“-all highly suspicious, I think, ladies and gentlemen,” Cox was saying, still unrecovered from the dagger-sharp glares coming from the witness box and Sirius, “that Sirius Black remained hidden throughout the year, depending on the k-kindness of one underage witch, and then suddenly Pettigrew is found, and the last thirteen years have been for nothing? The Ministry can’t have made such a mistake — the man was in Azkaban for years, after all, and-”

(and i’d been in such a good mood, too…) Sirius growled.

At least it failed, right? Discounting that feeble attempt to discredit you, they’ve got nothing to use, really, to lock you up or execute you, I said softly, watching Cox’s faltering closing statement, and then barely listening to Alby’s afterwards.

“-no evidence, therefore we must conclude that Sirius is entirely innocent of any high crime that might call for execution or a Dementor’s Kiss. In fact, we may conclude that Sirius Black was deeply wronged due to the chaos of Voldemort’s reign, all those years ago. It is imperative that we make right the wrongs against the Lord of House Black-”

“Weasley.”

I jumped in surprise.

“Professor?”

“You did well up there. As befitting of one of my House.” Snape said, not even looking at me.

I beamed. Honest praise from Snape was easier to come by when one was a Slytherin, but by no means was it easy to come by. “Thanks, Professor.”

He slid bored-looking eyes to me. “Know that this incident will likely be publicized…”

(unfortunately, we can’t stop that. and thanks to dumbledore’s lack of forewarning, we’re caught completely off-guard )

I nodded jerkily. “Yes,” I answered both Sirius and Snape, “But hopefully I won’t be harassed as much as if I hadn’t practically renounced my House’s bloodtraitor tendencies.” The words were bitter and new; I’d just realized them, after all. I had practically had to declare that I wasn’t a bloodtraitor to the world, in order to keep Sirius from being executed.

Dad and Ginny probably hadn’t thought about that, yet. They were too relieved that I wasn’t going to be married off to Sirius due to the shittiness of the Ministry, or that I wasn’t going to be accused of line theft or whatever. But my knowledge of the old traditions and my leaning on them, using them… that was a return to pureblood ideals, and a step away from bloodtraitorism.

Shit.

Snape must’ve sensed my distress. “You had little choice in the matter, Weasley.”

“I know. But this is going to have long-reaching consequences.”

But don’t you feel guilty, dammit, I snapped at Sirius, feeling the beginnings of his guilt. If it was this or your execution, obviously was going to choose this.

(you practically turned your back on your family for me )
They’ll understand why I had to do it. I didn’t turn my back on anyone. Besides. I’ve always liked pureblood history. I’m not a fan of the Muggle-oriented discrimination or the stupid abuse of power, but… Well, I’ll treat it like I do being the parvus potesta.

(goddammit, you are noblesse oblige incarnated, aren’t you? Of course you are. You realize this opens you to marriage contracts, right, Lys?)


Snape looked slightly amused at how my thoughts jumped immediately to that. “Yes, Weasley, how very unpleasant.”

Rolling my eyes sounded tempting, but also suicidal. This was Severus Snape, after all. The man didn’t take shit. “It’s a legitimate concern, Professor, especially since I was a case away from being the new Lady Black.”

Sirius and I both shivered at the thought.

Snape looked ill. “Yes, that is… an unpleasant thought. Nevertheless, Weasley, before you interrupted me… I meant to inform you that should you face harassment from your peers during the school year… things such as marriage contract proposals… I will take care of it.”

Well, then. That was nice of Snape.

…Wait.

“Won’t that undermine my position?”

Snape’s lip curled. “The potesta system is a training ground. If your peers think to bring legalities into a training ground, they will face real consequences. Your focus is school and social groups, Miss Weasley. I shall take care of the rest.” His eyes narrowed into dangerous slits, then. “Barring your Seer conditions, should another incident of this magnitude occur without you informing me…”

(git)

I nodded. “If I can, I’ll go to you, next time.”

“Good.”

Don’t call my Head of House a git, Sirius.

(then maybe he should stop being one)

Don’t be a child, Sirius, really-

“The jury has reached a verdict.” Announced the maybe-Zabini Wizengamot member. I’d noticed he’d been keeping a close eye on me during my testimony and especially after the botched cross-examination. I think. I’d been a little pre-occupied.

Fudge looked at him nervously. “And?”

Zabini smiled unkindly at the man. Seemed there was some bad blood, there. “Unanimously, we, the Wizengamot, find the defendant Sirius Black innocent of all charges of high crime.”
Sirius and I beamed at the words, our grudging fury thrown onto the back-burner in light of the verdict.

“And,” continued Zabini, “we find the defendant Peter Pettigrew guilty of the high crimes of assault against underaged wizards and witches, aggravated assault against a wizard, illegal torture of a wizard, endangerment of underage wizards and witches, werewolf baiting, infiltration into an Ancient House, and psychological terrorization of an underage witch.”

Fudge looked pale. And for good reason; he’d been firmly trying to get Sirius screwed over, and now it seemed Sirius would be getting out of everything. He’d just made a very pissed-off enemy today; two, really, since my family would be angry as soon as they heard about this. How on earth Fudge fucked up the trial this badly, I’d never know… How did anyone fuck up this badly? I couldn’t attribute all of it to Josie’s background machinations… could I?

“Sirius Leothrace Orion Saros Black III is cleared of all charges,” announced the Minister, lips quivering, “Peter Osbert Pettigrew has been judged guilty, and will be submitted to Azkaban in two weeks to receive the Dementor’s Kiss.”

Peter was sobbing quietly, head bowed as low as the chains could take him. It was a bit pathetic; enough to almost make me feel sorry for the bastard. But I kept in mind the threat he’d been, the threat he could be… I kept in mind that he was why Sirius sometimes couldn’t remember the names of his friends, the names James Potter and Lily Evans and Remus Lupin. I kept that all in mind, saw the Dark Mark on the rat’s skin, and smiled.

Minister Fudge pounded the gavel, the noise clear and conclusive.

“The court is adjourned. Release Black, and take Pettigrew away.”

The words were…

I don’t think it was possible to properly describe the way hope surged in Sirius’ throat, making it feel like his lungs were so full of air he was going to float. Images of Harry — both as a baby and as Sirius saw him, in bits and pieces, over the last year — flashed, tinted with longing and adoration, along with flashes of James Potter’s hand on his shoulder (“You did good, Padfoot. C’mon, Lily’s waiting at home.”) or Lily’s laughter or Remus welcoming him into his flat with rolled eyes (“Really, Padfoot, just because my flat’s closer to the Ministry than yours…”). I saw myself in there, grinning at him after he had another bout of dementor-memories, and there was Hogwarts, and there was the feeling of flying on a broom, riding a motorcycle…

I was there, with Sirius, when he felt the chains slide across his body and into the grates of the floor. I was there, feeling the weightlessness of their absence, how his muscles stretched as he stood, the slight stumble, and then the grin that pulled at his skin and scars. He turned to me, eyes dancing, and I didn’t even hesitate to beam back at him.

You’re free, Sirius.

( i… yeah. i am. i’m free. merlin, i’m FREE )

I sighed. Sirius was beginning to be swarmed by well-wishers, Wizengamot members asking when he’d claim his seat and the Black Lordship, people who claimed to have always thought he was innocent, people who were interested in his plans for the future. The reporter woman had pushed her way down, demanding answers to rapid-fire questions, fast as the flashes of light her cameraman was giving out. Everyone wanted to be in Sirius Black’s good graces; he was the revival of the House of Black.
Alby was doing his best to deflect everyone, get them away — he was used to doing such things, I suppose — but Sirius was still overwhelmed. Free and then suddenly everyone wanted a piece of him, in a very different way than two months ago.

(i think they’re going to eat me! Lys help!)

I would, you git, but it’d look a bit odd, wouldn’t it? Don’t let anyone hug you, though, dammit, I get the first free hug!

(oh merlin when this gets out in the papers… i’m going to be swarmed in the streets! hide me!)

(He was complaining and mimicking horror, but we both felt how wide his smile was, how utterly relieved and happy he was. I felt it just as strongly, glad that he was coming home. Sirius Black was a free man and he was coming home.)

(I did that. I changed that.)

(This means that no one has to die. Ever. If I just get better, me and mine will be untouched by the end of the upcoming war. If I just play the game better, I can change everything. Sirius’ wonder and awe at his newfound freedom was justified, yes, but he didn’t know how much of that tightness in his chest and anticipation in his throat was mine. He didn't know that the tears we were both trying to keep from spilling over our eyes wasn't just his own.)

(I was free, too.)

Ergh, this is so annoying, I can’t hug you physically since we JUST disproved that bullshit, but...

“As per Black’s request, we shall hold a compensation hearing after a recess of forty-five minutes.” Fudge announced, his voice under a Sonorus to be heard over the clammor.

Ten minutes was enough, wasn’t it?

Get to the bloody mindscape, Sirius Black, I’m going to hug you, dammit!

All I got was Sirius’ laugh in reply.

(We might’ve been blindsided by a little shit of an Auror, I might’ve been insulted gravely in public, Sirius might be a werewolf with anti-Ministry feelings, and the state of our House's politics was up in the air...

(But we were both free, and proud, and I was going to cry all over him in our mindscape, and ignore when he did the same.)
Chapter 47

Chapter Notes

I was gonna post this next week, but I'm getting bored so I figure this one can go up now. :D My eternal and heartfelt thanks to all my readers and especially my commentors, because you're the kiddos that keep me going with this story. RPR wouldn't exist without all y'all, so. :')

Just some fluff and shit, nothing too plotty. Gotta relax after the trial, y'know? Enjoy!

**OH WAIT ALSO FANART!!!!** I always fuckin' forget to link it, I'm so sorry y'all awesome artists...

...  

Given all that we'd had to do to make damn sure the public didn’t suspect Sirius of predatory behavior, nor myself of wildly, inappropriately slutty behavior, it was a really dam bad idea for the two of us to be seen leaving the Ministry together. Unfortunate, because it was pretty much a given that he was going to be coming to The Burrow, at least to have some of Mum’s cooking and celebrate his freedom. That in mind, while Dad stayed behind — ostensibly to see the last of the trial through, but really to wait up for Sirius — Ginny and I headed to the Floo, thankfully under one of my wandless Notice-Me-Not’s; being swarmed by reporters and/or Wizengamot members was probable, given my dramatic testimony, but also really undesirable.

But all the way from the court room to the Floos, I kept a constant chatter with Sirius. The man needed it, since the end of the hearing was also the end of everyone else’s composure. He was so swamped with questions and greetings and conversations, he was getting a little overwhelmed.

( **lys! quick! she’s asking what my plans are for the future!** )

_Tell her you haven’t changed your mind, even with the money the Ministry’s giving you, now. You’re going to concentrate on recovering from Azkaban and becoming a lycanthrope, and then you’re going to do your best to see what you can do to be a part of Harry’s life._

( **thanks, lys!** )

I sighed. Oh, Sirius. I hoped he would get out of the crowd surrounding him soon.

Ginny tugged on my robe sleeve, drawing my attention.

“All right in there?” she asked.

I grinned slightly. “Just sort of distracted. When I was up there, it felt like the trial would never end. Now that it’s over… I dunno, there’s a lot I’ve got planned that I have to do this summer, you know? And I forgot about it, while I was thinking about this trial and stuck at home, so…”
Good lord, he was really flustered if he was asking me that. I could feel how hot it was, everyone hounding him like they were all paparazzi reporters, eager to wring the information out of him. As if the single one who was actually a reporter wasn’t enough — the woman was relentless. His brain was short circuiting, I guess?

*Who the bloody hell is asking that? Tell them to piss off!*

*(favorite color! lyssie, please!)*

Definitely short circuiting. Honestly, this was ridiculous.

*Maroon. Who asked that?*

But Sirius had been sucked into more questions/answers. It was nice that he was trying to answer everyone and give off a good impression, for the purpose of further detracting from the disgusting theory the Ministry tied to spread, but… Well. I hoped he knew what he was doing, and didn’t really mind the weird questions. I’d make fun of him later.

Ginny nodded sympathetically. “Sort of overwhelmed?”

She got it in one, of course. I wondered if I had a specific expression for that; looking back on it, I’ve been overwhelmed enough that I could have an expression for that. Part of this time was Sirius’ own feelings of being overwhelmed, but…

“Oh,” I answered, “It’ll be nice to be home. Mum’s probably cooking, huh?”

“Might be a bit of a late dinner, actually.” Ginny mused.

I frowned at her. “Why? What’s Mum been doing all day?”

Ginny grinned. We were right in front of the Floos, the Ministry crowd bustling around us, heedless of Sirius’ finished trial or my scars. Everyone had things to do. Lucky that I took off the Notice-Me-Not, or we’d be trampled. I sort of wanted to cast another on Ginny, ’cos I sure as hell didn’t like that smug grin on her face… It was too demon twins-like to be safe…

*(where am i living???)*

*Alby helped you find somewhere to temporarily reside while you went over your properties, but you might like a fresh start somewhere new, as well, as long as you can find somewhere that’d lease to a werewolf,* I fired off quickly. Most of my attention needed to be on the scheming big sister, after all.

I narrowed my eyes. “What did you do?”

Ginny slipped a few coins into the receptacle and grabbed a pinch of Floo powder when the tile slid open to present it. Bloody Ministry maniacs, charging for every pinch they could. She tossed it into the fireplace, letting it flare green.

“The Burrow!” She called. Then she turned to me. “You’ll see. Bye, Lys!”

And then she grabbed my wrist, bodily flinging me inside.

“What the- DAMMIT GINNY!”
The world was spinning and I was still falling. The sensation pulled at my stomach and my scars, but I was more shocked than anything, and let Sirius feel that while he prodded at me mentally, pressing concern into my metaphorical hands.

*She pushed me into the Floo!*

( *but you’re not lost, are you?*)

No, she clearly sent me home, but why on earth- Tell him that you’d love to discuss it further, but you really ought to get your affairs in order before you think about the Black Wizengamot seat, especially since it’s not clear if the Ministry will allow a werewolf to take it. Stress that, maybe you’ll pressure the Ministry into relenting on their anti-werewolf legislation.

( *thanks, lys. why would ginny shove you into the floo? a prank?* )

He was clearly amused at the thought, memories of his time with the Marauders running through his head. I offered him a few flashes of my twin brothers and their own pranks, which were met with approval and anticipatory excitement, though I remarked:

*Bit of an odd time to prank me, isn’t it?*

The feeling of the dizziness reaching its height was a telltale sign that the Floo trip was nearly over. I bent my knees a little, and it was with practiced ease that I was deposited into the living room of my house, stepping onto the rugs with just a bit of a wobble; if Ginny hadn’t *pushed me*, it wouldn’t have even been there, but I’d had to correct my angle in the Floo…

( *if it was a prank, that would’ve been the best place for it* )

*Maybe Ginny was just being-*

“You have a really nice house, Lys! It’s very cozy-like!” called a familiar voice.

I froze, mid-thought.

“I believe I better understand why you insist on so many throws and blankets,“ commented an even more familiar one.

( *lys? you alright?* )

*More than,* I whispered in my head, feeling my grin stretch wide enough to hurt and pinprick-stings in my eyes. Sirius grew alarmed at the feeling of tears, and confused when I dashed forward, shock crumbling into bubbling happiness.

I almost knocked Harper and Dietrich over, trying to hug them.

…”

Ginny came through the Floo and immediately started laughing.
I was torn between crying, laughing, grinning like an idiot, yelling at her, or thanking her with everything I had, and I still hadn’t let go of Dietrich and Harper. Dietrich looked mildly harassed, but he allowed it, and Harper was hugging back as much as he could with me wrapped around both their arms. Sirius’ confusion and feeling of being overwhelmed certainly wasn’t helping me, and I guess his short circuited brain spread to mine.

I did all of the above.

“You’re the bloody worst and I love you!” I yelled at her, laughing and teary-eyed.

Ginny grinned at me, but before she could answer, I heard an offended noise from behind me.

“And what about us?”

“We came up with the idea!”

I twisted around a little, jostling my boys, to beam at the demon twins. At that point, I guess Dietrich’s quota for physical affection reached its zenith, because he gently untangled himself from me, shaking his head.

(Harper was happy to let me tuck myself into his side, though, so that’s what I did. Damn, these boys were getting tall… They were really going to shoot up, too, this year, and this little 3-inch difference between Harper and me would be a lot bigger… Which got me wondering how the other three were doing, if three weeks will have made any differences with them, too. I wished they were here, but I could settle for a 2 out of 5 for the moment.)

“I seem to recall it was Lady Weasley who spoke to my mother about this,” Dietrich said, raising a brow at the demon twins.

“Yeah, well, don’t reckon your mum would’ve said yes-”

“-if we had been the ones doing the asking, right, Bastion?”

“Honestly, man-”

“-and you’re a Slytherin!”

“Appearances, my young friend-”

“-are very important!”

It was… very odd, to see both Harper and Dietrich in my home. And in what I assumed were their casual clothes. The Burrow was cluttered and homey and warm, Mum preferring handmade things, household magic, colors like deep autumn and coffee and cream. We did our best with our mismatched furniture, inherited things, knick-knacks perched on the mantle and shelves and low-squatting endtables and coffee tables. The demon twins were hanging around the doorway to the kitchen, wearing holey jeans and Muggle T-shirts. Ginny was grimacing as she stripped off her Hogwarts robes, leaving her in a similar jeans-T-shirt combo that the twins sported.

Dietrich and Harper were a sharp contrast to it all. Dietrich was tall and pale and polished, high-quality robes of a dark grey color, left open to reveal fitted slacks, an olive-grey sweater vest, and a black button-up shirt underneath. It was almost Hogwarts uniform-esque, only it was better quality, and there were faint patterns in his robes and on the sweater vest. Harper was a bit more casual than Dietrich, but his robes were the color of sand, trimmed with geometric embroidery, the sleeves pinned up to buttons near his shoulders to show black sleeves fitted to his arms, a reddish-
maroon scarf with tiny grey patterns loose around his neck, grey pants tucked into worn-out boots. Both of them looked so oddly nice and out of place in my English cottage-turned-ten-person-house.

Harper noticed my quiet, and looked down at me curiously, blue eyes shining.

“Are you okay, Lyssie?” He asked.

That almost got me crying, truly, because it was so Harper to be all happy and smiley and concerned after me, when I had no idea how he’d gotten here or why or when or anything else. I squeezed my arms around his waist and buried my face in his shoulder, smelling something odd and sweet — it was incense-like, and I hadn’t smelled any of that since my last life — and bursting with happiness that my friends were actually here.

Only, I couldn’t quite focus on them, not as the initial shock wore off.

Tell them you’re not interested in a relationship at the moment, for Merlin’s sake! I snapped in my head, Sirius’ discomfort leaking through the link even as he tried to shove it all back onto his side; an attempt at tact, one that just doesn’t work when you’ve got each other in your heads.

( thanks Lys — let me try to step back a moment… )

You don’t need to. I think we’ve really broken past normal boundaries, after this.

( yes, but that doesn’t mean you don’t deserve the semblance of a normal mind. i lost mine in azkaban so i know how nice one is to have )

Don’t say that. You’re not insane. You’re-

( Lyssie i was a mess before we began creating the link. i have enough of your stability to see that now, to understand that now. we shouldn’t sugarcoat it )

You know I don’t mind that we have a questionably permanent mind link.

( it doesn’t feel right to me. i know how much you’ve missed your friends — they’re your brothers in everything but blood, just like the Marauders were to me. you shouldn’t be pulled out of this, distracted with reporters trying to figure out if the new lord black is looking for a lady )

I felt Sirius edging away. We had a way of straining against the mental link and then Occluding, producing the equivalent of a cloth wall in a shared room. A semblance of privacy — if we faced different directions and didn’t listen too hard, we could dampen stimuli from the other side enough to feel like two separate minds again. It was highly uncomfortable — we always felt a little lightheaded, and both of us got very good at acting normal in spite of the feeling — and required concentration to maintain, less as we kept practicing, but it was all we could do sometimes.

Our version of vanishing from the other’s presence was just agreeing that we wouldn’t poke at the other for a bit. It worked, I suppose.

We’ll talk about it later, I offered.

I knew he heard me, but I didn’t expect a reply, and I retreated to my own corner of our heads and gently drew the barest mental shields up; this way, I wouldn’t get leakages of senses and feelings and thoughts unless they were strong enough to warrant alarm. Probably better this way, anyways, because I really did want to concentrate on…
“Dietrich, I think we broke Lyssie!” I heard Harper call out, voice worried.

“What do you mean, we broke her?”

“I think she’s crying! I’ve never made her cry before… Is this what you feel like, all the time?”

“YOU MAKE MY SISTER CRY?”

“Ta gueule, Harper! Traitor!” Dietrich hissed.

I looked up at the sounds of a scuffle, witnessing Ginny with a demonic look on her face lunging at Dietrich, who dodged with a flourish — oohoh, those were _dueling_ stances, he had been training very hard last year, hadn’t he? — and made no move to counter, though he grimaced as she snarled at him. Her protective instincts were at an all-time high with the nearly-botched testimony she’d had to watch, and Dietrich was so Malfoy-like (Merlin, he’d kill me if I said so aloud) with his pale hair and skin and eyes and obvious wealth…

The demon twins started cheering them on, Dietrich hissing at them to _please calm down your bloody sister, you morons!_ I chuckled at the picture, and tugged Harper out of the way as the two ran by. Ginny was playing by this point, but Dietrich’s obvious confusion at the situation and her own inability to catch him were probably spurring her on. Harper was laughing, pointing at Dietrich and (probably) making fun of him in rapid French.

“GET AWAY FROM ME, WEASLEY!”

“Kind of too late for that, you’re the one who Floo’ed to us. Isn’t that right, brother mine?”

“Too true, brother mine. Bastion should’ve checked if there were Weasley’s _before_ he came to our house.”

“GET OVER HERE, BASTION!”

“WHY SHOULD I?”

Well, then. They were all getting along. Now to address the situation. I stepped out of Harper’s personal space, exiting a very warm and much-needed hug, and poked at Harper’s cheek, making him turn big, blue eyes at me curiously. I couldn’t help but grin. Poking at his dimples always got that owl-like look.

“Harper, why are you two here?” I asked.

He beamed. “Oh, your mum Floo called mine! She asked if we’d like to come over and celebrate with you after you testified at the trial, she was really sure that you’d all win! She sounded like she felt bad, since it was so last minute, but my mum was really happy to let me Floo over. She actually wanted to come meet you, since you know, we’ve all never met each other’s parents since we get off the train separately and all that, but she had work to do. Something about a Nundu and the shipment needing extra security and such.”

I blinked at him. “The transport of Nundus is illegal, Harper.”

“Oh, well, it must not have been a Nundu, then!” he answered brightly.

I buried my face in my hands. “She’s a smuggler. I almost got to meet Harper’s awesome smuggler mom and I couldn’t. This is so _unfair._”
She’s not a smuggler, Lyssie, she’s a merchant!” Then Harper paused, squinting at me in confusion. He took a moment before he seemed to find what he was looking for, and then he grinned broadly. “Ah! The scars are showing! I wondered what was different — you look fiercer now, Lyssie! And they make your eyes look brighter, too! You look pretty!”

That most definitely did not make my heart warm up. Harper hadn’t even noticed the scars at first, that’s how much he didn’t give a fuck about them… And when he did notice them, he was bluntly truthful about how he thought they looked. I knew he would react like this, too… Wait. But didn’t he just change the subject?

I pointed at him threateningly. “Don’t you try to distract me, Harper, even if you’re too nice! I know your mum’s a smuggler!”

He pouted, crossing his arms. But his eyes started following Dietrich as he wove his way through the furniture and around the demon twins’ halfhearted and laughing attempts to block him. He had a deadpan expression that he always had, and to anyone else he likely looked annoyed as hell, but I could tell he was having a good time. He thirteen years old and playing like a kid and obviously showing off, but no one would judge him for it at The Burrow.

Least of all me.

“Is my mum in the kitchen, Harper?”

He distractedly answered, “Mm, yes, she welcomed me and Dietrich and then got all panicky when she realized she hadn’t started dinner yet. We offered to help her if she wanted but she told us to go wait here for you instead…”

Ah, I got it. I snorted. “Go on, then, Harper, you know you want to join in.”

He brightened again, and as I turned to go poke my head into the kitchen, Harper started harassing Dietrich as well, who started cussing very loudly in French at him for it. At this rate, he’d have to do some fast talking to get the demon twins on his side, or else he’d be tackled into the ground for the crime of avoiding Ginny’s wrath as he had, and it wouldn’t do for his pureblood sensibilities to have his face mashed into our carpets.

Sure enough, behind the mayhem that my siblings and friends were unleashing, there was the sound of the kitchen going strong, and as I slipped into the kitchen, Mum’s muttering to herself and flicking spells at everything. I seamlessly slipped into the chaos of pots and pans floating about, knives cutting things up midair, etc. and took the place of nothing as it washed potatoes in the sink, scrubbing the skins to edibility.

Mum smiled warmly when she noticed me.

“Lyssie! You’re back already! Oh, but you don’t have to help me, your friends are here! I sent them to the living room, but maybe they went outside and you missed them?” Mum said all at once, ducking some flying pieces of onions that were putting themselves into a sizzling pan, coming to hug me quickly before she got back to it.

I grinned. “I figured if I helped we could eat quickly. Ginny’s stomach was starting to sound like Ron’s halfway through the compensation hearing.”

Mum lit up. “So you won? Of course you won! That poor Sirius Black, locked away in Azkaban for more than a decade, and then accused of trying to hurt Harry and you and Ron and Hermione! I can’t believe the Minister made it into such a storm in a teacup, honestly, it looked to me to be a
very straightforward case!"

“Oh, he tried to make it much worse than it was, alright,” I said darkly.

(remind me to make fudge’s life hard when i get that damn seat)

If you get that damn seat. You bet your ass Fudge’s gonna crack down on werewolves if he can, just to make it hard for you… Which is why you should lament about it a bit more to the reporter. You don’t need the seat to make his life hard, though… all you have to do is sigh at the cameras and throw money at everyone but him. Back again?

In the end, though, neither of us could really keep away from the other’s thoughts for too long. It felt a bit like when you had a very large problem on your mind, weighing down on you, and you were denying it was there, and in the process thinking about it more. Not as itching, I guess, and it didn’t bear the terrible feeling that grief or loss or anything had — but it was… odd. Sirius and I were so used to talking to each other mentally, now.

It might feel sudden, but Sirius’ thoughts commenting on whatever was going on with me was no more intrusive than my own thoughts.

That… was more problematic than I wanted to admit. I still remembered some of the shit in Helvynya Prevett’s book. How people got trapped in one another’s minds, how people could no longer tell each other apart. Her experiments with Memory Wards didn’t quite cover this, but I didn’t doubt that the same extremely terrible consequences could occur from different mistakes made.

(figured i’d let you say hullo to your friends, answer some questions. dumbledore’s driven most of them off, so now we’re just going to go watch Peter go to Azkaban and then i’ll find a way to get over there. might take an hour, since i need to do some stuff for the ministry as well)

I laughed at the eagerness in Sirius’ head, and we both expertly ignored the pang of grief. He was grieving his friend Wormy; we should be baying for Pettigrew the Death Eater’s blood, and we were. Bloody taking your time, aren’t you?

(don’t sass me, young missy)

I rolled my eyes at him, and he laughed as went off to his own business. That giddy feeling of freedom was dampened a little by the sudden swarm of people, but there was a persistent happiness radiating down our link that was at once surprising — it never felt like this before, never, and wasn’t that depressing to think about? — and comforting. So not a full Occluding; the blanket wasn’t drawn all the way across the room.

Mum was staring expectantly at me.

I blinked at her. “What? Sorry.”

“I asked what you meant by that, dear.”

A grimace. Mum wouldn’t like to hear it. She might actually go Floo to Hogwarts or wherever Alby’d be at to kill him. And then the Ministry, to kill Fudge. Come to think of it, maybe that wouldn’t be so bad… Only, I didn’t want to be the one to tell her. “Er… Dad’ll tell you at dinner.”

She gave me a look. “Pushing all the hard work on your father, hm?” she teased.

I laughed. “I just testified at court, Mum, I think I get a break!”
“Then off you go! Shoo! Out! Go say hullo to your friends and keep your brothers out of trouble!” She swatted me out of her workspace, making me laugh and duck away. Not before I managed to dodge an arm and get under it, giving my mother a hug and stretching up to kiss her cheek.

“Thanks, Mum,” I said softly, glancing at the doorway to the living room, where I heard yelling and cursing in French.

I Occluded, suddenly grateful that Sirius did respect privacy as much as he did. I wasn’t lying when I told him I didn’t mind, because if it was a mind link or his death or Pettigrew getting away, I’d take the damn mind link, but… Well, even knowing that he’d understand better than anyone, it was good that we had some sort of method to dampen the connection.

If he were listening in, he might laugh and say ‘I told you so,’ or ‘I knew it! You were just being stubborn!’

I wanted this moment for me and Mum.

(Sirius could look at it later, because I knew he especially loved examining the memories I had of my family if he could, and that he was embarrassed about it — god that was sad to think about, to think deeper about — but this? This was for me.)

She didn’t have to lift my punishment for the day, just because I’d had a temper-tantrum yesterday, but she did. I had no doubt at all that Mum had to do a hell of a lot of Floo calling and shit to get both their Floo addresses; she hadn’t known beforehand what they were, I don’t think. And then she had to face these terrifying women, Elisabet Bastion the Lady of House Bastion and Rolfhauser, and Neferu Harper the Egyptian smuggler, and ask if their sons would like to come to our house after I was finished getting an Azkaban-escapee his rightful freedom. She didn’t have to do any of it, and she did.

Mum’s eyes softened. Hazel and gold, just like Ginny. “I never wanted you to feel like you were trapped, luv. You’re a Weasley, and family and home are supposed to be comforts, not prisons. You better come to me next time, young lady…”

I nodded, wanting to spare myself another lecture. Mum had been more upset than anyone before; which was, you know, how Mum was, but still. When her entire world was our home and us siblings, it was hard to hear that one of her kids was stifled by it. She was so used to us running into her arms and hiding behind her skirts that she’d often forget that we were growing up, growing independent. I think this was why she pushed so hard in the timeline I once knew, that world that I read about once upon a time; she didn’t know how else to love her children unless they explained — which was hard to do when she had more of the Weasley temper than Dad did. She pushed and pushed and tried so hard and didn’t remember how to help her children any other way.

But then, of course, she learned how to curb that tendency, so her Clairvoyant daughter didn’t suffer nightmares. But then, of course, my mum wasn’t the same person as the Molly Weasley I’d read about in another life.

My gratitude to this woman for being my mother and for listening to me and for flipping so much of her life and our lives around to accommodate for me when I was little… I would never be able to express that gratitude and love properly.

(You all kept me sane so I’m going to keep you all alive.)

(She gave me everything she could, so I was going to give everything I could, too. None of Molly Weasley’s children would suffer an inch more than they had to, not while I still breathed. Her
family would *never* be broken.)

“Promise.” I told her solemnly.

She kissed my forehead, unknowing of the promises I held in that one word. I might get scolded again if she knew how far I would go to keep them. “Go see your friends,” Mum ordered firmly, smiling, “Be good. Dinner will be ready in an hour.”

I gave my mother one last squeeze around her waist and then trotted back into the living room.

... 

“How on earth did this happen?” I questioned, frowning.

The roughhousing had somehow burst out of the front door, and Percy and Ron had gotten involved. Dietrich looked pristine, dusting off his robes absentmindedly, his wand in hand, only slightly winded. Ginny was half dead on the ground — thankfully soft and grassy, since they’d avoided the shed and the chickens’ area — along with Ron, who was twitching in irritation, both of them smudged with dirt. Percy was kneeling by Fred and George with his wand out, their foreheads boasting shiny bruises that immediately told me they rammed into each other somehow — the *demon twins, uncoordinated?* — and he was healing them while scolding them and trying not to smile. (It wasn’t working too well.) Harper was giggling at everyone, spawled out on the ground, looking cheerful and completely at home despite something of a Leg-Locker curse on him.

I was only gone for like. Five minutes. How did things get to this?

(* lot can happen in five minutes, Lys *)

* Shut up, and tell that woman that you’re not interested at the moment, since you’d like to finish up your ministry business and be done with it or something.

(* this reporter is one persistent little witch, let me tell you that, Lys… *)

*I thought Rita Skeeter was bad… *

(* ergh, is she still around? no, wait, she’s a reporter? circe save me. i guarantee you, she’s worse *)

* Oh? I sense a story there… *

(* i’ll tell you later. why does it look like your siblings were on the losing side of a war? *)

* Good question.*

“Five minutes,” I said to them all, hands on my hips, “I was gone for five minutes, and you’ve already concussed the demon twins, Harper.”

“Oi!”

“That pipsqueak couldn’t hurt us even if he tried!”
“This was all Ron!”

“Shut up, gits!” Ron called back.

Sirius was chuckling in our minds, more interested in this than in fending off that rabid reporter, Flores, but both of us were calling on my Occlumency skills to keep our faces relatively at ease. I wanted to laugh, though. What on earth had happened to lead to everyone looking like they’d had a brawl? Except for Dietrich and Harper, of course.

I looked to Dietrich and raised a brow.

_Really?_

He shrugged at my unspoken question. “Your sister was intent on tackling me to the ground, and I was intent on keeping myself safe. I bribed the twins once Harper joined her, and then your other brothers came, and apparently you all still have the Trace on your wand, because only Harper began to duel me once I felt it necessary to pull my wand out.”

…

“You were duelling in my garden?” I deadpanned.

Ginny grinned, sitting up excitedly. “Why didn’t you tell us your friends were so good at duelling, Lyssie?! It was amazing! I mean, they know so many spells-” Her face took on a determined expression, and she twisted around to look pleadingly at Dietrich. “Teach me?”

Dietrich looked disgruntled. “You were only moments ago yelling threats at me.”

My sister looked horrified. “I didn’t mean it! Please teach me that spell that made Harper’s legs lock up!”

“That’s just the Leg-Locker Curse, I can’t believe you don’t know that already,” Ron muttered. Actually, neither could I. Ginny _loved_ Defense Against the Dark Arts. But more than that, she _loved_ duelling stuff. It stemmed from all the adventure stories she used to read as a kid, the ones with poor Harry as the hero.

“How do _you_ know it?” Ginny asked.

Ron made a face. “How do any of us Gryffs know our curses? Slytherins.”

(*this is why snakes and lions are usually the best duellists, by the way*)

_Shut up, Sirius._

The three Slytherins present, including myself, glared.

He waved his hands in surrender. “I meant Malfoy, not you three!” Then he frowned. “Though, Lyssie, from what I’ve heard, the ‘Claws are getting pretty good at Shield Charms and stuff because of you guys…”

“Which makes it more fun to prank them! Me and Lu have to get _really_ creative to get around them nowadays, Lyssie and Nate have to help all the time…” Harper called, giving a thumbs up and tapping at legs with his wand, muttering, _“Finite.”_

I started twitching. “How do you two _not_ have Traces on your wands?”
All the Weasley siblings went quiet, looking intently at Dietrich; he stiffened, and I would bet he had a feeling of foreboding crawling up his spine. It was never good when every Weasley sibling had their attention on you, ears pricked. Ginny was practically salivating.

“Meine Mutter. She took it off as soon as I received it…”

(ah, that’s right. it’s a little more dangerous to do it yourself — most people go to knockturn and have a specialist take care of it… but since you’re a dab hand at rituals and wards, you could probably knock the Trace off)

Wait, what? We’ll discuss that later, I promise you that.

Sirius laughed. (it’ll probably be the least illegal thing we’ve done! oh merlin, the reporter’s back- i’ll be back in a moment, Lyssie)

Good luck!

Not a full close of the link at all, but just the two of us being busy. I could feel his light, fluttering happiness as easily as he would mine.

“Me, too!” Harper crowed, flourishing his pine wand, “Mum said that our Ministry wouldn’t be able to Trace me anyways, what with the wards around our house and such, so there was no point to me having a Trace on my wand.”

“Why would you have wards that make the Trace not work?” Percy called, looking slightly horrified, but not as curious as if he didn’t know the answer. Percy knew Harper’s mum was a smuggler, he probably knew this, too.

“And what about when you leave your house?” Ron asked, perplexed.

Harper shrugged, his smile fading a little.

(“Did you know that Neferu’s kid — that boy, the one she sent to Hogwarts… Did you know that he has a mind disease?” — “I had no idea! No wonder she sent him away.” — Harper stood around the corner, looking at his toes, expression blanker than it usually was — righteous anger, black eyes he didn’t inherit, a snarl of spells and Arabic curses from her lips — “-but you think they’re right, aren’t they?” “There’s nothing wrong with it, my love, but you do need a little help.” — he sat in his room, knees up to his chin, wand in hand. “Expecto Patronum,” he muttered and it didn’t work — said he shouldn’t leave the house because he wouldn’t know how to get back or anything but he did, he does, he’s not — “-know he needs help, you KNOW he has a learning deficiency, why are we sending him all the way to fucking Britain for school, Omorose?” “Because he asked for it, Neferu, my god, could you have said no to him when he looked like that-?”

Stop.)

I crossed my arms. “I’m not surprised your smuggler mum took off your Trace, Harper, but Dietrich, I thought your parents worked in the government…?”

Dietrich recognized my drawl for what it was: a sharp deflection away from why Harper wasn’t allowed to leave his own home. None of us parvus potesta reigning really talked about our home lives except for me, really, and there was a reason. I had Seen things I knew none of them would ever want me to bring to light without their permission.

Dietrich looked at me lazily, not giving anything away, bringing up his wand — it was rowan —
and shrugging again. “My mother knows I’d only use my wand if I needed to, or if I knew there weren’t any Trace wards up. Seeing as you apparently used to practice wandless every day, Lys, I do not believe your home has Trace wards.”

“Good guess,” I said, ignoring my siblings’ shock at all this new information — I don’t think any of them except Percy were aware that the Trace wasn’t just a single charm/spell/ward, honestly — “There are enough magical families and properties around that Ottery St. Catchpole is practically two villages, one magical and one Muggle, so yeah, we don’t need Trace wards.”

“Don’t Muggle kids go to this area of the town?” Harper asked, intrigued.

“Nah, there are Muggle-Repelling wards all around the magical sect, which is just the houses and woods, really” I answered, “All of the families chip in for their maintenance, ‘cept for us, since we maintain ‘em.”

“Oh?” Dietrich raised his brows.

“Bill,” I answered, grinning, “Every three years, he comes and fixes ‘em up if he can. Makes Mum happy, since it forces him to visit no matter what. In a pinch, Dad could probably do it. I could too, but I’m not compatible with anyone else’s wand because I’m Dark.”

“Wait, wait, wait! How do you know all this stuff, Lys?” Ron asked.

“I asked Dad before I started practicing my wandless, of course. Didn’t want to get in trouble.”

“So we could steal Mum or Dad’s wand…?” Fred asked, his grin beginning.

“You’ve done it before,” I said, shrugging and skipping over to Harper to help him up, “but they won’t work well and Mum is going to whup you when she catches you. Also, Percy looks like he’s about to have an aneurism at the idea, so don’t do it.”

Percy’s ears were red. “If you two touch Father’s, Mother’s, or my wand… So help me, Merlin…”

George smirked, throwing an arm around Fred lazily. “You’ll what? Tell Mum on us?”

Percy adjusted his glasses. “I’ll buy as many books as Lys likes to get her to torment you two.”

“Bollocks. Lyssie and her friends do some scary things…”

“More humiliation than laughs, them.”

Dietrich sniffed, looking irritated. A lot of the revenge we dished out — whether it was a slight to one of us personally, to my siblings or Luna, or someone had actually threatened my potesta somehow — was concocted in Nate’s devious, devious mind. Nate knew some terrifying things about people, and he really had the method down to humiliate them the most and make them back off; a lot of his expertise was because he enjoyed it, too.

“If the Ravenclaws and older Slytherins and Gryffindors would simply get out of our way, there would be no need for our retribution.” Dietrich muttered.

“You’re a dictator, Lys.” Ron said in horror.

“It’s only authoritarianism if I’m supposedly in charge of them, too,” I replied loftily, “which I’m not, therefore, they declared war on me when they crossed my lines. Leave mine alone, along with my potesta, and I won’t come after you. Oh, by the way, dinner will be ready in an hour.”
Given that it was sunset, the skies pink at the edges and the shadows long, in spite of the extended summer daylight, it was a bit of a late dinner. My siblings had all recovered enough from their bout of childish fun that we could probably pile into the house again and wait for food, chat about whatever. I think it was a novelty for them, that my friends were over — hence why all of us were gathered. That, or they were suspicious of the snakes in our house. Might be a bit of both; my boys were famous, after all.

“You snakes are all so crazy,” Ron muttered, shaking his head and leading the pack back into the house — dinner awaited, after all, and this was Ron — “No wonder Malfoy’s such a bleedin’ prick, he was raised to be insane.”

“Don’t go badmouthing the Slytherins, now, Ronniekins—”

“-they’re all right scary when they want to be—”

“-though you wouldn’t think it, seeing as Bastion just played tag with our little sister there—”

“-and that Harper kid’s happier than a Hufflepuff.”

I trailed behind, tucking myself between my two boys and basking in the fact that they were here again. Dietrich took his place on my right, Harper on my left, their wands put away and their eyes glinting with contentedness. They must’ve been really, really happy to see me, too, if they were playing around with my siblings so easily; Dietrich more than Harper, in this case.

“Thanks for coming,” I said to them both.

Harper didn’t hesitate in grabbing my left hand, swinging it between us. For a moment, I wished Luna could’ve been here, too; Xenophilius took her with him every year on a trip to hunt one of their creatures, though, and it was bad luck that this year it aligned with the trial. Not that I’d really been able to see her before she’d left, since I was grounded, and Luna and I had never made it a habit to write each other. We preferred speaking face to face, she and I. It’d be nice to go looking for the gulping plimpies together, later in the summer.

“Of course we came!” Harper said happily, “I’ve always wanted to see your house, Lyssie. It’s really nice, honestly. It looks like a tree that decided to become a building. All the rooms and beams and things just keep growing out of the original cottage.”

I laughed at his imagery, but found it oddly suiting. I squeezed his hand. “I’m glad you like it. It’s not… well, it’s no pureblood estate or a castle or anything—”

“It is where you grew up, so it is good,” Dietrich interrupted unflinchingly. I looked at him and saw his face soften with sincerity. “It is warm and welcoming and full of laughter, like you.” Then his eyes glinted. “I suppose Slytherin has made you sharp and cunning and everything else, of course.”

Well. No wonder Dietrich was so quick to play around, if he felt the entire house was like me. He was instantly comfortable, wasn’t he? Even if he looked like he should stand out like a sore thumb, like he should be uncomfortable in a world so different from his posture and clothing and upbringing, he didn’t, because this was the place that made his best friend, his heart-sister. That was…

Adorable, of course.

And it made me happy to hear. I wanted them to like my home.
“I’ve missed you guys.” I sighed happily.

“It’s only been three weeks,” Harper reminded me.

“Yes, but I haven’t been able to write much, since my parents were all paranoid about my mail. I think they thought I’d cook up another scheme to go fight a magical creature if they didn’t make sure I wasn’t doing so.”

“You have fought a lot of them,” remarked Harper thoughtfully.

(And a little jealously. Harper loved chaos and magical creatures.)

I laughed, leaning my head on his shoulder lightly, tapping him. “And you apparently were fighting Dietrich and the demon twins. Never thought I’d see the day, really.”

Harper chuckled. “Your siblings are fun, Lyssie. And your entire house is really relaxing.”

We had passed into the entry of my house, and I darted away from the two to close the door after us. Ron and the demon twins thundered up the stairs, reassuring everyone that they’d be down in time for dinner, and Percy and Ginny were heading into the kitchen, talking about the trial, which I think Dietrich heard, too. My boys settled on our couch — Harper took to one of the crocheted blankets, a duplicate of which I usually draped near his seat in our potesta spot — and Dietrich looked intent as I joined them.

“I assume the trial went well, Lys?” he asked.

I nodded. “Sirius got off on all charges of high crime. At the compensation hearing, they overlooked the petty crime as part of what was owed to him. He still got a ridiculous sum of Galleons for his trouble, though.”

Dietrich’s face scrunched a little in distaste.

Harper frowned at him. “You really don’t like Sirius Black, do you, Dietrich?”

My Second glanced at me knowingly before replying, “I dislike the fact that Lys chose to deal with a potential threat alone. That, and he is a grown wizard who needed a girl not even half his age to function properly, even though Lys has many responsibilities as well.”

“She started delegating lots, though, at the end of the year.”

“Yes, but we all knew she disliked doing it, and only did so because she was constantly too tired to attend to her own business.”

Harper hummed. “That’s true.” He smiled at me. “Nate whipped the firsties into shape, did you know? The entire third circle is the first part of his information ring, and he rewards them by letting them sit close enough when you start tutoring me or Lu that they can pick up some things.”

I furrowed my brows together, confused. “But I lecture you guys on fourth year material at this point, they shouldn’t be able to understand some of my tutoring sessions…”

“Yes, but you really like breaking into tangents about other things.”

“I do?”

A look at Dietrich, who nodded. “I do not know if you are aware, Lys, but you have an oddly in-depth knowledge of magical theory, rituals, and warding. You often talk about it. And you have a
very thorough teaching method, since Lu and Harper do not often understand things at first glance, so your analogies and examples are understandable even to a first-year.”

Oh.

Well, see.

I hadn’t even given any thought to how I tutored Lu and Harper. They both needed a bit of a special touch, since Harper had trouble focusing or focused on different things, only to miss others, and Lu was always jittery. It’s not like I made lesson plans or anything, either, I just kinda asked them what they wanted to know about this or that, they replied, and then it was just a lot of chatting on my part about things I knew or liked or both. Sometimes I drew pictures or made stupid stories to make sure it made sense. If we were in the abandoned classroom, I used to use a bit of wandless to make it theatrical, enough to tempt both their attention spans.

Wait, what the hell, Nate was using me to pay off the firsties?

“Why didn’t Nate tutor the kiddies himself?” I demanded.

“Because no one likes Nathaniel.” Dietrich said without an ounce of humor.

Harper threw a pillow at him, which Dietrich caught with only a raised brow. He pointed at Dietrich accusingly. “Don’t be mean! We like Nate.” Then he turned to me, frowning apologetically. “But yeah, Lyssie, everyone’s sort of afraid of him. Did you know he has blackmail on everyone? Or he’s trying to get blackmail on everyone. And there’s a rumor that he’s trying to tame a Boggart so he can plop it down in front of people to get their worst fears.”

“Is he?” I asked, somewhat believing it. (Nate would totally love a Boggart for this purpose.)

“Yes.” Dietrich answered.

“Of course not!” said Harper, scandalized.

They looked at each other.

I snorted. “We’ll ask him later, I suppose.”

Dietrich rolled his eyes. “He will never give us a straight answer.” He set his gaze on me, concerned-looking, now. “But the trial is over with, now? You are free for the rest of the summer? And… I do not wish to make you uncomfortable, but you were not… harassed, were you?”

My heart sped up. How did Dietrich know already?

“Harassed?” I hedged.

His expression tinted with apprehension and suspicion. “For your scars…”

Oh.

Oh, that was different.

But I’d given away that I was harassed somehow… And I was rather not looking forward to my entirely too overprotective friends and family to hear that Minister Fudge almost got me betrothed to Sirius. Ew.

“Er… Not so much for the scars. I’ll… tell you later.” I muttered.
“Lys…” Dietrich intoned warningly.

I shook my head. “Seriously, I’ll tell you all later. At dinner. Get it over with, and all that.”

Dietrich’s expression didn’t change at all. “I’m not going to like this, am I?”

Harper snickered. “Of course you won’t, Dietrich, you always get touchy when it comes to Lyssie!”

“Ferme ta gueule, Harper!”

“If my mother understood you, I guarantee you she’d be spelling soap into your mouth.” I noted.

Harper grinned at Dietrich, but it was one of those smiles with too many teeth. “Heureusement que Lys n’est pas vraiment ta sœur, Dietrich,” Harper rattled off easily, making me extremely jealous that he knew more languages than I ever had, and also a little proud because I could tell he’d gotten better at the language from the last time I’d seen him, “car tu as une influence terrible. Elle est ta sœur, alors tu devrais essayer d’être un meilleur modèle.”

Dietrich growled at him. “Tu as un accent de merde, alors tais-toi, Harper.”

I blinked at both of them, only able to pick up a few words here and there. Mostly the cuss words. “I hate you both.”

Harper beamed at me. “You almost cried when you saw us, so no you don’t!”

“I wonder how much I’d have to bribe Nate to teach me…”

“He never will, because he also enjoys talking to you in French and knowing you do not understand.” Dietrich said instantly.

I narrowed my eyes in challenge. “Jay, then.”

“He’s not fluent.”

“Goddammit.”

“Your mum’s gonna spell soap into your mouth, Lyssie, shhhh!”

We probably could’ve kept going on this topic — they boys loved teasing me for knowing the least amount of languages — until we’d gotten to something else, seeing as I could talk to these boys forever and never run out of things to say, but we were interrupted by the Floo. It was right in front of the couch, so we all perked up as the fire flared and greened and my dad stepped out just a few moments later.

Both Dietrich and Harper stood, and it was so absentmindedly that I think it was ingrained pureblood manners or something, but I just grinned at my dad and waved.

“Finally finished, Dad?” I asked as he brushed soot off his old coat.

Dad beamed at me, pushing up his glasses quickly. “The reporters and Wizengamot didn’t make it very quick, my dear. And I see you got your surprises! Hello, boys, how do you do? I’ve heard a lot about both of you- Ah, but let me step out of the way of the Floo…”

Dietrich murmured a greeting to my dad politely, but Harper blinked at me.
“Dumbledore’s not coming, is he?” Harper asked.

I snorted. “Alby’s too busy for that. And we’d kill him if he tried, after what he pulled at the trial — part of what I’m gonna have Dad tell everyone at dinner, actually. Maybe after, so no one flips the table and wastes the food.”

Harper cocked his head to the side. “Then who’s coming through?”

“Oh, well that’s—

( miss me? )

The Floo flared and I smiled when Sirius stepped into my living room. I hadn’t even replied to him, mentally or physically, when—

“SALAUD! INCENDIO!”

( WHAT THE BLOODY- )

And then Dietrich attacked him on sight.

Oh my god.

Ah, yeah. I forgot… Dietrich was pissed at you.

Dietrich was frozen, looking at his wand hand like he hadn’t ever known it was there. Sirius had ducked the spell and near knocked down the mantle with him as he did, my dad having been shoved to the side. They were both wide-eyed, looking at Dietrich. Harper's shoulders started shaking, and I was trying really hard to hold in a snort.

( i blame you entirely, Lyssie )

Was it bad that I was still very happy to have my friends here?

( yes )

That's when I lost it, and Harper and I had to hold each other up as we laughed.
Chapter 48

Chapter Notes

Here's chapter 48! And I'm attempting to become more active on my tumblr in the fanfic page, so go check it out! It's got all the fan art I have links to, and sometimes I write some updates or other things. :) Probs better on computer, since mobile doesn't let me look at individual pages for some reason.

Also, question (ANSWER ME ON TUMBLR AND I'LL LOVE YOU FOREVER AND PROBABLY RANT ABOUT RPR HAHA): You guys want the author's notes at the beginning of the chapter or after? Also would y'all prefer a slower, more detailed summer or are you gents too excited for the World Cup and the Triwizard?

Lemme know wherever! Thanks for always reading and commenting and throwing this poor author your support! :D Enjoy~

...  

It was only a single spell, but Dietrich had roared it, along with what I believed was a cuss in French, and immediately afterwards he seemed to realize what he’d been doing and where he was and gotten that embarrassed look about him: a specific slouch to his shoulders, averted eyes, the thin line of his mouth, all that. Harper and I recognized it for what it was, as Dietrich carefully shuffled back and put his wand away, and that, along with Sirius nearly having jumped in my dad’s arms to dodge, and Dad’s flummoxed expression, and the fire lit suddenly, but no other marks of destruction… Well, Harper and I sort of lost it.

That drew everyone back to the living room, curious and concerned, with Dietrich somewhat horrified that he’d lost his shit so completely and Sirius sort of terrified that he’d almost gotten set on fire by a thirteen-year-old with a temper worse than most Weasleys’.

I decided to have mercy on everyone and stood, grinning at Sirius, whose heart was still recovering from a sudden escalation in tempo from the scare.

“Welcome to The Burrow, Sirius.” I said cheerfully.

( you’re such a little shit ) he whispered petulantly.

Not my fault! I didn’t think Dietrich despised you enough to attack on sight instinctively like that!

( it’s definitely your fault )

I raised a brow at him. “Are you going to hug me, or are you still cowering away from my friend?”

Sirius rolled his eyes but not-so-reluctantly opened his arms. ( little. shit )
I grinned and kept myself tucked into his side while my family began to crowd the stairs and door, eyes shining with curiosity.

“Sirius, this is my family. Mum’s in the kitchen, Ginny and Percy are behind her, the two identical ones on the stairs are Fred and George — bonus points if you can tell them apart — and Ron’s with them. The one who almost decapitated you is Dietrich Bastion, and the smiley one is Tristan Harper, and you know my dad, and we’re all pleased that you’re no longer an escaped prisoner whose plotting makes me lose sleep.”

Sirius nodded to everyone, the nervousness in him relenting only a little with how I stuck to him like a burr. It was more embarrassing because of that, but at least the anxiety wasn’t bad! Embarrassment, we could handle. Things close to fear… Well, I preferred such things stayed far from his head, even with our mental link bolstering his mental stability to near normalcy.

“Ah… Hullo. Thank you for having me over.” He said, giving the impression of wringing his hands in our mindscape. He took a breath, then looked at Mum squarely in the eyes, stepping forward; I let him take the center of the room alone, as he wished. He bowed shallowly to her. “I owe your daughter a debt I’m not sure I’ll ever be able to repay in this lifetime. For what it’s worth, I’m sorry about… everything. Her injuries and the secrets and the danger. But you raised one hell of a witch, and I’m honored that you’d forgive me and trust me enough to have me as a guest in your home, even at her request.”

Mum looked surprised. I was, too, honestly; Sirius wasn’t one for formalities, and I didn’t know he could even remember manners at this point — or maybe having only bad memories for years, stuck at home with Walburga Black and pureblood ideals and such, maybe that made it easier for him to recall? I wasn’t sure. Whatever the case, Mum blinked at him, and as she studied him — the threadbare robes, the thin figure, the earnest face — I saw her face soften with sympathy.

“We all should’ve known that our Lyssie would do whatever she wanted, so rest assured, Mr. Black, not all of the blame is on you,” Mum said, warmth coloring her tone with every word. Sirius looked up, hopeful at her kindness. “And of course we’d have you over! You’ve just gotten out of Azkaban or the Ministry holding cells or what have you, I wouldn’t expect you to have anything lined up in terms of home or food or- or anything! My daughter thinks of you as family, and you’ll find we Weasleys take care of our own. Now… you’re too thin! Those horrid dementors have done quite a number on you, even with my Lyssie doing her best to help you out, so come along, I can set something out for you, even if dinner’s not quite ready yet! Come, into the kitchen! Go on!”

Sirius was suddenly being manhandled by my enthusiastic mother, and he sent an owlish look my way at the sudden surge of motherly instinct. I shrugged at him.

Just go with it. Mum loves feeding people, and you still look half-starved. I narrowed my eyes at him, though… Wait… In fact, you look even worse than before the Ministry! What the bloody hell did they do, starve you? Bastards.

(i understand completely why you are the way you are, now)
What’s that supposed to mean?

( nothing. weasley women are scary too, that’s all )

With that, my whole family relaxed and the three brothers on the stairs decided to come down entirely, Ron shuffling into the kitchen — likely because he knew Sirius peripherally and wanted to talk to him? — followed by Dad, Percy and Ginny vacating the table to poke at Dietrich and Harper — they hadn’t forgotten the spellfire, even if everyone else was too distracted with Sirius’ sudden entrance into the family — and the twins milling about. Dinner was almost ready, the house filled with the smells of steak and kidney pie, roast potatoes, baking bread, and all such things, so no one saw any point to not waiting for it; plus, everyone was interested in the quasi-Weasley I’d asked if we could have over, at least after the trial.

There was something I had to do, though.

I decided to approach the twins, leaving Dietrich to his embarrassed hedging away and Harper to amused re-telling of how Dietrich attacked Sirius — Percy was aghast and Ginny was laughing. The demon twins looked up as I approached, smiling identical grins at me, George not even hesitating in ruffling my hair gently — too much and it’d get tangled, since I still hadn’t cut it — in greeting.

“So that’s the dread Sirius Black, eh?”

“Mum’s sunk her claws into him, we see-”

“-the poor man-”

“-he seemed like a good fellow.”

I rolled my eyes at them. “If anyone needs Mum’s cooking, it’s Sirius. I actually have a question for you two.”

Stay out of my head for a bit, would you?

Not even an iota of suspicion or curiosity. Just trust. ( sure, Lyssie )

Thanks.

Fred and George blinked at me, waiting.

“You came up with having Dietrich and Harper over, right? Even if Mum did all the leg work.” I said.

“Well, like we said-”

“-s’not like Bastion’s fancy pureblood mum or Harper’s would’ve said yes to us.”

“We’re handsome gents, little sister-”

“Very handsome, indeed.”

“-but methinks you’d need a bit more than that to persuade a snake.”

Having been subjected to their twin-speak for my entire life, it wasn’t as difficult to follow as it used to be when I was little. In the advent of my and Sirius’ mind link, I wondered if Fred and George had something similar. Maybe no mindscape, since to my knowledge neither of them
learned Occlumency, but the ability to send thoughts and feelings to each other? Something to study, maybe, though I’d never get a straight answer from these two unless I explained my own mind link… which wouldn’t be happening. The demon twins weren’t the type to ever show they were mad, not anymore, but they knew how to be vengeful little fucks when they wanted to be.

I was getting off-topic.

“If you brought those two for me, why didn’t we bring Harry for Sirius?”

The demon twins stopped. They shared a glance, and their eyes betrayed a little concern.

Then George patted my head, comfortably. “Truth be told, Lyssie, we weren’t sure what the outcome of the trial would be.”

I raised my brows. “You didn’t?”

Fred shook his head. “Nasty piece of work, our Minister. We didn’t know if you’d come back happy, with your favorite ex-criminal, or terrified after seeing a Dementor’s Kiss.”

“That’s why we thought your friends might be good to have-”

“- since they could help you through that-”

“-or it’d be a nice little present for you!”

“Two birds-”

“-one stone.”

“As they always say,” the two of them chorused cheerfully, their seriousness never lasting long, as usual.

Well. That was a bit surprising to hear. I had no doubt whatsoever that Sirius would be coming home, but no one else… Perhaps I should’ve read up on the Ministry’s courts and trials and stuff beforehand, but it sounded so boring. Magical history was one thing… there was nothing magical or interesting about bureaucracy, in my humble opinion.

Ah, I see. “So Harry’s not here because if we hadn’t won, it wouldn’t have been good for him to… what, have false hopes?” I frowned. Wait. No, I didn’t see. “Doesn’t he already have false hopes? Does he even know that the trial was today? Who’s going to tell him that Sirius was freed?”

The twins glanced at each other again.

They leaned closer, bending down a little.

“You didn’t hear this from us.”

“Mum was Floo-called by Dumbledore a while back.”

“The Headmaster said it’d be better if Harrykins waited in the comfort of his own home.”

Fred grimaced. “With those Muggles relatives of his.”

George shook his head. “And told Mum and Dad to keep quiet about it, if you please, until after the trial, since there was no point worrying Harry needlessly-”
“-or having him wait all day-”

“-only to hear that his godfather got the Kiss.”

Fucking. Alby.

Of course it was Alby. I kept forgetting I was mad at him, but I kept remembering, too. He had a lot to answer to, I swear to god… What was he playing at?

“Why didn’t Harry show up in court? The Boy-Who-Lived could’ve given a great testimony.”

“Something about Fudge-”

“-and saying something about undue danger to Harrykins-”

“-and saying something about how you’d be enough as a witness-”

The two’s faces went a little dark.

George nearly hissed out, “Dumbledore looked right pissed off about it, too, so I think he was telling the truth to Mum… Said the Minister told him he wouldn’t risk the Boy-Who-Lived to dementors or Pettigrew or some mad criminal like Sirius Black-”

“-but he’d risk you.” Fred finished, voice low and dangerous.

That’s it.

I was going to kill the Minister of Magic, wasn’t I? I was going to have to go kill him.

I could see the thought-process already. Hermione? Muggleborn, didn’t matter. Written off. Harry? The Boy-Who-Lived, challenging the Ministry, in danger by coming in the sights of possibly dementors and criminals? Not even a question, he needed to stay away — both for his safety and the Minister’s. Ron Weasley? It’d be better to get the sister, the little sister, because she was more involved and she was a little girl and we all know what madmen like Black do to little girls. No, there was no need for Ron Weasley, the Ministry wouldn’t allow that witness to be called up. Written off, while the girl is sacrificed to the sharks of the media.

Mother. Fucker.

Maybe Alby had kept Harry in the dark, hoping that he wouldn’t find out about all the shit the Ministry was pulling? Keeping Harry out of politics… There could be reasons for that; maybe Alby didn’t think Harry was ready for the snakes in the ministry, or that he would’ve held up well, or any number of reasons. I still don’t think it was enough to justify keeping him and Sirius separated like this, though. He probably didn’t even know when the trial was.

Now, more than ever, I was regretting was a sulky brat I’d been. If I had stopped to think… Alby’s orders didn’t mean jack shit to me, not ones like these. I could’ve written Harry- Wait, no, because my mail was being watched. Shit.

Wait. I got distracted.

“Well, that’s bollocks and all, and I’m sure I’ll be right proper mad about it later, but back to the main thing: Harry. He should be here.”

Fred and George nodded, lightening up with the topic.
“We didn’t agree with the Headmaster keeping Harrykins with his Muggle relatives, either—”

“—not after what we had to do to get the ickle Boy-Who-Lived out, two years back—”

“—but he doesn’t have a Floo connection, we’re pretty sure—”

“—and it’s a bit late to go ask for one, don’t you think?”

I rolled my eyes. “This is what Apparition is for.”

The two glanced at each other.

“Hate to break it to you, dear sister—”

“—but neither of your handsome gent brothers can Apparate—”

“Yet.”

I wasted no time in pointing to Percy.

Ah. Those were the grins they were famous for, and professors took shots of Firewhiskey picturing.

“I’ll get a camera. For their faces, you know. Maybe you can annoy the Dursleys while you’re at it?”

Fred and George laughed evilly, and Percy looked a little wary when they bounded off to him. I think me and Ginny had a camera in our room somewhere, some old thing that she’d asked for, for our birthday… It might be nice to start a photo album for Sirius, something solid he can draw back on when he needs it the most, once our minds are fixed.

And goddamn, I needed to talk to Alby. First the trial, then I find out he’s been purposefully keeping Harry in the dark? Using my family? The man said we should talk more, last year — well bloody hell, we were going to talk more.

Unfortunate that I was in a dark mood now.

Maybe feeling Sirius see Harry for the first time, free, would knock it off my shoulders. Time to go get the camera and buy my brothers a bit of an alibi.

…

Dietrich and Harper gave me suspicious glances as everyone was called to dinner the the twins and Percy ostensibly would be down from their rooms in a moment, or so I explained.

Ah, right. Dietrich always knew when I lied, somehow. He didn’t often call me out on it, so I forgot about that weird superpower of his.

“What did you do?” Dietrich asked immediately.

I smiled. “You could call me an accessory to kidnapping now.”
Dietrich stared at me for a few moments.

Then he sighed.

“Sometimes I hate you.”

The only reaction anyone was ever supposed to have to that statement with that amount of exasperation was to give the speaker a big, shit-eating grin. A lesson from the demon twins. “You love me, you hate the shit I get up to.”

“You would not be yourself if you were not causing trouble, so no, I sometimes despise you.”

“Well, I adore you.”

“Me too, Dietrich!”

“Both of you, get off of me.”

It was at this point that I heard a sharp CRACK! faintly through the entrance door, only obvious because I was listening for it, and I smiled. Harper and Dietrich turned to look, following my expectant gaze, Dietrich having a harder time with two of his shorter, sunnier friends hanging off his arms like children, but I felt him stiffen as he realized what I’d done. Always knew Dietrich was a smart one… Or maybe he just knew me too well. Probably a bit of both.

He tried to pull a face that meant he was unimpressed with me, but I knew he was amused, dammit. “So he is besieged by my wand upon arrival, by your mother immediately after, and then by a sudden appearance of Harry Potter before dinner? I do not think you like Sirius Black nearly as much as you claim.”

I grinned. “A little surprise is good for you.”

Harper pawed at my hands until he got the camera. He grinned at me winningly. “I’ve got it, Lyssie.”

Hm. Harper with delicate objects. Harper with delicate breakable objects that I didn’t quite own by myself. Hmmmmm…

“You sure?”

I was happy to be able to just watch my little prank unfold, but…

Dietrich snorted. “Nathaniel makes him photograph embarrassing moments of our enemies.”

Oh, what the hell.

“In that case, I trust you, Harper.”

“You can count on me, Lyssie. See you in a minute!”

Dietrich was shaking his head, following after Harper as well. He was amused, I know he was. “If the connard has a heart attack, it will only be good for me.”

“Whoa, don’t say that, Dietrich! Rude!”

Harper and Dietrich’s voices trailed away as they joined the cacophony of the kitchens, and I surreptitiously poked my head out of the entry door, crossing the living room and staying out of
obvious sight, if I could. It was well and truly dark outside, but the warm lamps and candles of The Burrow were painting slanted squares of light on the ground outside. I smiled as I saw a very confused but pleased Harry approaching, a weary-looking Percy trailing after the demon twins on either side of our small Boy-Who-Lived. They all spotted me, and Harry was about to say something until I threw a finger to my lips and motioned for them to hurry the hell up.

Harry, thankfully, shut his mouth, tugging himself out of Fred and George’s grip — they beamed at me, thumbs ups telling of a successful kidnapping even if Harry being here didn’t, and skipped into the Burrow. Percy raised a brow at me — he really did look drained from Apparating that bloody far without prior preparation, notice, or knowledge of Surrey, and I intended to do him some huge favors for going along with me and the twins, and was a little curious as to why he went along with us anyways — but just skulked inside, intent on regaining his energy by devouring maybe half the table. Funnily enough, and no one commented on this, but Percy’s appetite was just as ravenous as Ron’s — he just had proper manners about it.

“Lys, what- What is going on? Why am I here?” Harry whispered furiously.

I let my brothers through, but I wanted to say a quick hello to Harry before I dragged in inside. I smiled at him, only feeling a little bad that he was obviously out of sorts. Kidnapping tended to do that to you, I suppose.

(I suppose it was because the light was behind me, but Harry didn’t seem to see the new scars. I wondered what his reaction would be? He was about to get hit with a few more surprises, this poor boy… Though I had a feeling his reaction to the scars would be kind. Probably gentle, too. There were few souls as kind and gentle as Harry Potter’s.)

“Hullo, Harry! How was Apparition?”

He looked sick at the reminder. But he focused on the issue at hand quick enough, not looking quite annoyed, but getting there. “Terrible, actually — I prefer flying- No. Wait, no, Lys, what am I doing here? Aunt Petunia and Uncle Vernon almost had aneurisms when your brothers showed up at the front door, but they didn’t say anything other than they were doing you a favor! Does your Mum even know I’m here? I don’t have an overnight pack or anything, and your owl’s so old that I barely get letters in time so maybe I didn’t get the explanation or something-?”

I grinned widely at him. “Maybe I just wanted you over for dinner!”

Harry blinked at me. He pushed up his glasses. The disbelief was almost tangible. “Er.”

“No, really, I just wanted you over to eat with us!”

“Percy looked half-dead. The twins had those smiles on, you know, the ones when you know something utterly terrible and brilliant is about to happen…”

“More the latter than the former. C’mon, Potter! I’ll explain at dinner-”

“This has to be kidnapping or something, honestly,” he was grumbling, letting me grab his wrist and pull him inside — too thin, I noted to myself, especially with how tall he was getting — “but I’d be an idiot if I tried to argue with a Slytherin, especially with you…” He paused. “Lys, is Sirius getting his trial? Is that what’s this about?”

His voice went all hopeful and excited as he spoke, and I beamed at him. Heh. This was going to be so good… even though I really did think Harry should’ve known about this trial. “Maybe. Come eat and I’ll explain, yeah?”
I dragged him after me, his mumbling buried by the chatter in the kitchen.

Before we made it quite to the open doorway, I called out:

“I knew we were forgetting someone! Look who showed up!”

This one’s for you, Sirius.

(wha-)

The kitchen went quiet as I pulled Harry up next to me. He was in the process of waving awkwardly and saying hello, realizing that no one but me, Percy, and the demon twins were aware of him coming — probably realizing that we’d orchestrated it entirely on the fly, since Harry was a smart one, bless his bloody soul — when he froze. His expression went slack, and I felt hope and shock bloom in my chest in tandem with Harry’s face.

“Sirius?”

“Harry?”

(oh)

Welcome home, Sirius.

There were two quick flashes of camera-light, and then Sirius and Harry were lunging for each other, nearly knocking the dining table over as they did, and the kitchen devolved into shouting and chaos and laughter.

If it weren’t a celebration, I’m sure Mum would’ve grounded the shit out of the demon twins, Percy — no matter that he was an adult now — and myself. We had, after all, risked splinching Percy by making him Apparate clear across the bloody country to Surrey, to steal Harry away from his family with no warning and no explanation, for the sake of pranking him and Sirius. A good, well-intentioned prank, but it was definitely a prank. As it was, Mum went white as she processed all of this, welcomed Harry warmly once he had hugged Sirius nearly to the point of rib-breaking, and then sharply called our names, ordering us out to the backyard.

Harper had laughed and Dietrich shook his head as we trailed out, Percy half-asleep and dreading a lecture, us other three siblings grinning for a prank-well-done. Mum had given us a good reaming, then she let Percy back inside because he looked like a corpse and was on the brink of magical exhaustion, then she continued to yell at me, Fred, and George. Wasn’t ’til I managed to get a word in (‘Mum, you can’t tell me that Harry and Sirius don’t deserve this. Harry should’ve been at the trial! Sirius is his family! He didn’t deserve being kept in the dark, and he definitely deserves being able to welcome Sirius back after thirteen years of prison and bureaucracy and all that rot! Mum, they deserve this!’ or something along those lines) that Mum let us back inside, irritated at us and our complete lack of repentance, but mollified when we returned to Harry bundled up between Sirius and Ron, laughing and chatting and eating happily. Percy was slumped over the table, satisfaction in his eyes and hastily-made coffee (via Dad) in his hands, nodding as Dad talked at him amusedly. Fred and George demanded stories about the Marauders from Sirius, who took the chance to talk about James Potter, with Harry listening eagerly, and I took my place between
Dietrich and Harper, across from Ginny, grinning at how well everything looked.

(I was missing three boys, two big brothers, Hermione, and Luna, and if Josie weren’t busy I would’ve loved to have her here, too, but this was what home was. This was what I fought for, this was what I wanted forever. This was everything.)

At some point halfway through eating, Sirius was regaling more prank stories — Mum was smiling but I could tell she was also twitching, knowing that Fred and George would get worse after Sirius’ influence — and I was explaining how one bought Muggle train tickets to Harper when we caught each other’s eye. Throughout it all, there was a rising sense of happiness and home and relief and awe flowing down our mental link, bouncing off each other and making our smiles brighter, and we hadn’t needed words to really understand that.

But he caught my eye and I felt a mental prod at my mind.

(you’re making it very hard for me to pay you back)

I almost laughed aloud, in surprise. I expected a word of thanks or something sappy, not that.

“But how does the Muggle machine know how many of those paper bills you put in? Is there one of those… thingies, with someone at the other end, looking?”

I rather prefer this. Keeping you in my debt means I get all the benefits of the Black fortune and alliance without needing the wedding.

(oh goddamit ew i was this close to forgetting about that)

“We’d not defeat the purpose? The Muggles don’t want to pay their workers to sell tickets.”

“Well, see-”

Laughter.

“Lyssie, how is a scanner not Muggle magic?”

“Technology isn’t runes.”

“But-”

Well? Does it live up to your hopes, Sirius? I dunno what you expected when you approached the girl with the Mind Eater’s book, the Clairvoyant descended from the Twin Dark Lords, but I hope this is something close.

Sirius rolled his eyes, timing it with his story expertly.

(don’t be daft, Lyssie)

“-James messed up, though, because your mum passed by right at that moment. The rest of us were horrified, because we knew what would happen right away, which was why Remus and I were trying so hard to get Lily to go down the other corridor-”

Percy slipped from leaning on his hand, and almost face-planted into his potatoes. Ginny snorted and nearly choked on her peas.

“Really, Harper, you’re just as thin as Harry! You ought to take a few more plates-”
A deer-in-the-headlights look. “N-No, Mrs. Weasley, I really don’t think I’d be able to eat another plate, let alone more than one…”

“And you, Dietrich!”

“Er-No, no, Mrs. Weasley, I am quite happy with-”

( *this is so much better than what i ever dreamed up in azkaban*)

Ginny patted Harper’s arm across the table. He was looking at his suddenly-full plate in dismay, Dietrich blinking at his own on my other side. “Don’t feel so bad, Harper, it’s Mum’s way of saying she’s glad you’re part of the family.”

You deserve this, you know.

“-goes to show, Harrykins, you shouldn’t ever lose your head around women.”

“Fred loses his head around Angelina all the time, don’t listen to him.”

“George! Betrayed by my own kin, my brother, my twin, oh woe is me-”

( *never in a million years*)

Ah. That’s something we both can agree on, I suppose.

Mum was fussing over Percy, who was still attempting to converse with Dad about Ministry politics. Ginny was snickering at Dietrich and Harper, who were quietly and surreptitiously levitating bits of food off their plates to others’. Fred and George were teasing each other, making Harry and Ron laugh. Sirius and I were watching and commenting when someone drew us into conversation, but leaning more on the quiet side of things, now.

Our thoughts ran together.

( *but we try to be worthy-*)

-every day we live.

Our family was lit up around us, down a few members, gaping holes in the warmth that we didn’t quite manage to overlook, but this was enough for now. The wolf in our heads was happy, feeling from both ends of the connection the fact that we were among pack, safe and protected and victorious over our enemies (the Ministry). I wished that Lupin could’ve been here, for Sirius if nothing else, but he was being held in a Ministry detention cell until his own trial. We could have another celebration then, or Sirius could…

“Lys.”

Ah. Dietrich succeeded in clearing his plate, I noticed.

“Still hungry, Dietrich?” I teased.

Completely unimpressed, my Second. “I was rather hoping you would elaborate on the trial.”

Across us, Ginny went a little still; at the end of the table, Dad did the same thing. Harper and Percy, the two interacted with them, noticed and turned to me. Oh dear. It was time for this, then… All eyes were on me. Or, y’know, at least half of the eyes of the table.
“Something a bit more than ‘we won’ would be nice, Lyssie,” Harper added hopefully.

“You mentioned that something I would not like happened. Harassment?” Dietrich prompted.

(considering the fact that bastion’s pissed off at me for a mental link neither of us are really that devastated about, i’m actually curious as to what he’s going to do when he finds out what the ministry tried to do to you)

Aha… ha… haha… Yeah, no, Dietrich’s going to lose it.

At this point, the other half of the table went a bit quiet, too. Sirius, Ginny, Dad, and I were all trading wary glances, everyone else looking concerned and curious. Dietrich’s expression was getting a bit darker, because he was likely imagining all the ways it could’ve gone wrong, and my mother was likely going through a similar line of thought, at a slower and less steep pace…

“Harassment?” Mum questioned.

I blanched.

I did what I had to do. I looked to Dad for help.

He sighed heavily. “It was,” he began, “a… It was an eventful trial.”

Mum’s eyes narrowed dangerously. “What do you mean by ‘eventful’.”

Oh god the anticipation was killing me.

(do NOT for the love of Merlin blurt out what you were just about to)

‘Sirius and I almost had to get married’ puts the point across rather well, I think.

(no it doesn’t, Lyssie)

“You did win the trial, didn’t you?” Percy asked, looking between Sirius and I, “You wouldn’t have been allowed to come here without… Well. Without having won the trial. No charges of high crime, I believe.”

“Got off on all of that,” Sirius answered, “but I suppose… Well, I think we all agree that there are some things you’re better off hearing from the source than from the Prophet. We don’t know how much is going to be covered tomorrow.”

Dad nodded. “We were cautiously optimistic that we’d win the case, of course.”


“It was going fine until Lyssie’s testimony,” Ginny added weakly.

Mum looked at me. I swallowed. “Ah… Well, there were apparently some last-minute questions the Ministry insisted on last night. I’m not sure what Alby- er, what Headmaster Dumbledore needed that he traded those questions in-”

(probably something to do with why Snape wasn’t cross-examined)

Likely.

“-but, er. The questions were. Er…”
“Invasive.” Sirius supplied.

I nodded. “Yes, that.”

Dad took pity on us, I think. Or was growing nervous at Mum’s rising suspicion.

“The short of it is... Well, I think the Ministry knew they were unlikely to pin Sirius down on attempt to murder, werewolf baiting, assault, etc. Pettigrew and Snape’s testimonies made sure of that. But... There was one avenue open to them, one last path for high crime, and it...” Dad’s face tightened. Ginny looked pissed all over again. “They accused Sirius of attempted line theft and Lys of perjury.”

It.

It took a minute for that to sink in.

Harry, I noticed, looked confused entirely. He wasn’t well-versed in these sorts of things. The gears were turning in everyone’s heads — trying to make the connection from Dad’s gentle ‘line theft’ to how this was so terrible that none of us trial-goers had wanted to say anything but felt we had to, something that was Daily Prophet worthy — but there were some connections that Harry and his Muggle upbringing wouldn’t quite be able to make. I might as well take the chance while everyone was still processing. Make it easier on all of us.

That, and I usually psyched myself up for these things. Now that it was out there, what was the point in being afraid?

“They accused Sirius of sexually assaulting me,” I said bluntly, feeling revulsion in both our heads, “I was apparently either too terrified of him or the one who wanted it, because those were the only reasons I’d be defending a grown wizard in court, obviously.”

There was a pulse of magic.

The kitchen sink’s window cracked.

Mum’s face was almost demonic.

“What?”

..."Quelqu'un va mourir pour cela."

The scariest thing about Dietrich saying that was the fact that there was a tilt to his mouth that was almost a smile. I had only witnessed Dietrich truly smile once, and I was his best friend. Dietrich didn’t smile. It was the sort of glazed, subtle expression that you should really be terrified of; the type that told me all I needed to know about what he said, even without understanding a bit of French.

Harper, on my other side, had this look of wide-eyed devastation and shock on his face. Like he’d heard the worst thing in the world. He turned to me, looking horrified and panicked. Before my Mum could further scream, or any of my siblings kick up a fuss, or any of us trial-goers get a word
in to ease the blow, Harper blurted out:

“Are you engaged??”

A pregnant pause. Another window’s glass cracked. Then…

“ENGAGED?”

“BLACK, YOU BAST-”

“ENGAGED?”

“SEXUAL ASSAULT? ”

…my family finally lost it.

I wasn’t sure who had been the source of the accidental magic — my bet was on Mum, with how her face kept fluctuating between horror-white and enraged-red — but all of them looked like they would kill someone. Fred and George had those creepy, dark looks on their faces again, the kinds that meant they would drop their self-imposed restriction to pranks in good fun, and maybe edge a little into my territory of pranks… Percy looked re-energized out of sheer fury, his voice going near shrill as he interrogated Dad when Mum had to take a breath. Ron was similar to Mum, really, though he tried to lean in towards Harry every now and then, trying to explain things but probably doing a terrible job on account of how pissed off he was. Ginny was getting irritated again, remember it and surrounded by family with temperament more similar to her own.

Harry and Harper both had shock written all over them, one from guilt and the other from fear, both of them stemming from kindness. Dietrich’s eyes were unfocused, his thoughts a million miles away — either thinking about revenge or how to fix this — and Sirius and I glanced at each other.

I thought it would be worse, honestly.

( wait until they remember they’ve got a working Floo. we’ll really have to break out the Petrifictus Totaluses then )

Y’know, I don’t think I’ve trained that one wandless yet.

( the fact that you can conjure water and fire but can’t wandless a Full-Body Bind is very telling )

Of what?

( of everything, Lyssie )

“ENOUGH.”

We all went quiet at Dad’s Sonorus-enhanced voice. Telling of how loud we were that he felt the need for it, actually. He silently canceled the spell and met everyone’s eyes calmly, wordlessly getting everyone to sit down and listen.

“Ohviously, those claims are untrue,” he began, giving Sirius a pointed look, making him nod frantically. “Lyssie was the last witness. We had all but won the case due to Headmaster Dumbledore’s monopolization of the questionings of Pettigrew and Professor Snape, along with the verdict of the previous trial. Lys’ testimony was the Ministry’s final chance to turn the case around.”
“There had to be reporters there, though,” Mum interrupted, face having settled into pallid worry. “It’s the trial of the summer, there had to be— Arthur, there had to be Daily Prophet reporters there, oh Merlin, the entire wizarding world—”

“Shouldn’t we do something—” Ron started.

“It’s already taken care of, for the most part.” I announced, cutting through the rising voices.

Mum looked at me, more distressed than before. “‘Already taken care of’? Lyssie… What do you mean?”

Dad sighed, nodding at me when I glanced at him. I guess this was my floor, then.

“The Ministry was trying to either paint me to be a victim or a scheming whore,” I said flatly, “either of which would villainize Sirius somehow, and even if the charges didn’t go through, the rumors would discredit him and make him a non-threat to the Ministry due to public backlash. He either would’ve been executed for sexual assault of a minor, especially a minor of an Ancient House, or I’d complete my nefarious plan and marry him — either way, Sirius would be out of the way, and if they had to sully my name to do it, so be it.”

“Bâtards.” Dietrich spat.

Harry leaned forward, looking a little pissed, too. My sharp tone and chosen words were getting the lot of them irritated again. “How did you fix it? You did fix it… right?”

I nodded, watching everyone slump a little in relief for it. All eyes on me, now. Even Dad and Ginny were letting me go on; I suppose I had the most right to talk about it. Damn. This was when I’d have to tell them, wasn’t it? I’d have to explain what it meant, when I called upon the old traditions; even unofficially, it was important.

I took a deep breath.

(remember, Lyssie: it didn’t happen. we got out of it, thanks to you)

“I had to invoke the old traditions,” I said quietly, “but I did it. The Ministry wanted to discredit me; they wanted the public to believe that I was a liar, and that I was dishonored somehow, and that their version of events had to be true. I had to do the opposite, make them take back their words while also shutting down the idea entirely — the public had to believe that there was no way in hell me and Sirius were… ergh… like that.”

Sirius looked vaguely sick, still, at the idea. So did most of my siblings, and Harry. Dietrich shot an intensely irritated look at Sirius as Harper reached over to pat my hand.

“They wanted to discredit me, so I reminded them that I was a daughter of Weasley and Prewett, that I had the blood of druids and lords, that even if our family was too small to hold a Noble title… I essentially told them that I still followed the old traditions.” None of my family seemed to understand, except for Dad and Percy, whose faces were growing alarmed. I decided to enlighten them, get us all on the same page. I cringed, even knowing that I had no other choice. “I… I pretty much announced to the entire world that I wasn’t a bloodtraitor. That’s… It was the only way to get them to believe me- t-to get them to back off. I’m always around pureblood heirs and such, at school, I knew how to act the part, and I just… The Prophet might mention it tomorrow, that- that I renounced us. Or something. Which is better than them focusing on the, er, betrothal thing, but…”

Dad had brought his hands up to his face, covering his nose and mouth, eyes closed. Thinking. I winced at the surprised reactions, but Dad’s looked almost pained.
It’s still not your fault.

Harry spoke up quietly, though. “Er… I don’t think I quite follow.”

Sirius took this one, thankfully, setting a hand on his shoulder.

“The reason the Weasleys are… not looked upon well by other purebloods, especially Ancient and or Noble Houses, is that they’re bloodtraitors — traitors to purebloods, and pureblood ideals. Pureblood ideals is… it’s a vague term, but one thing everyone agrees on is following the old traditions, which are, well, traditions spanning centuries. Rituals and rites and all that, things our families used to do before the Statute of Secrecy, before the witch-hunts, before the common era… Lately, the old traditions and pureblood ideals have become sort of synonymous — you follow the old traditions, you’re against Muggles, and that’s why any pureblood with a good thing to say about them, or Muggleborns, is branded a bloodtraitor and released from the old traditions.”

“I called on the… Well, I threatened the Auror questioning me with one of them,” I volunteered, freeing Sirius from being the one on the spot — I had an inkling that there were mixed feelings about him at the moment — “They claimed I was… Well, no one in this day and age really cares about sex before marriage, but the old traditions dictate that if someone should publicly accuse a maiden of being… well, not a maiden, and she’s proven true… Well, that’s slander, and the woman or girl has the right to invoke one of her male relatives to duel the accuser to death — usually her Paterfamilias, or an older brother, but it was whoever was the best duelist of the House called.”

Dietrich groaned beside me, head in his hands.

I frowned at him. “What’s with you?”

He peeked an eye out at me. “You, legally, threatened to kill an Auror.”

I bristled. “He called me a whore!”

“He called me a whore!”

“I think what Dietrich means is that he’s not even surprised that you would do that.” Harper added.

“If I didn’t challenge him, Sirius either would’ve been dead or my fiancé right now!”

Dad moaned into hands.

“I winced again. “Sorry, Dad.”

Dad opened his eyes. “I’m not angry at you, Lyssie.”

See? Idiot.

( i can feel that you’re still stressed. you’re not convincing anyone of that cavalier attitude )

If I have to deceive even myself to keep you from feeling guilty, that’s what I’ll do.

( it’s when you say things like that, that i worry about what will happen when we get our heads straightened out )

“I didn’t think so, but things are really going to be a mess now, you know,” I sighed. I looked to the rest of my family. “I think it’s better that you all hear from me, though, instead of from the papers.
About the, er… near miss, with Sirius and me and wedding bells, or the… or the fact that I somewhat publicly turned away from bloodtraitorism and by extension… you… all.”

Ginny’s face was set into something fierce and unyielding. “As if! You didn’t turn your back on anyone, Lyssie! I was there, I heard how that Auror was going at you, and if you hadn’t found a way to legally threaten him to death, I would’ve done it illegally! We’re not stupid, we know you didn’t have a choice — Sirius is one of yours, which means he’s one of ours, too, and Weasleys don’t turn their backs on each other! The Daily Prophet can shove tomorrow’s special edition up its—”

“Ginny!” Mum scolded.

She didn’t look cowed at all. “If anyone has rubbish to say against Lyssie for defending herself and making the Minister and that Auror wanker almost piss his pants, you’ll answer to me!”

“GINNY.”

“I’m not sorry,” she said stubbornly, chin jutted out.

(one hell of a spitfire sister you have there, Lys)

I know, I replied proudly.

Mum scoffed. “Being right doesn’t excuse vulgar language!”

Ginny brightened. “But you agree with me!”

Despite myself, I felt nervous and hopeful. Part of it was probably Sirius; he was much more concerned about my family’s reaction than I was. I couldn’t truly blame him — he had terrible memories of a similar occurrence. But he’d never experienced it going well before; never anticipated that it could.

Mum straightened, eyes hard, and she looked at me with a face full of determined understanding. “Of course I do! Lyssie, we would never- It’s not like you’ve proclaimed yourself a follower of You-Know-Who! And this is a vast improvement to you being- Well—” She turned to Sirius, looking a little pained. “I mean no offense, Sirius—”

Relief flooding our mind link. The pressure that was bearing down on the light, fluttering happiness was relenting.

“None taken,” Sirius replied easily, “I honestly might’ve preferred Azkaban to having to marry Lyssie.”

“Well, that’s rude.” I deadpanned.

He threw me a disgusted look, but I felt his amusement, underneath it all. “The torment of dementors and a Kiss, or having to live with the fact that I married a child I’m old enough to father? Also, you’re still a little shit.”

I grinned. I felt lighter, with my family’s verdict; not that it was unexpected, but it was comforting to hear, nonetheless, that no one really gave a shit. The wizarding world would not have that same opinion, and I liked the feeling of having my family and friends firmly in my corner. And Sirius’ own worries were soothed as well.

I crossed my arms. “Anyways, that’s it. We won, Sirius and I don’t have to get married—”
“Because Lyssie put that Auror in his place, and it was fantastic.” Ginny interjected.

I rolled my eyes. If Ginny hadn’t been so pissed back then, I have no doubt she would’ve cheered when Auror Cox meekly took back his words and backed off. It was always so nice when your enemies were defeated and embarrassed.

“Yes, we don’t have to get married, nor is Sirius going to be executed or Kissed, and the Daily Prophet will make a big deal of it. With that in mind, society will no longer consider me a bloodtraitor, I need to study the old traditions more for a while so that the Ministry doesn’t try to pull anything else, and I’m going to set Alby’s beard on fire if he doesn’t give me a good explanation for why we weren’t warned beforehand. Oh, and Sirius and I are going to make the Ministry’s lives hell.”

“Language!”

I shrugged.

Fred and George chuckled. “We’ll help with that.”

“Lys.”

Dad was calling me. The table’s murmurs — much more calm than before, but still simmering and disquieted — trailed off as they watched. I was worry to see the cheerful, warmth atmosphere that surrounded everyone during dinner descend into this. A sort of flux, one where we all knew everything could’ve turned out so much worse but at the same time, we were all angry that things didn’t turn out better. A rude wake-up call, but not a violent one — not since I told them all that we’d dodged the worst of it.

“Dad?”

“You did what you had to, just as the rest of us would have done. Be proud of that. I didn’t have the chance to tell you before you and Ginny left the Ministry, but your sister is entirely correct. Sirius is one of yours, therefore he’s one of ours, and we protect our own.”

Mum spoke up warmly, “That includes you boys, too, of course! Harry, dear, naturally, but also you two, Dietrich and Tristan.”

I saw Harper mouth to himself, ‘She called me Tristan!’ in confusion, and Dietrich looked like he was about to bolt and find the nearest hole in the ground to sink into. But there was no mistaking the pleased look in their eyes, the straightening of their backs. Harry was, thankfully, simpler than those two and just smiled shyly.

“It’s over and done with,” Dad said conclusively, “and now we’re all aware of what happened. We’ll write the rest of the family tonight, and then we’ll see what happens. And later… Well, we’ll deal with the Ministry and what they tried to do to two of us.”

A snarl in my head, but I felt like it could’ve been made aloud, and it wouldn’t feel out of place. I might have to rescind my opinion on who did the accidental magic, actually. I hadn’t noticed how tightly Dad was holding his silverware…

Dad spent all these years trying to protect me from the Ministry, and then this happened...

( i think he’s a right bit more angry than either of us thought )

He’s an Occlumens. He’s a good Occlumens. Better than I’ll ever be — you can’t even tell.
light allegiances are always better at the practice)

And Dad’s always been terrifyingly smart.

( the more i find out about your family, Lys, the more i respect you damn crazy weasleys. no wonder the death eaters turned tail when your mum and dad showed up on the battlefields — you know, they were more feared than fabian and gideon? i never understood why, until now. i think they were more pleased whenever your mother had to leave the field for pregnancy than our side was )

I did NOT know and goddammit, now I’m curious.

“Hmph. That we will,” Mum said, her voice cool and face disdainful. “The nerve of the Ministry… But. Well. As you said, Arthur, there’s nothing we can do about it at the moment. Now, since it looks like we’re all done with dinner… I suppose it’s time for desert! I won’t let the Ministry and the Prophet ruin that — all of you into the living room. Honestly, we’re supposed to be celebrating…”

“We are, Molly,” Sirius soothed her, “But it’s better you all know what to expect.”

“You all honestly had me thinking I was going to have to marry Lyssie off to Sirius Black.” Mum complained, hands on her hips.

Fred and George chuckled.

“If it weren’t almost real-”

“-it would’ve been an excellent prank.”

“Don’t you two start!”

“…Would I have had to call Lys my… godmother, or something?” Harry questioned, lips twitching.

Ron mimed vomiting.

So did Sirius.

The whole room seemed to sigh in relief, tension leaking out of our stiffened muscles. I was thankful to Harry and the twins for leading the charge; it wasn’t that big of a deal, if you could joke about it, after all. And Mum was right — this was supposed to be a celebration. I sort of wished we’d gone over the trial immediately, in retrospect, but… Well, next time.

Wait, no. There won’t BE a next time, because if there is, it probably won’t be me in danger there, not again, and if it’s not me, I’ll probably kill someone.

( like we agreed, Lyssie, we’ll figure it out. promise )

“-all of you out! I didn’t bake this cake for nothing-”

“Should’ve put little wedding bells on it, Mum-”

“YOU TWO ESPECIALLY!”

Percy stood. “I’ll help you, Mother.” He threw a dirty look at the grinning demon twins. “You two
would write some sort of felicitations for a wedding, if I don’t.”

“Thwarted again, George.”

“Whatever are we to do, Fred?”

“Me, too, Mum,” Ginny piped up.

“The rest of you — out! We’re going to at least eat the cake in peace!”

She waved her wand and the plates started floating up lazily, clearing themselves and bobbing towards the sink. The twins ducked under the cutlery and into the living room, whispering to each other. Dad and Sirius began to mutter in low tones, and I eavesdropped into Sirius head enough to know that Sirius was having yet another unnecessary apology rightfully waved off. Ron swung an arm around Harry’s shoulders, shaking his head, following the procession. (“I’ll explain whatever you don’t get, though a lot of this stuff is sorta ancient, so I dunno why Lyssie knows all this stuff.” “Slytherins.” “Yeah, that’s probably it, mate.”) I had Dietrich and Harper with me as I followed.

“My family is high up in Der Republik der Vereinigten Zauberstädte Deutschlands,” Dietrich mulled over quietly, trying not to be overheard as my family scattered into their own conversations, determined to recover from their shock and reign in their anger, “And my parents will be quite irritated to hear if the British Ministry believes my chosen liege lord to be nothing more than a lying gold-digger…”

Sirius was laughing in our heads.

What’s with you?

(liege lord. noblesse oblige. oh my merlin it was meant to be. why did anyone ever think you were going to stay a full bloodtraitor?)

This is some old traditions stuff, isn’t it? You’re gonna explain this to me later, or so help me…

(i will, but… pffftttt…)

Harper smiled. It was a little unnerving. He leaned over to whisper, “I might only be a branch member of the House of Harper, but my mother was a favorite granddaughter of Köken Kasiya Paterfamilias. Dunno if we’ll have much sway, Lyssie, but a little more pressure is a little more pressure.”

I nodded to both of them. “Keep that on the back-burner for now, we’ll see how the Prophet paints us tomorrow and go from there.”

It was probably bad that I was considering using the not so insignificant resources my friends possessed. Honestly, it was a wonder that Dietrich was treated so badly in first year — his family was nothing to scoff at, after all, and that came with a bit of weight to his name. Seriously. Who else would Occlumency-train their heir to the point of expressionlessness but someone who really had shit to hide? And Harper… Yeah, he might only be a branch member of his family, and his mum was technically a Halfblood, but seriously.

“With pleasure,” Dietrich said.

Harper nodded. “Of course, Lyssie.”

(your friends scare me, Lys)
I know. Imagine what they’ll be like when they’re older!

(bloody hell, you’re all going to be nightmares)

You’re damn right we are.

All in all… Today had been good. Today had been very good. Hopefully that was a sign for the rest of summer. Warmth and family and surmounting seemingly impossible obstacles. I was a little nervous for what was coming tomorrow, and I didn’t doubt that I’d See some flashes tonight, but at least I wouldn’t be alone for it.

(unfortunately, though, Lyssie, this means we can’t go to diagonal anytime soon to fix this…)

Ah. We’d get swarmed by people, no matter what the news was. Sirius already got a taste of it, after his trials and hearing.

I shook my head at him.

One thing at a time, Sirius. One thing at a time.
I could still feel Sirius sleeping when I woke up, our head emptier and darker with it. To be fair, it was ridiculously early. Hell, I hated getting up early like this — but there was a special feeling I got when I managed to be up and I could listen to the magic of the house, pick out the colors I recognized as my family’s. It was relaxing to do. Reassuring.

And it was even better, because if I concentrated hard enough, strained my eyes a little, I could see the faint shimmer of Sirius’ black-red-indigo-blue maroon (clouds of my colors cradled in his), the faintest traces of deep, deep blue and green and gold I associated with Harry’s core, and Harper’s fluttering teals and robin-egg blues and faint golds. Sirius’ magic was easier to pick out, connected to mine and knowing it by the way it tried to reach out to me, and Harper’s was nearly dwarfed by Percy’s awake sky-blue-purple-silver, and Harry’s was the furthest away, but brighter since he was in Ron’s room, peacock-colors set against Ron’s veritable sunset.

My seeing-sight was stronger than my hearing-sight, yes, in that it was more accurate and more detailed, but my hearing-sight tended to have better range; I was just worse at being able to tell what the hell was going on with the hearing-sight. I did know, however, that the quiet lulls of music, simple tunes that played over and over, were joined by three different melodies, and that only Percy was awake besides me. Wait, no- Harry was also awake, but only just, and I wasn’t too sure about that.

I sighed, thinking back to last night.

I’d felt like a little kid again, hopefully asking Harper and Dietrich if they didn’t want to spend the night in one of my brothers’ rooms. Harper’d Floo-called his mum and the woman had apparently agreed enthusiastically — though with lots of orders for Harper to be safe and tell anyone if he needed help (and Harper’s colors shrunk in shame a little, hearing that, and I was a little glad I’d only been eavesdropping and not looking at the woman because I might’ve gotten snappish otherwise) — but Dietrich’s mum had given a definite NO WAY IN HELL, so he’d elected to
(“I wrote you a letter, by the way. Dunno if you got it already, but a lot of it… well, I’ve told most of it to you already, so feel free to ignore it.”)

“I will reply. We will have to make plans this summer. You still need to visit.”

“Yeah. See you, Dietrich.”

Stop.)

No one, least of all Harry, wanted to deal with the Dursleys after cake and ranting about the Ministry and Sirius doing some impromptu lectures on certain old traditions — Percy had insisted, panicked that I’d have to appear knowledgeable to make the Ministry back off, if only until the heat died down — and though Mum gave a token protest, we settled Harry in Ron’s room without further ado. I think he stayed up, him and Ron, because Sirius had snuck out of his room (Bill’s old room) to go talk to them; they’d still been quietly snickering and telling stories when I’d told Percy to take care of Harper and went to bed with Ginny being dragged behind me sleepily.

Sirius, of course, was staying with us until further notice. He was one of mine, so he was practically a Weasley. Same with my boys, same with Harry and Hermione for Ron, same with Lee Jordan for Fred and George. Our eldest brothers were a tad bit more reserved about that kind of thing; or maybe they thought the family wouldn’t be able to handle their friends, because I knew for a bloody fact that Percy was good friends with Oliver Wood, and that kid was fucking nuts.

I sighed again.

It was nice to sense so many of mine all around. Percy’s magic was in that focused, sharp pattern that told me he was writing applications for jobs again; ridiculous, because he was going to get that Ministry position with Crouch Sr., they were just backed up and Percy was a nervous wreck. But Harry’s… Harry’s magic had bloomed into full awareness — he was fully awake, now, I think — and it was growing larger with proximity. He was moving around.

Well, I wasn’t allowed to bother Percy when he was in one of his moods — it wasn’t often that Percy lost his temper with me, but I was much more easy-going about future careers than he was, since I was aware of the fact that I had a war to fight before I needed to worry about that shit — and I had orchestrated Harry’s kidnapping. He’d been busy with Sirius and all the trial revelations last night, I hadn’t been able to greet him properly and ask how he was holding up.

I might’ve been a little hasty, dragging him to The Burrow without any warning or preparation. But I’d been more indignant that he likely didn’t even know his own godfather was free, yet the rest of us did… Harry was Sirius’ priority, even if I had a mind link with the man. I understood that.

(Harry’s maturity didn’t fluctuate between a twelve-year-old’s and a nineteen-year-old’s. Harry didn’t think, sometimes, that he was actually Sirius’ age.)

(I would have been thirty-one years old if I hadn’t died. Sirius was thirty-four.)

He’d already made it down the stairs and to the kitchen by the time I willed myself out of my warm cocoon of blankets. I padded across the room, idly thinking that I really should clean it a little before Harper inevitably burst in and embarrassed the ever-loving shit out of Ginny (she left her laundry around, though not a single sock crossed the invisible divide between us, because I would be on her ass for that), and followed Harry down, out the kitchen door, past the chicken yard. He was in the fields, overgrown and messy and excellent for playing, and I was reminded of my and
Sirius’ shared mindscape, walking out in just a baggy shirt and shorts and a last-minute jacket. The only difference was the sun was rising here, and it was always nighttime, in there.

“Dī-konden An-drixtā,” I muttered to myself. I didn’t want to get a headache when everyone else started waking up — Harry’s magic was damn bright already, just by itself.

Harry must’ve heard me, because he whirled around in surprise.

“What the- Lys!”

I grinned at him as he blinked rapidly at me, adjusting his glasses — they’d nearly flown off his face, with how suddenly he turned. “Surprised you, huh, Potter?”

“Nearly gave me a bloody heart attack, Lys.” Harry sighed.

Were my Mage Sight up, I’d bet his colors spiked up like a cat’s fur. Shock did that to you.

I stopped next to him, feeling a little chilled. Summer mornings could still be right cold, and the field was all covered in dew. “You normally a morning bird, Potter, or did Ron kick you in his sleep or something? Ron kicks.”

“I know,” Harry replied wryly, “You should see the weird positions I find him in when I wake up. I think he once kicked his blanket across the dormitory. Seamus was right confused when Ron called him a blanket thief.”

“Ginny used to hate it. One of her first instances of accidental magic was when she summoned every blanket in the house after Ron kicked the blanket off of them while they were napping.” And if Harry heard the tinge of pride in my voice, because Summoning multiple objects was an amazing first feat of magic, then… Well, I trusted Harry to keep a secret.

(Ginny would complain that I was being embarrassing and Mum-like.)

(I wouldn’t really be able to disagree.)

Harry snorted. “The more you and Ron talk about Ginny, the harder time I have imagining it.”

Ah, yes. I forgot. Ginny was still a slight Harry-Potter-shy. She really was getting better, but I think she was having a difficult time reconciling the hero in the books she’d grown up with all her life to Ron’s dorky best friend. That, and Harry was honestly a very pretty person. A bad combination for my tomboy sister, whose interactions with males were usually of the family variety.

I smiled sheepishly, for her sake. But I wouldn’t defend her to Harry; he had to make his own decisions about that. They’d become closer when they were older — how else would they have gotten married in canon?

“Anyways, you didn’t answer my question, Harry. Up early for laughs?”

He shook his head. “I just… had a lot to think about.” Then he shrugged. “And I’m usually up this early anyways, to cook breakfast. For. Er. For me and the Dursleys. To cook breakfast for me and the Dursleys.”

That…

Was a very poor save.

_To cook breakfast for the Dursleys, I heard, but not me._
I narrowed my eyes. There was a reason I pushed nutrient supplements on Harry, before. There was a damn good reason Madam Pomfrey still sent them; let it never be said that the woman didn’t take her job seriously, or that she didn’t have favorites.

But I had to tread carefully here. I didn’t want to trigger Harry’s temper, which I’d Seen that I’d have done before, if I confronted too bluntly. If I pushed too hard. Best approach this like a Slytherin, right? Manipulate to your heart’s content, little queen.

I lowered my eyes. I didn’t have to pretend to be sad for this. I already was.

“You know it’s wrong, don’t you?”

In the corner of my eyes, Harry stiffened. A strong approach. Maybe a bit too much.

“I dunno what you mean.”

A sardonic smile. “Don’t you remember, Harry? I need stimuli to See. My Clairvoyance doesn’t differentiate between good and bad, negative and positive. If I have strong feelings for something, it shows whatever it can.”

Harry relaxed. It was easier to reveal vulnerabilities if the other went first. It was easier to slip into a trend than to begin one. Add that with dangling interesting information, with emotional response, with honesty, with obvious hesitance… I made myself not into an enemy, talking about this, but into someone to commiserate with.

(This was what it meant, to knowingly manipulate someone.)

(This was what everyone was afraid of when they walked up to a Slytherin.)

(What’s best for me and mine, and what’s fair to everyone else.)

“And that’s why you have the nightmares,” Harry sighed, remembering my explanation on my Hospital Wing bed. He was determinedly looking at the tree line, away from me. “It’s not… You’ve Seen the deaths of your family. Ron told me- you- He said you’d never met any of your uncles or your aunt, but you knew how- the war-” Harry’s jaw set. “It’s not the same. It’s not that bad. You’ve had to have Seen that — it’s not.”

“Don’t compare pain, Harry,” I said quietly, “Just because others have suffered more, doesn’t mean that you suffered any less.”

He went quiet. Willing to listen, but too full of thoughts, I think.

I knew the feeling well.

“You don’t have to tell me anything, and I won’t tell you what I’ve Seen. Not unless you want me to, or unless you want to talk, or… Please, just… tell me you know that the way they treat you is wrong?”

Harry was nothing if not stubborn, however. “They didn’t ask for me.”

“And my family didn’t ask for a daughter whose nightmares and accidental magic used to threaten to take the entire house down, did they?” I said sharply.

He looked at me quickly. “That’s different.”

*Yes, because my family accommodated for me and yours tossed you in a cabinet and made you*
their slave, I thought angrily. But I knew that responding to Harry like that, with anger and sharp words, would only pissed him off. I took a deep breath. Occluded. Calmed.

Alright. I could… Yes. I trusted Harry enough.

“I look at the things that have hurt my family and friends the most in this world,” I started quietly, fiercely, “and… Well. The ones I call mine should be living freely and happily, growing into themselves and learning themselves and… I just want them to be at peace. I want them to have had childhoods full of warmth and safety, and barring that, to know that warmth and safety will be offered to them without a second thought, just because they’re themselves and I love them. When I see Dietrich growing up alone… When I see Harper shrinking at every accusation that he’s wrong in the head… When I see Nate flinch away from a shadow I can’t see, or Jay, or Lu… When I see Luna looking at shredded books she loved, or Mum staring at her brothers’ bodies, or you in that fucking cupboard…” My gaze turned murderous. I thought of the colors and songs I’d woken up to, thought of them twisted and glassy and rotting with soul sickness. I thought of the loneliness all my boys felt and lived through, of the blood on my brothers’ familiar faces, set into unfamiliar, empty expressions. “It makes me want to kill something.”

Harry looked surprised at the flow of information I was tossing his way.

I swallowed. I don’t think… Well, aside from me shattering Pettigrew’s arm, I don’t think Harry’d ever witnessed me flare my Dark tendencies. I kept that shit in check, if I could. I suppose I considered this a… test, of some sorts.

“Pretty bad, right? It’s wrong to think like that. I like to think I’m a decent person, even being a Slytherin. I think… if there are things in the world that do things like isolate my friends in their own homes, give my family nightmares, crush their spirits… Those are the things that are wrong, not me.”

Harry’s stubborn defiance was replaced with a sad sort of sympathy. It cleared of that expression that meant he was shutting me out, which was all I wanted.

“I’ve told you before, Lys,” he said softly, “You’re a good friend. You’re a good person.”

“And you’re better,” I shot back without pause, “You’re better and you deserve so much more than the Dursleys reluctantly gave, and… Sirius would give the world to have you as his kid, legally at least, you’re already his kid in his mind, so he thinks they’re shitty, too.”

Harry spluttered out a surprised chuckle. He ran his hand through his hair, sighing, then smiled at me exasperatedly. “You’re really not going to let it go, are you, Lys?”

I shook my head, inwardly cheering. That was a prelude to a sort of victory, those words.

He sighed again, shooting me a shy smile. “I’m glad I’ve got some way to get away from them.”

“Because…”?

“They’re terrible and… being locked in a cupboard, always hungry and all that rot… if it were Ron or Hermione in my situation, I think I’d want to kill something, too.” Harry admitted, voice going quieter as he went.

I nodded. Thank god he stopped denying it. No use, really, when I knew things I shouldn’t already. I knew too much. “And?”

Harry gave me an even more exasperated look. “Must you?”
I crossed my arms, a brow ticking upwards.

The teenager he was, he sighed. “And I… deserve better.” Then he snorted, and gave me the side-eye. “So I dunno why you decided to stick me with Sirius of all people. Did you know he hates the Chudley Canons?”

“The monster.” I deadpanned. Then I grinned — and not just because imagining Ron’s face at that revelation was hilarious. “It’s good for you to acknowledge that, you know. Your Muggle relatives are the bloody worst and I hope Fred and George annoyed the shit out of them.”

Harry laughed. “They did, don’t worry.” Then he rubbed at his hair, looking embarrassed. “You know… You did help me with them. The Dursleys.”

“What? Me? When?”

“That… You always give me little things for wandless magic training and meditation and… Well, I can’t really set fire to things on command, but… I keep to really small things, like making stuff float, but it keeps the Dursleys away, since they think I can do more if I wanted to. ‘Specially after the Ministry loosened the Trace wards after Aunt Marge.”

I laughed. “So you threaten to set their things on fire?”

“I’ll be able to do it, one day,” Harry said, eyes glinting. The look on his face, it was competitive and determined and I definitely wanted to see him and Lu fight, now. It’d be extremely entertaining. Maybe a broom race?

I shook my head. One day at a time. “Maybe. You’re Grey-Light, you know. You’d have an easier time with enhancement magic or wandless barriers. Use barriers right, they can become some terrifying weapons, actually. Sort of makes me wish I was Light.”

Harry smiled. “Guess I’ll finally be able to one-up you, then.”

“Hm?”

He scratched the back of his head, looking a little odd. “It’s… funny, you know? Knowing that you’re this accomplished Slytherin, brilliant at magic, terrorizing the Hogwarts students who pick on yours, dueling Malfoy, friends with Sirius… It’s just. Everyone thinks of the Boy-Who-Lived as this mythical hero or whatever, but they don’t look around and see that there are other people more… I’m not really a hero, I just want to keep myself alive every year something rubbish happens to me, but Lys, you- you’re so far ahead of everyone, sometimes, it’s downright… ridiculous.”

He hesitated on that last word.

I had told Harry, once, what that word meant to me. It was hard to hear the word from other people. Made me think of a dead almost-maybe-probable friend who needed more time in this world. Another one of mine who deserved better than what he got.

But, still. Harry Potter, Boy-Who-Lived… jealous of me?

(That was. Something to address. That was definitely something to address. But… we had just had one hard conversation. Now was not the time for another. Let it never be said that I didn’t sometimes know when to back off.)

“It’s the Clairvoyance,” I said lightly, tapping my head, “Gave me a head start. The rest of you are
catching up… though I won’t be making it easy. Get strong enough, get smart enough, and protecting me and mine? Stopping the nightmares? It’s almost in my grasp.”

A filthy lie. That goal was so far away, I was still Seeing my family’s deaths. And now my boys’, too, their deaths and their hurts and shadows converging on them with white masks. flashes of terrible futures I had to stop.

But Harry smiled. “Guess I ought to hurry up, then. I’m older — it’s my job to watch out for you.”

“Says who?”

“Ron. Gave me a big lecture on how to take care of little sisters. You’re my god-sister, aren’t you?”

I laughed. “That was a joke, but I don’t mind. Merlin knows I take on friends as family all the time.” I shook my head. I meant it when I told Harry he was better. He was. He was so much better than I was. “C’mion, then. No one’s really up yet, not at this time, but if you want to make breakfast, I can help. I can’t make anything fancy, though.”

Harry nodded. “Sure we can use the kitchen?”

“It’s my kitchen and I say you can use it. Besides. You’re a teenage boy, you’re bound to be hungry.”

“That’s… such a mum-like thing to say…”

“Shut it, Potter, I’ve lived with seven older brothers!”

It was still early enough that I didn’t think many of us would be up. We made our way back to the house, chatting amiably, the difficult conversation behind us. I was glad to know that Harry understood that… Well, I’d been a little afraid. Not that I had much experience with child abuse or kids who were abused or anything, at least not from my last life, but I knew there could be this fucked up thing where they thought they deserved it. It was relieving to know that Harry… didn’t think like that. And he wouldn’t ever, not with Sirius standing behind him now, determined to make up for his years in Azkaban.

Speaking of which.

*OI! MUTT! Wake up and come cook breakfast with your godchildren.*

(*hrunnnnwha-?*)

*I want to see how bloody terrible you are at cooking. And I know you are, Sirius.*

(*rude*)

“Oh, by the way, Lys.”

I opened the door and wandlessly cleaned my bare feet before I stepped in. Mum’d have a fit if I got her floors dirty… “Hm?”

“I, er. I think you look pretty even with the scars. Didn’t even notice them, really, until halfway through dinner last night. So, er, if Malfoy or anyone says anything about them…”

I looked up in surprise. Harry was looking very pointedly away.

Heh.
I grinned at him. “Us scarheads ought to stick together, you mean?”

His hand automatically reached up to touch his forehead. He smiled. “Yeah.”

Finally awake, are you?

( you poked me! )

You were already waking up if it worked.

“Don’t worry too much about Malfoy,” I said in amusement, patting Harry’s shoulder, feeling a glowing fondness for him that I concentrated on to keep the embarrassment at bay, “He’s *magnus potesta* reigning this year. He’s going to be busy, scrambling around and trying to keep his little throne.”

“Scrambling?”

I raised a brow. “You think Josie *wanted* him to succeed her? Hell no. She didn’t prepare him *at all* for the takeover.” I grinned evilly. “I’m putting a list together of things Malfoy’s got to do for me if he wants me to teach him how Josie ran things. Harper wants to make him have to hug every Muggleborn he’s ever mocked, without a wand to defend himself when they hex the bloody shite out of him for it. He’ll tell you all about it over breakfast, I bet.”

Hermione would give the boy hell for it. I sort of wanted to make it happen, if only to see what sorts of terrifying spells she knew — I *knew* Hermione knew some, there was no way she didn’t, and I *really* wanted to see it.

Harry was still laughing when we finished making a simple breakfast, the kitchen a mess due to Sirius’ unbelievable *incompetence* in cooking, my family — and yes, Harper was also my family at this point, Mum absolutely *loved him*, it was already too late — stumbling down with bleary eyes.

(It was nice to have a moment of peace.)

(The paper came during breakfast, after all.)

…

**LORD SIRIUS BLACK: FREE MAN, NEW WEREWOLF, GODFATHER TO BOY-WHO-LIVED — WERE WE WRONG TO TRUST THE MINISTRY?**

*written by Mia L. Flores*

*It has been previously released to the public that the events of November 1981 have recently been revealed to be more complicated than we all believed. What appeared to*
be a straightforward case of a rogue Death Eater — a follower of You-Know-Who — attempting one last crime following the demise of his master was called into question with the surprising revelation: Peter Pettigrew, who received an Order of Merlin, First Class posthumously, was taken into Ministry custody on suspicion of several high crimes and infiltration into a wizarding family. What did this mean for the Ministry? What did this mean for the recently-escaped Sirius Black? What truly happened twelve years ago? And what on earth happened three weeks ago, on the night of June 6th?

This reporter was determined to find out. Statements taken from Lord Sirius Black, Minister Cornelius Fudge, Hogwarts Headmaster Albus Dumbledore, Ministry employee Arthur Weasley, Lady Augusta Longbottom, and Lord Eduard Zabini, among many other venerated wizards and witches in attendance, confirm the entire story.

Twelve years ago, James and Lily Potter — parents to our very own Boy-Who-Lived — were hidden under the famous Fidelius Charm, cast by Headmaster Dumbledore himself. There was only one wizard in the world who could reveal their location. For Twelve years, the world has believed that wizard to have been Sirius Black, who then betrayed the Potters, leading them, and with them You-Know-Who, to their deaths. Black was then supposedly cornered by Peter Pettigrew, whom he killed along with twelve Muggles, shortly before his arrest and imprisonment in Azkaban.

“No trial,” said Albus Dumbledore, when questioned shortly before the trials began, “There was no trial, and there was no Veritaserum. Sirius Black was unlawfully thrown into Azkaban for twelve years, while Peter Pettigrew survived and hid himself away, despite the world’s approval of his actions. Now, why was that?”

Why is that, indeed, dear readers?

The first trial of Sirius Black, come twelve years too late, was conducted from nine in the morning yesterday until ten-twenty. Sirius Black was charged for the murders of twelve Muggles, a sentence which earns a lifetime in Azkaban by itself, and for the newly turned Black, an execution, made lawful by Article X.VII.IV of the 1656 Lycanthrope Legislation. Due to Ministry error, the procedure check of Sirius Black’s wand was not performed, and so the ladies and gentlemen of the Wizengamot — led by Lord Eduard Zabini II — demanded the Aurors to rectify this mistake during the prosecution conducted by the state. The fact that this procedure was not carried out prior to the beginning of the trial is already suspicious, dear readers, and this reporter thought so even as the trial began; perhaps it was with good reason. If the world got the story right the first time, the Priori Incantatem performed by Auror Robbard Stevenson would have revealed Black’s callous murder of twelve innocent Muggles.


The last thing Lord Sirius Black ever cast with his wand was something to protect his newly-orphaned godson. Not a curse that killed thirteen people.

Needless to say, dear readers, Sirius Black was let off charges of mass murder after Albus Dumbledore motioned for a judgement of acquittal — the evidence the state presented for Sirius Black’s guilt was not enough for a full trial to be conducted.

With that, we all knew, those who were watching the trial, that Sirius Black’s imprisonment was illegal and immoral. Were this mistake identified prior to the
mysterious night of June 6th, in which both Pettigrew and Black were arrested, perhaps this article would finish there. However, there was the issue of that night — the night Sirius Black was bitten by werewolf Remus Lupin, who also attacked four Hogwarts students and Hogwarts Potions Professor Severus Snape.

“He was an illegal Animagus,” stated Auror Nikita Pavlovic, “Pettigrew, that is. Arthur Weasley’s filed everything he could against him, since he was playing at being his kids’ pet rat.”

When questioned on the connection of June 6th to November of 1981, Auror Pavlovic would not give any further comment. Which, unfortunately, is when this reporter had to retreat to to back of the courtroom. The trials began, and we all know how the first ended: in Sirius Black’s favor, and the entire room knowing the last thing the man had been able to do before Azkaban was keep his godson warm, before Harry Potter was handed to Albus Dumbledore’s safekeeping.

What do we know from the trial?

Peter Pettigrew was an illegal Animagus who hid within the Weasley family, playing on the childrens’ innocent tendency to keep any animal they could. He intended to remain there, if not for the observations and abilities of one of the Weasley children: Guinevere Weasley, the youngest of her siblings, a Hogwarts Slytherin, and a natural-born Soothsayer.

Under oath, though understandably refusing Veritaserum, Sirius Black told the Ministry of his escape from Azkaban being owed to his own illegal Animagus form: that of a black dog, with remarkable similarities to a Grim. After his escape, he said, he focused wholeheartedly on, “protecting Harry, and trying to get close enough to the rat to kill him. I recognized him from the papers, when the Weasleys went to Egypt with the money from the Daily Prophet draw.” During the course of his avoiding the wizarding-world-wide manhunt and trying to enact the old tradition of Rightful Vengeance, Sirius Black happened upon Guinevere Weasley, who, with her abilities as a Soothsayer, had long ago divined the true nature of her family’s pet.

“I’m not ashamed to say that I begged her for help. We had a Weasley in the family, once — Septimus Weasley. He was a Clairvoyant. He told me, long time ago, to look for the girl descended from the Mind Eater when I needed help the most. It was January and I was getting pretty desperate… A Weasley and a Prewett, right? I thought. I figured the Slytherin one would be more likely to hear me out before anything else. She almost cursed me to bits anyways. But Guinevere listened and she, thank Merlin, believed me, and she... Well, I wouldn’t have been able to have this trial, if she hadn’t helped me.”

For nearly five months, Guinevere Weasley, at the risk of her own health, reputation, and safety, sheltered Sirius Black in the vicinity of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, providing him information on Pettigrew and supplies to survive. Their goal was the capture of Peter Pettigrew — thus the safety of the unknowing victims, the Weasley family — and the rightfully restored freedom of Lord Black. It came to a head on June 6th, 1994, when Pettigrew was captured, though not before the man terrorized the Boy-Who-Lived, the youngest Weasley son, a Muggleborn, and Guinevere Weasley herself, also attacking Professor Severus Snape with an illegal torture curse — a creation of You-Know-Who himself — and baiting the werewolf Remus J. Lupin, who was the Professor of Defense Against the Dark Arts at the time, into attacking Miss
Weasley and biting Lord Black.

Not only did Peter Pettigrew orphan the Boy-Who-Lived, but he was the cause of Sirius Black’s twelve-year stint in Azkaban, terrorized a child Soothsayer for years, spied on a pureblood family with young children, assaulted a distinguished professor, and then baited a werewolf. Crimes that might have gone unnoticed and unpunished were it not for the actions of Sirius Black. Crimes that were very close to being blamed on Lord Black himself, by the Ministry!

That’s right, dear readers. Assault against a wizard, the casting of a torture curse, werewolf baiting, and more — all these high crimes were leveled at Peter Pettigrew, but they were, too, attributed to Sirius Black as Pettigrew’s co-conspirator! The man whose imprisonment can be laid at Pettigrew’s feet, accused of being his co-conspirator! Charged for it!

And charged, too, for the crime of requiring help!

It was most shocking to hear, near the end of the second trial, new charges brought forth against Sirius Black: sexual assault of a minor, manipulation of a minor through the Dark Arts, and attempted line theft! That’s right, ladies and gentlemen — the Ministry not only attempted to paint Lord Black and the criminal Pettigrew with the same brush, but they also accused the man of threatening his foremost supporter, one Guinevere Weasley, into submission!

Auror Ethan Cox, during the last cross-examination, the questioning of Guinevere Weasley, stated, “[Weasley] aided a criminal, either determined to take him as a husband, or afraid that [she] would have to. It’s hard to tell, when [she is] a Weasley girl in Slytherin.”

The outrage in the room was palpable yesterday. None more than Miss Weasley’s Paterfamilias, Arthur Weasley’s, or the young lady’s herself. Auror Cox was made to rescind his accusation and statements moments later, as Miss Weasley promised him a Duel of Defamation should the man’s slander of the pureblood family continue, but the Ministry’s mistake has been made. What are we to do, when innocent wizards and witches are accused and belittled by the Ministry? What are we to do, when the Ministry threw an innocent man in Azkaban without proper trial, and claimed that same innocent man a rapist in order to return him to prison?

“I owe Guinevere a debt that I will never repay in my lifetime,” stated Sirius Black after the trials, “I would never hurt her. She’s young enough to be my daughter! She’s younger than my godson. She saw that I needed help and she stepped forward to offer it. That the Ministry would say that I… If Guinevere was ever attacked like that, I’d tear the man’s throat out myself. Make no mistake about that.”

Unfortunately, this reporter was unable to interview the girl in question, but what we know about the girl who saved one of the Most Ancient and Noble Lords is impressive. A Slytherin student at the top of her year group and a daughter of two bloodlines whose purity goes back to the druidic ages, Guinevere Weasley is a girl who possesses enough strength to stand up to the slander of the Ministry, and enough honor to extend help to an innocent man plagued by misfortune and Ministerial incompetence.

It is by the grace of Magic herself that Sirius Black was able to weather the charges against him, and that the Ministry’s frankly disgusting claims were retracted, a proper compensation given to the man for his years of suffering. And even then, during that
hearing, they attempted to detract Lord Black’s rightful compensation on account of his lycanthropy! The lycanthropy that would have been avoided had the Ministry put Pettigrew away earlier, or had they conducted a trial in the first place.

This reporter is ashamed to say that this is the state of the Ministerial justice system. A man thrown into prison without so much as a by-your-leave. A manhunt on a starving, dementor-affected prisoner seeking Rightful Vengeance. Ignorance of the fact that he was framed. Claims that he attempted to kill the godson he had only ever tried to protect. Accusations that he sexually assaulted the noble girl who saved him. Accusations that the same girl seduced the man in order to take advantage of his later freedom. Attempts to rescind rightful compensation due to lycanthropy by werewolf baiting.

I am honestly disgusted. Were we wrong to trust the Ministry?

Dear readers, I’m sure you know the answer.

(See page 5 for more on Peter Pettigrew)
(See page 6 for more on Lord Black)
(See page 10 for more on the Fidelius Charm and Secret Keepers)
(See page 11 for more on the trial transcripts)
(See page 15 for more on Animagi)
(See page 17 for more on Duels of Defamation, Rightful Vengeance, and other ancient pureblood traditions)

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Dear Lyssie,

I really think you owe me, you know, because Dietrich knew you’d raise new wards for all the mail. That was fun, by the way, even if the owls were practically attacking us all while we were trying to set them up… and we all basically had to leave our breakfasts unfinished to do it… I’m really happy I got to stay overnight, because seeing the ex-Head Boy curse owls out of the air was really, honestly, very brilliant. I’m glad he never ever punished us that hard because you’re his favorite, because it
was a little terrifying. Wicked, but very, very terrifying. You two are definitely related.

What was I saying?

Right. Right, so Dietrich was so mad and he knew you’d do something to redirect all the mail you’d be getting (I still think it’s funny you’re making all the owls go to Hogwarts because the Headmaster was a complete arse, but you really should edit the wards so Howlers from friends can go through so Dietrich doesn’t go spare dictating threatening letters to you, only to send them to me) and basically Dietrich’s owl is half-dead and so’s mine and we were actually having something like four conversations at once, but all of them were about how pissed off he was, mostly. At the party he was angry, but I think reading about it — I had to send him my copy, which isn’t even my copy ‘cos I had to ask Mum for it! — just made him a lot worse. He mentioned something about fixing dogs? Fixing mutts. He also mentioned the fact that his mum’s got some old silver rings and Lu offered to teach him how to punch someone in the face properly, not that I think Lu’s ever punched anyone in the face, even if he’s tried to.

I think you should hide your dogfather.

(I rather like him, by the way. Dietrich and Lu are all angry about the fact that he needed you, but I remember what the dementors were like. After twelve years of that, I think it’s only right that Sirius Black needed the best of us to help him through. And he did take care of you, really, outside of your getting scratched by our secret werewolf professor. Oh by the way Lyssie — Teach me those spells he used to help you breathe, the ones you mentioned in the trial? I’m Light enough for them, aren’t I? I can almost cast a Patronus, so I can definitely help you out, too.)

Oh, and Dietrich’s also mad because you reminded him that you’re friends with a cambion. Or not friends. Probably not friends, because I think it’s really likely that it messed with your head somehow. Dietrich wanted me to forward the first draft full of his edits, and I added some of mine, too. Don’t worry, I didn’t tell my mum. But even if I did, I think she’d laugh or something, Dietrich’s too paranoid about things. So look that over and Dietrich says to please don’t send your family’s owl because he honestly thought it died in his room and was definitely panicking about it, and don’t let him convince you otherwise, I’ve got letter proof! It was really funny to read.

Anyways, I hope you’re doing well, Lyssie. I wouldn’t go out in public for a while, considering the owls bombarding us yesterday. And I hope you managed to get in touch with your warden brother! Maybe he knows how to tweak the wards better? You and your dad and Sirius came up with the stuff we all put up on the spot, after all.

Love,

Harper
Lys,

It is more than fortunate that your newspapers are on your side. I am still very irritated, and you will hear of it when we next meet, but I am glad that this Mia Flores woman seems to paint you in the best light possible. I suppose much of that is due to Black, so stop reminding me in every paragraph — I will not castrate him. From reading the trial transcripts, however, some of that is your own influence.

Though, I am sorry that you are receiving letters congratulating your supposed distance from your family. It is idiotic to think such a thing, as your testimony stated that you refused to reveal Pettigrew in a somewhat misguided attempt to protect them. I suppose we can expect no better from most of the idiots in your country. Which is not to say that either Germany or France is better, but I rather feel that Britain has sunk to a new low. Malfoy and his two inbred idiots are proof of that. As is Parkinson, I feel, though she has been tolerable.

Additionally, Lys…

You will take that potion.

Yes. I do mean the one I sent with this letter.

It is to relieve your pain and I brewed it myself — it was not expensive, and I enjoyed the task. You know I like Potions. You are already feeling guilty about using my and Harper’s and Percival’s owls more than your family one, I will curse you if you add this onto your stupid thoughts. Drink the potion. With hope, the pain you’re feeling from Black’s transformation tonight will be eased. I am surprised you managed to write, considering how messy your writing was. But thank you for letting me know immediately — I see you are learning not to be so solitary. It is good to know that you are no longer holding back, so I have reciprocated: Siegfried is a fast owl, and used to carrying heavier parcels. He is my father’s favorite messenger. I will send your own owl along after it has suitably recovered… It worries me. It is making noises I do not think owls should make.

The potion should be intact. There’s no need to return the vial, I have plenty of those. There are more details in the instructions I left. There is a Stasis Charm on it, but once you open it, you have twenty minutes before the effects become weaker with age. DRINK. IT.

I also have the second draft of the contract. Harper has already looked it over as well. Lucas, Julius, and Nathaniel pass along their well wishes and greetings. Please make Harper do this instead, Nathaniel is still as irritating over writing as he is in person.

Drink the potion. Or else.

Dietrich
Dear Josie,

Considering the fact that it’s two days since Sirius’ first transformation (the Headmaster offered an empty, warded room in Hogwarts, before you ask) and we’re both hiding from the outraged and outspoken public, it will take me a while to make good on our deal. I promise I will, but Percy tried to Floo to Diagon to meet some friends and, lo and behold, our Floo activated ten minutes later with Percy being princess-carried by that nutcase Wood. Apparently the entire bloody wizarding world is mad for me or Sirius and thus our respective close ties, and they mobbed him; Wood bodily picked my brother up and dove into the Floo to save him.

There’s a picture of that with your name on it if you give me some tips and tricks on how to properly parvus potesta without an amiable relationship with ones potesta counterpart. Funnily enough, I can’t imagine Malfoy will be any less of a prick, even if I’ve made myself a beloved pureblood darling of the wizarding world.

Also.

Thank you, for your help in the courtroom. I’m not sure how you got the holder of the Zabini Wizengamot seat to do your bidding, nor am I sure how you pulled off the lack of Priori Incantatem, nor am I sure how you influenced the fact that Fudge was entirely unprepared for Pettigrew’s Veritaserum testimony, but it was all fantastic. Rest assured, I’ll be pushing Sirius to go see your man-eating aunt as soon as we don’t think we’ll get torn apart by the public on sight. He is also grateful to you, and urges me to remind you that if you need the Black name behind you for some reason — which he’ll need details on, but likely not many — it’s yours to use.

Please encourage your aunt to look elsewhere for a husband.

Please also pass along my regards to Madam Bones. Her letter was quite kind, though unexpected. She said about the same things Lady Longbottom did, in a much more clinical fashion. It was extremely amusing, honestly. I’ve written her a letter in thanks already but I don’t think I can stress enough how hilarious it is to read so many polite ways of saying they goddamn hate Auror Cox and want to flay the Minister alive, would I like to be there?

I hope your job is going well, and it’s not too busy at the Ministry. I have to get back to sorting mail with Sirius, he’s insufferable and likes messing up the piles of the stuff we have in my dad’s shed, shipped straight from Hogwarts. It’s busy work, but nothing worse than archive-diving, I suppose. Tell Percy I said hello, by the way, if you see him.
To Ms. Guinevere L. Weasley,

You are formally summoned as a testifying witness for the trial of one Remus J. Lupin, werewolf. Your attendance is voluntary but significant to the case. The trial will be conducted on the 14th of July, 1994, at ten o’clock in the morning, courtroom 5. The trial will be open to the public. You are permitted to bring a maximum of three family members and/or significant persons as escort, due to your status as an underage witch.

Please submit your reply forthwith, along with the completed paperwork attached. Please use only black ink. Your response will be categorized as a declaration of absence otherwise.

Cordially,

Mdm. Amelia Bones, Head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement

Lyssie,

A Wolfshawk? Really?
Lu,

I hope you realize that the fact you didn’t sign that, and you and Harper both have shit handwriting, means I was really confused for a moment. Also, I assume the Daily Prophet wrote about Lupin’s trial? I wouldn’t know, since Mum stopped getting them — me and Sirius were getting antsy at them always mentioning us every time the Ministry fucks up. They fuck up a lot, what a surprise.

And yes. Wolfshawk. For your benefit, Harper, since I know you peek at every letter anyone sends through you: Wolfshawk is a legal practice that can be called upon during the case of a werewolf who has bitten a human. Some pureblood woman named Easthawk back in the 18th century got bitten by a werewolf after it killed some bastard who was about to rape her, so at the werewolf’s trial — which was basically a ‘He bit someone, we’re going to execute him tomorrow, I guess.’ — she said that she had the right to decide his punishment as Rightful Vengeance. She adopted him into her dwindling family as a vassal-branch, got him released from all charges, fell in love with him, and became a proponent of werewolf rights. Changed her name to Wolfshawk. Sirius says there are rumors that her line still floats around, but since it’s illegal to reproduce with a werewolf, the line is technically dead. Funny that one of the proponents for werewolf rights today is a moderately wealthy pureblood family called Hawkings, hm? Same crazy family that shows up to random trials for baited werewolves and keeps adopting them in…

Anyways, yeah, Sirius wasn’t going to let them execute Lupin so he called a Wolfshawk. I dunno why they even bother executing werewolves who were baited into biting — the Hawkings have never let a baited werewolf get executed — but yeah. If they didn’t let Sirius call it, for not technically being the Lord of House Black yet, I was going to do it. S’not like we Weasleys have any branches, vassal or not.

AND YOU BETTER PRACTICE YOUR WANDLESS.

I will actually kill you if you made me ask Harry to let me borrow the one I made for him to Geminio and send to you. I hope you’re doing well, though, and that Edward isn’t giving you too hard of a time.

Love,

Lys

P.S. Ron says that you basically can’t fly shit, how dare you criticize the Canons? Sirius says that he agrees with you but the fact that you support Bulgaria just for Krum is weak. Please for the love of Merlin stop antagonizing them through Dietrich, and with Nate’s advice, he enjoys it too much. Both of them enjoy this too much. ALL OF YOU DO, STOP IT.
My dear new goddaughter,

Please stop charming the marriage offers, love letters, and fan mail to hover outside of my bedroom and attack me when I try to come down to breakfast. I will buy you and Ron an owl if you do. The irony of owl-ordering a bunch of owls is not lost on me.

Love,

Your new godfather

P.S. If you hadn’t guessed, the paperwork went through. Ministry really went above and beyond to get that done quickly.

P.P.S. I know you’re still worried about Harry’s reaction, but he was fine with it — and no, I didn’t ask him over letters, it was during one of my visits to Privet Drive. He was pleased about it, I assure you. And like you specified, in my will, Harry is set to inherit the lion’s share. Pun intended.

P.P.P.S. Moony’s new apartment in Knockturn Alley’s hooked up to the Floo and warded to high-heaven, apparently. He’s still not speaking to me, though, so I’m not really sure what to do. Advice for your poor, scramble-headed godfather? Also, I owl-ordered those Sleep Aid potions already, which you’ll find on your side table when you wake up from your nap.

—

Lys,
I think this is the final iteration of the contract. Have the cambion sign it, but more importantly, have the thing recite the words at the end. They are more bound by oaths and spoken promises; it is stronger and safer if we had written it in poetic form, but we do not have time or patience for that, I think. I would advise you to sign it in blood, as well, since much of your payment has been in such. Perhaps blood mixed with ink. Keep copies in safe places; Black has several Gringotts vaults, no?

Take care of this soon, and once you have, my mother has told me that she would like to have you come to Schwarzvogelschloss. You need not leave the grounds, so there is no chance of reporters or masses swarming you — in Germany, I do not think our populace is as ravenous for a glimpse of you as your English wizarding people are. I would have invited you to come sooner, but my parents have been eager to meet you, and would not allow your first visit to be without their personal greetings. Father in particular is excited, but do not worry, he is harmless. Harper reminds me of him, sometimes.

As you thought, Nathaniel is still writing through me. Yes. I know. He also says that he’s had little to do but translate Sollertia Augurium. I still cannot believe you allowed him to take it. I will never forgive you if he traumatizes the first years with Legilmencic nightmare implants and gets us all expelled. I refuse to go to Beauxbatons, and Durmstrang is only for wizards. And we are not going to Ilvermony.

Nathaniel also passes along the knowledge that your should read the vampire chapter in your copy of The Magick of Man-Hunters, because there are certain spells that might allow you to slip into Knockturn Alley without being recognized. I suppose he read that from his own copy at home. Perhaps you can go to Knockturn soon, and then visit? After the upcoming full moon, likely. I will make arrangements to have the others over as well, if I can. Let me know.

Dietrich

—

Dear Luna,

Want to meet by the creek after lunch or so? You can bring Serateed — that’s what I named my new owl, the one Sirius got me. She’s lovely, isn’t she? I’ve always liked barn owls, they’ve all got sharp-looking beaks. See you at the creek!

Lys
Dear Lys,

I made one of my cousin’s old toys start smoking, so I suppose that’s progress? Also tell Luna I said thanks for the. Thing. The twine and cork necklace. It’s for warding off… things? It’s actually rather nice, I’ve been wearing it around recently, since the twine’s not even itchy and the cork is sort of soft. I actually started mumbling nonsense over it and Dudley ran away screaming.

Then again, Dudley practically runs away screaming at everything these days. Sirius is really not healthy for the Dursleys questionable sanity. Neither are Fred and George, whenever they tag along. Speaking of which, Ron says that you should get over yourself (I swear, he’s making me write this, please don’t hex me) and come visit with Sirius, too. I sort of agree? I didn’t mean to make you all… odd, when I said I was sort of jealous? And I only said I was a little bit jealous, anyways. It’s understandable! And, really, Sirius is your godfather, too, you don’t have to run away and hide in your letter-shed whenever he comes around. It’d be nice to see you, and I’m really grateful that you made me another wandless magic booklet thing. Though… I’m not too keen on dueling Vaisey wandlessly, so. I’d appreciate if you let him know, because the stories Ron’s telling me, I’m a bit afraid for my life. Something about him wanting to challenge me for some reason. Wouldn’t fancy another crazy Slytherin after my head, you know.

Point is, after you’ve gone and visited Bastion in Germany, you should come to Privet Drive. Not that there’s much here, but with you and Ron and Sirius and Remus and I, we can find something to do. If the twins came, too, we’re really have no trouble finding something. Also, Ron says he really wants to see you talk to the Dursleys, he thinks it’d be funny.

Really, Lys. I’m okay. You worry too much about the strangest things.

Love,

Harry

P.S. Ron says Pigwidgeon can’t fly all the way to Cairo as fast as Serateed, so you should use her, he reckons, if Harper’s isn’t back yet.
P.P.S. I know it was your idea for Remus to start coming along to visit me. He’s sort of my honorary godfather, too, and he was my favorite professor, so it’s nice. And it was clever, too, that you made sure Sirius and Remus made up through visiting together. (Ron’s gasping aloud behind me, apparently he didn’t realize…) Don’t be worked up about Remus, by the way — he’s more guilty than anything, which is why he won’t speak to you. If you visited Privet Drive with all of them, though…

P.P.P.S. The demon twins say hello, by the way.

—

Dear Lyssie,

Be careful. From all of us, actually, even if only Dietrich and I will be waiting for you in Germany. Jay can’t, because he’s busy in America with his intended and such. I think we should prank her, she sounds horrible. He says that you’ll be alright, but please be safe. Neither can Nate, because his mum hates mine and she doesn’t like that Dietrich’s family is foreign. Oh, and Lu, he can’t come either, his parents haven’t said it was alright and his stupid brother won’t let him come. We can prank him, too.

Lu does say, though, that you’re mad, and Nate says that if you can somehow get the cambion’s name, then you hold power over it and won’t need a contract all that much at all. I think that’s too dangerous, so try not to accidentally fight the cambion while its in your head, okay? Dietrich’s going to be unbearable if you get hurt again.

Oh, and tell Sirius I said hello back!

And the demon twins! Tell them I have ideas for pranks!

But really, Lyssie. Be careful in Knockturn. There are worse things than the cambion there. Watch out for Fae hunting grounds and vampires, especially if you bring Sirius. Vampires like messing with werewolves, and since you’ve been living with one and a half (’cos Lupin sort of lives with you guys, but not really?) you’ll probably smell like one. And if your scars really do help you tell the moonphases — which sucks, because I was going to buy you a moonwatcher for your rituals for your birthday, but now I can’t! — then there’s magic in them and that’s dangerous, too. Be careful, okay?

Nate says that he’s going to be really upset if he has to tear apart Knockturn Alley if something happens to you. The Wilkes business is really scary, ’cos I wouldn’t be all that shocked if Nate did sink Knockturn Alley’s economy to avenge you or something. Or maybe he’d just do it for fun? Or both, because Slytherins are good at the whole two birds, one stone thing. It’s a shame we can’t all see each other, I bet Dietrich would make one of those funny faces if he had to be polite to Nate as a guest in his
castle. After Germany, come visit in Cairo! If we’re still there, sometimes we move around. If we go to the Britain manor, you definitely have to come. It’s not as cool as my mum’s house in Cairo, but I think it’d be nice to have you over.

Good luck, Lyssie! Be safe and get what you need done and come back better than ever. I know you and Dietrich have got all these secrets, so when you get back, teach me some Occlumency! I’ll get Dietrich to get me started, so I can keep things quiet, too. See you soon.

Love,

Harper

—

Sirius,

Here are some sandwiches for you from Mum. The meat is raw, so you better eat this soon, or else you’re going to be bloody miserable during the moons. Stay safe and be good.

Lupin’s had a rough time of it. I’m going to take the anaesthetic potion or whatever Dietrich sent me twenty minutes before moonrise, so I won’t be there to tell you to shut up before you make Lupin want to jump off a bridge. You took him in as a technical vassal branch to the Blacks, DO NOT push half your fortune onto him.

Have a good three moons, Sirius. We’ll enchant those cloaks and then leave for Knockturn as soon as you’re ready. Don’t think too much about the bad stuff, and I’m sorry the potion makes it hard for you to use me to stabilize. You’ll be alright. I know you were worried about it.

Love,

Lys

P.S. Tell Lupin I said hello, if you think it won’t depress him. And tell Alby that we’re still going to have words, I don’t care that he’s pushed your Lordship paperwork rubbish through faster than light.
P.P.S. I’m using your wand for the vampire magic on the cloaks, since you’d have a hard time with it. Vampires and werewolves, you know. So don’t be alarmed if you can’t find your wand on you.
Okay... So this is a little late, but I'm still on time for PT, so I'm counting it. Sorry guys -- I got SWAMPED with homework and stuff this week since my spring break's just around the corner... As always, my eternal gratitude to you readers, especially you commentors.

Finally, here's some cambion. Hope y'all enjoy! :D

There were a great many things that needed attention after the Daily Prophet story broke.

The first and most important was the mind link.

My mind link with Sirius grew alarmingly stronger after two full moons. We shared pain and senses to the point where we had a very, very difficult time figuring out who was who. I’d had to stumble out of bed and into the shed, knocking over piles of letters, so I could thrash peacefully as the pain started. The only thing that grounded me were the scars on my face; they burned in the moonlight, the way Sirius’ didn’t. Three nights of that was miserable, which was why I wrote Dietrich the second day and asked for advice. He sent me a tranquilizer-pain-relief mix that numbed my connection with Sirius, giving me relief, but driving him a little around the bend because suddenly he was stuck in dementor visions again and didn’t have my right mind to stabilize him. And our minds still grew closer, making my family suspicious — though still silent — and making it on the list of another reason I didn’t want to go with Sirius to Surrey too often; distance seemed to keep our minds from merging too fast, so distance it was.

With that, our need for Knockturn Alley increased. It was dangerous, to keep our link unchecked, to keep the two of us so close together all the time. We started feeling anxious if we didn’t see the other in the same room, and that’s when we really agreed that it was do or die. I started writing my boys furiously, getting the contracts taken care of. Sirius was writing Nicolosia Zabini, starting a tentative correspondence about his business, but mentioning the fact that he wanted to create a contract to bind a Mind Healer into secrecy.

The second was Remus.

His trial was straightforward, though publicized. He was a baited werewolf; the condescension towards a baited werewolf was nearly intolerable — they were treated like they were abused, mindless animals, honestly — but Sirius motioned for a Wolfshawk and added Lupin to the name of vassal branches to the Ancient and Noble House of Black. Against Lupin’s spluttering protests, Sirius gave the man an allowance that allowed him to buy a dingy but comfortable flat in Knockturn Alley and a constant supply of Wolfsbane. The two were awkward and shifty around each other for a while… but thanks to me forcing them to visit Harry together — thank you Harry
and your ability to charm people even if they’re not getting along at the moment! (*COUGH ROH Cough*) — Lupin slid right back into his place as the voice of reason against Sirius’ recklessness. There were still kinks to work out in their renewed friendship, and Remus could never look Sirius in the eye after the full moon, but it was a lot better than what it had been. Making Remus a vassal branch of the Black family certainly threw some oddness in there. Everything about the two of them was upended at this point, except for Harry, but they’d been reforging bridges and coming to an understanding again.

Then, of course, there was Sirius’ second transformation, and…

Well, even if I was put under with drugs provided by my lovely Dietrich, our mind link still strengthened. Anxiety when we couldn’t see the other skyrocketed into full on panic; it was like we thought we were missing a limb or something, until we realized the other was there. We’d copy each other’s mannerisms. We would multitask if we were together in a room, but if we were apart, we were too busy chatting with each other or sharing senses that my family noticed us spacing out. We had to start taking lots of naps to cover it up; Sirius visiting Harry was practically declared my naptime, which was why he could never stay the night anymore, though Ron did. Remus noticed, perhaps because he was so removed from our house, and called Sirius out on it.

I mean.

I had Dietrich to confide in. So it was only fair that Sirius got Lupin.

So I guess the third would be a combination of the first and second, because needless to say, Lupin was less than impressed to hear that we accidentally created a mind link so strong that we were actually worried about our sanity.

Which brought us… here, I suppose.

“I still think this is the worst idea you’ve ever had.”

“Well, it’s mostly not mine, so…”

“You have one of the strongest, most potent, most illegal mental links with the mind the idea mostly belongs to, Sirius. It’s practically your idea. Why are you going along with this?”

To be fair, I met the cambion by myself, before I met you.

( HA! )

“She came up with it before she met me! It’s not entirely my recklessness this time, you can’t blame me!” Sirius crowed, pointing at me.

I yawned, sitting comfortably on the end of Lupin’s ratty couch. Remus was pacing in front of his dining table, behind the longer couch that Sirius was taking up ( it’s very comfortable ). The place was high-ceilinged with lots of skylights and windows, though the glass was filthy and it was late enough that you couldn’t really see anything outside ( have to go back to The Burrow soon, Molly will be missing us ). We were both sitting because the after-effects of the transformation were still painful for the both of us ( sorry ); Lupin was used to it, thus had the strength to pace and yell at us. He glowered at Sirius, shutting my new godfather up in a flash.

“Don’t use a child to defend your actions!”

“Well those words were mostly hers, so basically mine.” Sirius said with a grin.
Remus chucked something at Sirius’ head, the resulting pain making both of us wince. Something that the ex-professor didn’t miss, his eyes landing on my face suspiciously (Moony reacts to his senses better than I do, he’s much more experienced, after all). I smiled innocently, but the man wasn’t tricked. A Marauder and an ex-Professor and a werewolf, how could he be?

“Is the link really getting that strong?” Lupin demanded.

(strong enough that we can’t really ignore each other)

Makes it awfully painful whenever either of us has to go to the bathroom.

It was telling of the two-ish weeks we’d all spent sort of getting to know each other than Lupin knew when we were conversing mentally. That, and the strengthening link was becoming a problem (more than just becoming a problem). Thankfully my family hadn’t voiced their budding suspicions (I know they’re suspicious, though). (Funnily enough, Luna had divined it right away. She’d even said hello to Sirius through me, waving at my eyes as if he was sitting in there.)

Remus pinched the bridge of his nose. “Sirius. Aloud with words, please.”

(how come he always scolds me, but leaves YOU alone?)

He likes me better, obviously. I answered.

Completely and utterly untrue, of course. Remus was always so painfully awkward around me now. I tried not to really interact with him, because it was my choice that used his greatest fear — attacking a human — for my benefit, and he tried not to interact with me because he blamed himself and hated seeing the marks on my face and knowing they were from his hands and mindlessness. Hence why I was sitting in the corner of Lupin’s dusty, grimy-windowed flat and rereading the cambion contracts while Lupin, once again, attempted to talk Sirius out of it.

“It’s getting to be a little dangerous, which is why we decided to do Knockturn now,” Sirius answered Remus, “The cambion’s place isn’t too far off from your apartment, Moony, so I figured it would be…”

“Fine.” Lupin finished flatly.

“Fine,” repeated Sirius hopefully.

Oh my gooood, this is pathetic… I mumbled inwardly.

(pathetic?!) 

Sirius snapped his head towards me, pointing. “Oi! Leave me alone!”

Lupin was around the two of us too often. None of my family liked visiting him except for Sirius, but Sirius never wanted to go alone, and I was the one with the least amount of animosity towards the man. (unfortunately, even if the Weasleys say they understand it wasn’t his fault…) He was used to this by now, I suppose. Even if he was still guilt-ridden and hesitant around me.

“What’d she say?”

“I called him pathetic.”

Remus shrugged. “Well, Guinevere is not wro—”
I snickered. *Sirius, you two have argued over this a thousand times. Our mental link is bringing our minds close enough together that we’re overlapping. Sometimes I think I’m you in the morning. The full moons made everything worse, which is why Dietrich sent the potion in order to help stall that. But it’s not enough. We’ve gotta figure out what’s wrong, and I’ve got to make sure the cambion doesn’t use anything its seen in my head against us, and undoes anything it did to me without permission. We’re running out of time.*

( *I know we are. I’d just rather Moony be with us than against us.* )

*Why is he even against it?*

“*Why are you even against it?*” Sirius voiced aloud, frowning.

Remus threw up his hands. “The cambion’s not the only thing that can help with the Mind Arts, Sirius! Albus would be happy to—”

Sirius growled, and both of our expression matched, following the wolf in our head. “Dumbledore stood by and watched as I went to Azkaban. He was a politician. He’s Wizengamot! He could’ve gotten me out at any time. And then with the trial! What was this bullshit, that Snape didn’t get a cross-examination as long as he approved the questions about Lys being some gold-digging slag? As long as he didn’t warn his defense? That’s not even legal!”

“Neither was what happened with Peter’s questioning,” I muttered, knowing the two werewolves would hear me perfectly. I did do my best to separate myself from Sirius’ irritation, though. To separate myself from Sirius at all. Especially given that we were becoming worried about confusing ourselves with each other nowadays… “I don’t think any of those questions were raised and traded with the law in mind. It was a big show and Josie and Alby somehow manipulated it in our favor.”

( *I thought you were angry with Dumbledore, too?* )

*He had to make some sacrifices to ensure we got what we needed. I’m pissed that I was used, but I can’t say I don’t understand that sometimes that’s what you have to do, I answered in our minds. I’d come to this conclusion after a bit of stewing, Beside. The Prophet spun it beautifully, and I now have so many sympathizers that it’s creepy.*

“We can discuss that later,” Remus said gently, giving me a nod. He turned back to Sirius with hard eyes, “*Why the cambion, Sirius? Why continue to give it weaknesses? If you were just going to seal the information it may have gathered from Guinevere’s mind already, I wouldn’t protest. But you’re going to go ask it to walk through your heads and fix the link as well? The new Lord Black and a Clairvoyant’s mind, tied together, under a Legilmencic half-demon’s mercy… You cannot tell me this is the smartest move, Sirius, Guinevere.*”

I was startled when Remus looked at me, too.

Unexpected.

( *he does like you, you know. you were one of his favorite students, and he likes that you were so loyal to Harry and willing to fight for your friends and family. he’s just… it was his worst fear, you know. Moony was bitten as a kid. he never wanted to becoming someone who’d bite a child the way he was* )
I know. But I pushed this fate on him, too, and that’s why I can’t quite befriend him, either.

( you’re both idiots with too much guilt )

Shut up, Sirius.

(Didn’t help that from Sirius’ mostly-repaired friendship with Remus, I couldn’t quite decide whether I was friendly towards him because of our mind link or because of myself. Lupin was an excellent teacher, yes, but I kept calling him ‘Remus’ in my head, and… Well, it was a mess. Probably why Sirius got along so well with my family, and despite Dietrich’s grudge against him, quite liked my Second as well.)

(Like I said before. This mind link was getting dangerously strong.)

Sighing, I flicked my wrists and wandlessly levitated the contracts I was reading over for the thousandth time. ( maybe I should start some wandless training myself… though meditation doesn’t come to me as easily as it does to you ) They bobbed in the air, unfolding before Lupin’s eyes.

“I’ve been creating the secrecy contract for myself since last year, Professor,” I said calmly, letting my magic slip as Remus took the papers into his hands, “The contract for Sirius and me is a little different, revised, but I’ve had brilliant minds working on it. I think they’re as secure as we can make them. Hell, Sirius asked Nicolosia Zabini for advice. Subtly.”

“Which means you were definitely coaching him along, then.” Remus said distractedly, eyes already roving over the parchment.

“Sirius isn’t that bad…”

( thank you )

“…but yeah.”

( never mind, I hate you )

I chuckled at Sirius. Then I glanced at Remus. “You could always come, you know. Added protection.”

“Two werewolves and a Clairvoyant walk into a cambion’s shop…” Sirius said jokingly.

Lupin shot him a dirty look. “Even if I found something wrong with this, you’d just take it, fix it, and demand to go to the cambion anyways.” He scrubbed his face with his hand, looking irritated and tired. “There’s no way I’m winning here, is there?”

“If you know a powerful Occlumens who isn’t A) naturally manipulative like Alby, or B) my Head of House and therefore liable to murder Sirius to fix the problem, or C) likely to break a contract of this nature, then be my guest.” I said, grinning.

Remus looked at me. “That’s all Sirius, there.”

We both jolted. “Ah. Right,” we said together, hesitantly.

That’s probably what got Remus, really. Seeing us synchronizing ourselves so much; he was watching as our bond turned out to be less of a bond and more of a tangle, and we refused to go to anyone less skilled than a Legilimency-based cambion or less bound by oaths and emotions than
one. Sirius felt triumph, and so did I.

“I’m reading it,” Lupin sighed, “And if I don’t find anything, then…”

*He won’t find anything. My and my boys’ pride is at stake here. So is Nicolosia Zabini’s.*

( *Merlin save us from Slytherin pride* )

*Hello pot, meet kettle!*

Sirius shook his head. “Four Slytherins beyond their years, myself, and an unknowing Nicolosia Zabini made that contract, Moony. I’ll eat my hat if there’s something in there that can be exploited. We’ve combed it word by word.”

Remus rolled his eyes, turning to sit at his dining table. “I’m also going to go with you.”

( *HA! I knew it!* )

*Overprotective instincts seem to be a dog thing.*

“Guess I’d better start on a third cloak,” I muttered, eyeing Sirius’ wand, “Neither of you two will be able to enchant the thing, after all. Vampire magic’s tricky. And I’ve got a feeling that we don’t want anyone seeing the newest vassal of House Black skulking around a cambion.”

( *might be bad for the press* )

*Which we’ll be needing if we want to push the Wizengamot seat through. Have you even talked to Andromeda about it, yet?*

( *she might’ve married a Muggleborn, but Andy’s a Black witch. didn’t I say before, Lyssie? we Blacks like our power, no matter where it comes from* )

I snorted at the answer. Of course. At least Sirius and I were thinking ahead of the cambion, though. He’d focus on rebuilding his House, gaining more support, providing a safe haven for Harry and Remus when he could… and I would go see my boys, start figuring out next year with Dietrich and Harper in Dietrich’s castle-manor-thing — he was adamant that it wasn’t a real castle, it was just built in the *style* of one, whatever that meant — preparing for what was to come. I was looking forward to it.

... 

Three cloaked figures strode down the twists and turns of Knockturn Alley.

I twitched a finger, letting my Mage Sight fade into my vision slightly. (Sirius had helped me do the Brightstalker-esque ritual a while ago, which made me doubly irritated with myself for not thinking of using the vampire magic chapter to help us disguise ourselves. I owed Nate a butterbeer or something for the reminder.) Even if it wasn’t obviously colder, this small little passageway to Knockturn, the shuffling bodies and misty lights were a dead giveaway of something being… well, *not* Diagon Alley. For me, the whispery, fluttering, staccato of the songs and the difference in core colors was obvious enough. The colors were darker, murkier, edged with glass, twitching, animalistic. Humans’ colors were like ink in water, blooming, differing between each other by
patterns and subtle behavior; the magic of nonhumans had extra or lesser qualities, difficult to describe but easy for me to spot, after years of looking.

Sirius’ colors were marked like a werewolf’s now. He was still maroon and muted gold and huge pulses of violet and tinges of blue — my colors blended in with his own, much more than my family or friends were, though to be fair, they didn’t have mental links with me — but the edges were sharp and they stiffened and cloaked around his shoulders differently, stalking rather than curling around others. There was a certain sort of substance to a werewolf’s magic, easy to tell apart from a humans’ but not too dramatically different. Lupin’s were similar, but more blue and lighter, a little breezier when it moved, colors gentler and more pastel — but not entirely. He must have been Light before the bite; he’d never be able to be pure Light, but he was quite Grey, for being a Dark creature.

(are you ready, Lys?)

I nodded.

You know I’ve made it through here before.

(and we will again. stick close to me)

Who was I to refuse? I could feel Sirius’ nervousness and concern clearly, enough that I was getting a bit scared myself. I suppose there were certain added dangers since the last time I’d been through Knockturn Alley, but I didn’t think we’d get murdered outright — especially if both of us stuck to my Mage Sight and were careful. I had done this when I was eleven years old, alone. I could do this a month from thirteen, alongside my new godfather and an experienced werewolf like Remus.

We glided down the crooked streets, Sirius in front of me, Lupin behind; like protection detail or something. We didn’t dare to speak for some reason; it didn’t feel right, if we did. Remus seemed content with it, though, and Sirius and I managed to communicate just fine without voices. I think Remus was more here for the cambion — preparing to protect us while the thing was in our heads.

Vampire in the alley that way. Maybe several, they’re muffling themselves. I warned.

(I smell them. they’re looking at us. curious about you, I think)

Take a right here.

(Merlin’s pants, Lyssie, this way leads straight past a vampire nest, I can smell the blood from here)

Just don’t cross their threshold and we’ll be fine.

The twists and turns of the alley were only slightly familiar, really. Grimy windows and chipped brick and pervading shadows, hunched figures looking at their feet avoiding each other, and someone was playing piano in an open window a block away. Sirius led us, though he was drawing on my memories and my sight. Now and then, he’d raise his head sharply and stare intently into shadows or corners or down alleyways, and I’d feel his eyes burn gold and the wolf in our head growling. My own physical senses couldn’t pick anything up, but Sirius kept smelling other werewolves and when one looked curiously at us — me in particular — he got snarly, and Remus tended to rest a hand on my shoulder, as if he were ready to take me into his arms and bolt if Sirius started fighting. I monitored colors and core songs, searching for anything particularly dangerous or erratic; I couldn’t read hunger in magic, but I could read desperation or violent aggression, and
that would have to be enough.

In my cloak’s inner breast pocket, the contract sat heavily. Remus-approved, as of yesterday.

At one point, I mentally prodded a warning to Sirius; a magical core was right around the corner, werewolf. We turned it, hands twitching closer to the wands hidden in our sleeves — which was a big pain, let me tell you, my arm was not long enough for this shit — and I felt Sirius yank me back, fast and hard enough to wrench my shoulder a bit. A chorus of snarls ripped through the air, Sirius’ eyes bleeding gold and his wolf mentally nudging me, snapping at me until I tucked myself neatly into Sirius’ back.

"Child-biter.” The man spat out at Sirius.

Sirius snarled and fury burst in our chests, but Lupin quickly stepped forward.

“You don’t know what you’re talking about, friend.” Remus said mildly, the words dripping with danger and the gold of his eyes burning through the vampire shadow magic on the hood of his cloak. He flared his magic, the action just wisps and shadows to my tightly-controlled Mage Sight, and the other werewolf backed down with a disgusted look.

“Let’s go.” Remus said warningly, making Sirius nod curtly.

We walked off quickly after that, making me curious at the exchange.

Sirius?

( wanker thought I bit you, ) Sirius seethed mentally, betraying his angry reaction, ( which means he’s got a shitty nose or is just a really weak werewolf… they can sense something on you, you know. I think it's the scars )

Oh?

( you haven’t seen? ah, well… as a werewolf, I can sort of tell that you were marked by one of us? not bitten, but you still have a bit of Moony’s magic on you. they keep staring and getting curious and if I smell one more bastard nosing up to you, I swear to merlin… )

I chuckled. Sirius, initially, had really despised the enhanced scent thing; it made it really hard for him to down the Ministry potions, because he could pretty much taste them as soon as they were shoved into the cell. After his first full moons, he’d gotten more resigned to it, along with the enhanced hearing, his predilection for meat, the sudden bouts of territorial aggression, and having the wolf in his head influencing him.

Isn’t it just down here?

( you’d know better than me. good god do you see that? how close we are to that empty square with that overgrown fountain? that’s a Fae hunting ground if I’ve ever seen one, you were bloody blessed to have not wandered in there, those little bastards eat humans- )
Careful, Sirius, your pureblood is showing.

(don’t fuck around with Fae, Lyssie, you won’t like what happens)

Like cambion?

(considering the fact that they’re likely descendants of those, yes)

The Rookery looked much like I remembered it. Tall and crooked, dirty windows piled with books and covered in iron gating, the narrowness and steepness of the roof making the entire building seem decrepit and towering. I hopped up the stairs easily, somewhat excited to be back and have access to all the books again — something that outweighed my nervousness at the thought of seeing the cambion again — and Sirius followed with suspicion and hostile caution flooding his head. I kept in mind all the points of the contract that my boys and Sirius stressed, and reviewed my interactions with the cambion as I opened the door.

(CIRCE’S TITS THAT HURTS)

Oh.

That pure, silvery ring from the entryway’s bell was a werewolf deterrent. I’d forgotten that, and Sirius hadn’t seen in in my memories, with how little it featured. I stopped and watched as Sirius and Lupin bristled at the sound, clapping their hands to their ears, growling a little; under their hood, both their eyes had gone gold again, faces cringing in pain. The werewolf in my and Sirius’ head was barking in outrage, howling in pain. A peek into our head revealed the sound bouncing around, echoing from side to side, high-pitched and ringing and scratching his brain in the worst of ways. I winced at the effect bleeding into our shared psyche, feeling sympathetic; it must’ve been much worse when the bell had actually sounded. Remus was pale and twitching, leaning heavily against a bookcase — as if he was affected even worse.

Sorry… I forgot about that one.

(I’M DEAF)

Sirius, physically and mentally, was clawing at his ears and snarling at the noise. It wouldn’t stop bouncing around, even though I had long ceased hearing it. I wondered what sort of magic was in that bell, or that sound. My head was throbbing with shared pain, but I could block it out a little better, seeing as our minds weren’t totally merged yet, and we could Occlude to keep them that way.

Are you okay? Why isn’t it stopping?

Sirius struggled to Occlude with me, his twitching calming down. His mind was still a mess, though, ringing and echoing and pulsing with pain. (FUCK)

“Well, well. So the reveler returns, and with her, a new wolf and his sire.”

I snapped my gaze around, and found less than an inch of space between the bone-white mask with no texture but the grooves between a fanged smile. Part of me begged me to flinch backwards, out of range, while another part — along with the wolf in our heads — urged me to step forward and strike, attack. Sirius and my right mind clamped down on both instincts hard — when we worked together on one focus, it was easier than if we were separately doing our own things, at this point in our mind link — and both of us stood perfectly still, expressions smoothing into matching Occlumency-calm. It must have been creepy, but I suppose that didn’t matter; the cambion was the
I checked into Sirius’ eyes to find the image of a small, hooded human — scent and hands, that’s how he could tell — being dwarfed by a looming figure covered from head to toe in thick, black cloth, nothing betraying anything underneath, the only spot of color being the white mask. He was nervous and irritated and drawing on my calm as much as possible. Remus had staggered up, looking more sickly than ever; he was not an Occlumens, to my knowledge, but his calm was reminiscent of one.

(I do not trust it, Lyssie) Sirius grit out in our heads, determinedly ignoring the pain the sound was still causing him.

Don’t give anything away.

“How odd… you return so late, reveler, in the company of two moonborn. Shall I ease your pets’ suffering? I do not much like werewolves, but I highly doubt that you would be in one’s company if his leash was held by Ministry hands.”

I blinked slowly. ‘Ease his suffering’ could be taken in many ways. I was hyperalert for problem words and phrases, for every tick and mannerism the cambion possessed. Paranoid, maybe. Sirius and my calm and Occlumency was helping me pick things apart; a streamlining of my mind that was no doubt the influence of having a mindscape, as messy and disorganized as it was at the moment.

“You will cancel the effects of the bell for no price?” I asked.

The cambion chuckled, low and rich and sending shivers up our spines. “How clever you’re becoming, dear one. Yes, I shall empty the wolves’ heads of the silversong bell. I daresay the excitement I received when I sensed you is payment enough.”

“Is it?” Lupin asked, speaking for the first time. It sounded like his teeth were gritted.

The cambion lifted its head to face Remus over my shoulder. “Like I said, oh little wolf: euphoric.”

My and Sirius’ werewolf snarled.

Like I’m prey, I remembered in my head. (like you’re prey) Sirius echoed irately.

“If you please.” I said, mentally shuddering.

The cambion glided back, uncurling its bent spine — where it leaned down to look at me — and moving too silently and too gracefully backwards. It took a sharp left, mask still facing me, ending up behind the counter covered in books and that old cash register, and came right back to the spot in front of me with its hands cradling a tiny, brass bell; the kind you rung with just your fingers. The cambion offered the pretty, old thing to me.
“This sound will cancel the other,” it said simply.

(are you sure?)

“That, and nothing else?” I asked.


I reached out for the bell to be placed in my palm, and inhaled sharply as the cambion’s draped hands let go. Once it was out of contact with the black cloth, the bell gave off a trace of color, and the echoes — so faint and willowy, it was barely there — of magic. Werewolf magic. This thing was saturated in it; objects didn’t get like this, not normally, not when everything else in the bookstore was so faint and quiet, magic hiding inside until something prompted it to open.

God, what the fuck.

These weren’t just color remnants from people closely bonded to the object. It was like the bell was a Horcrux, only weaker and less... well, less. How did the cambion hide it from me? How much of the shit in this shop was like this?

But, I had things to do, so I rung the bell.

It was almost disappointing, the metallic tittering — nothing like the shop door’s bell, though the decoration was just as intricate. But I nearly winced as the magic — blue-green-silver, bristling and talking and faint and jagged — exploded out from the bell, filling the room as the sound did, and settling around Sirius’ magic, which he’d drawn up with his hesitance and hurt, the strings of color twisting from the depths of the magic and doing something to him. I blinked in surprise as the threads wove around mine as well, and startled when there was a comforting feeling blanketed over my shoulders. The noise in Sirius’ head subsided and my scars felt warm.

“How curious... so you were marked by a werewolf, reveler.” The cambion said, voice as eerie as ever, “The one... Yes, that one. The older one. It adds such an exotic sense to your magic, and yet you’ve seemed to accepted it...”

(how does it know that?) Sirius demanded.

It’s some sort of Soothsayer. Probably a LOT stronger than me. Magical creatures always have stronger talents than wizards and witches.

I held the bell out, watching its magic recede and leaving behind just a calm, gentle feeling and a lack of ringing in our heads. “Thank you, cambion. In light of this favor, I suppose I can confirm your suspicions.”

The cambion chuckled, taking the bell. It somewhat disappeared into the folds of cloth. (there can’t be a humanoid body under there, I’ll never believe it, this is so bloody creepy...)

“You lead an interesting life, dear reveler. How honored I am, to be a small fixture within it.”

“I told you once,” I said carefully, choosing to ignore the very odd things the cambion said, “that I would come back with a proper contract. My Occlumency is much improved, but... well. I lead an interesting life.”

Lupin stepped forward, towards me. I was Occluding enough that I didn’t react to it, though I wanted to.
Sirius was quick to reassure me. *(he’s nervous. he doesn’t know what he’s supposed to do, he just wants to make sure both of us are alright)*

*I’m thankful that he’s being quiet.*

*(he knows this is our show, Lyssie. don’t worry so much)*

“You will have never seen what happened to her mind before,” Sirius added gruffly.

The cambion straightened. Its voice was tinged with amusement and a bit of excitement. “So you think to present me a challenge? I have lived a long, long time, dear customers… Ha! And I did so expect the taste of blood and despair today, yet I also might be challenged?”

I nodded. “But first, the contract.”

It leaned down to me, mask tilting. “Oh?”

“That amendment to the assistance you have already given me,” I explained, “And a new contract to help with my current… problem. Secrecy contracts. Clauses to make sure you cannot use what you see to harm or manipulate me into harm. Things like that.” I slipped my hand into my breast pocket and grabbed the folded parchments.

The cambion fixed its sightless gaze on the papers. “Ah, I see. You are much more prepared this time, little reveler. Very well. We shall come to an agreement, I am sure. Though… won’t you uncloak yourselves? No other will come to my little shop tonight, I will make sure of it.”

“As long as you swear we were never here.” Remus said.

He was protective, this one. I rather liked that he balanced Sirius out so well, and in effect, *me*. For now, at least. Hopefully the separation of our heads would… well, change that a little? Sirius and I had already been very similar people before the mental link, but the lines were becoming blurred *(sorry)*. I had to try very hard to call Lupin by his proper name (either of them), and not ‘Moony’ *(I really don’t think he’d mind, Harry was right, you worry about the weirdest things, Lyssie)*. I would gladly take the comfort I felt that Lupin was here, though, from Sirius or not.

“An easy promise. I do not tend to give out the comings and goings of customers, wolf. Not a soul will know from me that any of your magics graced my shop.” The cambion laughed a little, and looked down to me. “And your past visits, dear one… Yes, I do not recall such a thing. I likely never will. Memory is so fickle, like that.”

I sighed in relief. “You’re always doing me favors, cambion. You’ll forgive me if I still have you sign a contract, of course.”

“I F of course. The least I can do for such a willing feast. Come, reveler, moonborn. Shed your cloaks and follow.”

The cambion turned to lead us to that same back room where it usually did the Mind Magic on me. Sirius and I shared a mental glance, a quick argument about to reveal or not to reveal, which eventually I won. With a sigh *(different types of sighs)*, we unhooded ourselves, Remus doing the same after a moment’s hesitation, and followed the cambion deeper into the shelves of books.

...
Mesmerizing.

Magical cores had a certain formula, to my Mage Sight. They were usually clouds of color, surrounding the creature/person/object/etc. they belonged to; the larger the cloud, the more magic one was putting out. The clouds of color twisted and condensed into thin strings that acted, performing magic, strings that exist in the clouds lightly and only harden and define themselves when called upon. Having mainly pastel, warm colors denoted Lightness, as having mainly rich, cool colors was Dark; mixing them meant traces of Grey. But behavior of the core also added to the Light-Dark scale, which was harder, making it a bitch to decipher unless I spent a lot of time around a core and analyzed the person bit by bit. Non-human cores acted differently, and the colors sometimes formed unnatural shapes or moved oddly or had colors that I’d never seen on humans, shifting things or translucent things. Broken cores were fine, cracked glass and screaming.

The cambion’s colors was a pattern of thin, static, geometric shapes flashing every neon color, shining in black ink. Black ink that moved like blood in water, glimmering with the things you saw when you pressed your hands to your closed eyes too hard. Drawing you in, making your head hurt trying to follow the change of the shapes, trying to figure out what color was what… And it was everywhere, blinding me, like I was meditating but instead of my core, there were a thousand shifting spiderwebs around me, glinting with dew and sun, twisting and turning and-

( LYS! )

I blinked.

The colors were gone. The cambion sat before me, calmly, papers sitting on the coffee table in front of it. Sirius and Remus were on either side of me, Sirius leaning against the arm of my chair and Remus standing stiffly — they both seemed alarmed but hesitant to move. I took a breath, realizing I’d been holding it.

“Ah. I… I apologize. Did you say something?” I asked the cambion.

The cambion shook its head, the white mask swinging from side to side. “No, the fault is mine. I read of your… peculiar mental link with the other moonborn, I’m afraid I quite lost my hold on my magic, dear reveler.”

I blinked.

Right.

The cambion and all of us present had signed the secrecy documents already. We’d recited the summary sentences aloud, along with our names. The magic had taken, a weaker version of an Unbreakable Vow ( thank Merlin or we’d all be in trouble ). All of us present here would never be able to use any information we learned in this room against each other; the cambion, especially, wouldn’t be able to sell or otherwise abuse what it found in my or Sirius or even Remus’ heads ( it’s not supposed to look in Moony’s head, but you can never be too careful ), not with any information gained in the future or gained previously; and if it had sold the information already, it was bound to tell us, which it did not, meaning we were safe. It was over and done with, there would be no selling each other out with that.

And then I gave it the second document, which fell under the secrecy agreements as well, regarding what we wanted done with my and Sirius’ mental link.
And then…

And then the cambion lost it, I guess, and it overwhelmed my Mage Sight, despite the Soothsayer rituals. That was a little problematic. Or maybe I was just surprised at the sudden flare of magic, and how utterly different the cambion’s core was, when revealed. I’d never seen a core like that before; if it was only a half-demon, I couldn’t seem much of the human in the thing at all.

“Ah… May I ask why?”

( why are you asking WHY? )

Piss off, Sirius!

The cambion giggled. Honest to god giggled. “Oh, reveler… You are the most fun I’ve had in ages! I would so like to see this mental link… You have been speaking to the young moonborn, the other half of your mind, all this time, have you not? No… No, I can sense it, even if your Occlumency is preventing me from hearing the words. I wondered…”

Remus shifted. “But you agree, first, to the contract?”

“Oh, to this first clause, certainly.”

“And the second?” Sirius asked pointedly.

The cambion leaned forward. “Now… You can’t blame me for diminishing my presence in the mind of a Clairvoyant, little wolf. Fate and I don’t quite see… eye to eye. I would rather not be within her sights. Drinking her favorite child’s blood is already such a risk… She might drive me to the Ministry, and then where would I be?”

( rightfully dead )

Sirius!

“How… Something rude was said, wasn’t it? How very interesting… I can see it now, the way your minds light when they connect, when one thought becomes another’s…” The cambion didn’t even hesitate in abruptly kneeling in front of me, making Lupin jump and Sirius snarl, taking my face in its hands, eyeless mask level with my forcefully-stony expression. “How the world would have trembled, were you alive five hundred years ago, dear reveler…” it whispered.

I clenched my jaw. “Please refrain from touching me until it is time for the Legilimency.”

The cambion seemingly flashed back to its seat, just in time to dodge Sirius’ furious swipe for its chest. Remus hunched a little, looking a little feral as well. Sirius was straight up snarling at the cambion, both of them edging closer to me.

( bastard! it’s playing with us! it’s pissing our wolves off on purpose! )

I didn’t know I was pack to Remus’ wolf.

( Moony marked you, didn’t he? the man might be a little hesitant because he’s guilty, but the wolf considers you a pup that will be bitten later )

That is… strange.

“My apologies,” the cambion said mildly, unaffected by the werewolves bristling at it, “I let my
excitement get the better of me, I’m afraid. Shall we go on to sign the contract, then? I would so love to explore the rivulets of your mind. Both of your minds, that is…”

“You understand that you need to undo the mental flag you have on yourself in my head?” I asked, interrupting Sirius and Lupin’s growls at the reminder that it was definitely going to be digging around in our brains.

( he doesn’t smell like anything! I really hate it, goddammit it! )

“I will do so, but I request that in return for this, I be allowed to create a separate flag in your mind on any and all Clairvoyant visions of myself. Not to hide, but to mark — so in the future, I will never go near them. I do not wish to see.”

“You may only mark them. The markers can do nothing but be present — no alterations to the thoughts, just labels with no purpose other than that.” I said, wandlessly gesturing for the contract to return to me.

The cambion nodded and I began to write that in, copying the rest of the contract’s formal language.

Lupin spoke up as I wrote. “Will you attempt to determine the origins of the bond? The reason it’s become the way it is, and what it is?”

The cambion nodded again. “If nothing but for my own curiosity, though this might take some time. I have no problem showing the reveler what was done. It is… interesting. I hope none of you wish to leave any time soon?”

My family believed Sirius and I were staying with Remus for a few days.

“Will it take longer than four days?” I asked.

“It is possible. I would have to look.” The cambion answered, rather honestly and bluntly. It seemed the thing was excited to begin, trying to get to the “fun part” as quickly as possible. I wondered just how bored the thing was, and just how old it was to be this bored.

Sirius soothed my small prickle of worry. ( we’ll figure something out ) he said.

Yeah. We need to know what the hell happened and how to fix this, that’s the priority.

“There is a werewolf in our head,” Sirius said, crossing his arms, “How will it react to you?”

The cambion laughed. “Foolish wolf. I am a creature of the Mind Arts. No mental manifestation of instinct or creature magic can best me. Your werewolf’s domain is the change, the moons, the body. Mine is the mind, and I am old enough that there is little chance that your fledgling puppy can harm me.”

There was a noise of pure, unadulterated rage in our heads. Sirius himself growled, eyes golding over, hands clenching into fists. His magic spiked, flaring, the clouds of maroon-indigo and deep red and navy blue and ringlets of gold launching out, demanding dominance. I don’t think he did it consciously, because Lupin reached over to put his arm on Sirius’, staying him, and the cambion didn’t react in the slightest.

( shit. I didn’t mean to- )

It happens. Your wolf makes your temper crazy sometimes.
“Apologies.” I said simply.

The cambion tilted its head to the side. “Such a young, brash moonborn. I wonder how your mind has touched his, has shaped his wolf. I look forward to seeing it. Your mind must be an interesting, interesting place now, reveler.”

(it always was)

“Do you agree to periodic breaks?” I asked, instead of replying.

“We shall all need them. Your payment of blood and gold and this challenge itself is much appreciated, and I shall need to drink to replenish my strength as I explore your mental link and minds as you wish.”

So blood energized it. Good to know.

I nodded. “I think much of what we were worried about is covered…?" I glanced to the two men with me.

“May I read as you do this? Bring the book here and watch over all of you?” Remus asked politely, though his voice and expression were still wary. It must’ve been the lack of scent — it certainly alarmed me, the first time I noticed the cambion’s complete lack of magical core. Maybe it was similar and longer-lasting with werewolves; I had gotten used to it.

“As you wish, quiet one. I certainly do not mind.” The cambion turned to Sirius and me, mask tilting, making the teeth look like they were smiling even more. “Shall we recite the contract, dear reveler and brash youth? I do not blame your caution. In fact, I applaud it. Our only amendment… I shall undo the hiding marker on the reveler’s memories of me, replace them with benign markers so that I do not stumble across visions of myself. Is this acceptable?”

It sounds harmless enough.

(I agree. though it’s a bit odd, isn’t it, that the thing doesn’t want to mess with Fate?)

Not that odd, really. The cambion’s old as hell. I’m not even a blip in its existence and I’m already tired of messing with Fate.

(I guess)

Yeah…

“We accept.” Sirius and I said together.

The cambion laughed again. “Well then… Let us begin, dear customers.”
Chapter 51

Chapter Notes

This here's a little late, but I made it! Okay, I'm actually out of chapters out of this, so... who knows what'll happen next chapter. I certainly hope I'll make it, but just a head's up that I might not. :')

Gotta move this damn summer along...

Also, apologies to all for late replies to comments last chapter. I just had my spring break, I'm damn exhausted... But it's done and I'm on my last leg of the semester, so yay! Anywho. Thanks to all who read and comment and kudos and whatnot! Enjoy the chapter! :D

... 

We stood in our mindscape.

(It was the same, but it wasn’t. A forest, but it was darker and twisted and overgrown, more than it should be. That’s the first sign we had that there was something wrong with our heads.)

Instead of nondescript, black slacks, shoes, hooded robes, and long sleeve shirts, Sirius and I were wearing the usual casual, Muggle-esque clothing (grass-stained and holey jeans, light hoodies, tank tops, no shoes) we wore around the Burrow. The clearing was flooded with water, murky with silt and forest debris, and the trees were so tall and black that it was like towers were growing and trying to block out the sky. It was still beautiful, but it was becoming a little eerie — less familiar and in our control. The werewolf paced in the woods, every step touching the water rippling towards us. Sirius and I both looked towards the same direction — the stars were different enough that neither of us could tell if it was north or south or any of that — with the instinctive, shared feeling that there was something in the forest that shouldn’t be there.

“That’ll be the cambion,” Sirius murmured uneasily.

It was like every snapped branch, every touched leaf, every brushed stone was vibrating onto my skin. I winced at the feeling — it didn’t seem right, somehow.

“We probably ought to go get it, then,” I said, feeling cold and shivery, “Our mental defences are harmless, but it’ll never make it here if we don’t… help it out a little.”

Sirius nodded. “Best get it out of here as soon as possible.” Then he turned a dirty look on me. “I still don’t like that you’re using your own blood to bargain. I have enough money that I could probably replace that.”

I smiled grimly, wading through the water and leading both of us. The wolf was waiting in the dark, whining softly. “Gold, it can get from anyone. The virgin blood of a Seer-witch? This will
make sure the thing stays loyal — or, if not loyal, at least polite.”

He shook his head. “Building yourself into a necessary resource for a cambion doesn’t seem like a good idea.”

“The cambion is a valuable resource to us. Anything that’s illegal just by its existence and is still here, under the nose of the Ministry, anyways? Probably something worth noting.” I said, as I stepped out of the water, I brushed my fingers across the werewolf’s snout. It was harmless to me, huffing out a breath that warmed my hand.

“Don’t spoil the furry bastard, Lyssie.” Sirius grumbled as the wolf allowed us to pass.

I rolled my eyes. “He’s harmless.”

“Tell that to Padfoot, dammit.”

It was probably Sirius looking back to glare at the werewolf that stopped it from bounding after us. I found it unlikely that the thing was sentient enough to realize there was an intruder in the mind it shared with Sirius, especially if Sirius had allowed it entry. Werewolf magic was weird, and adding it to Mind Magic just made it even weirder; the werewolf in our head was a construction, a representation — it wasn’t entirely another mind, though it wasn’t entirely just Sirius’ instincts and whatever, either.

Sirius and I didn’t often walk through the woods in our head. The clearing was our center, where our most important and relevant memories were housed. Where we met each other, where we were connected. The forest was dark and labyrinthian, meant to confuse intruders, holding things we didn’t deem too dangerous; the smallest bits of memories, separated into fireflies or other insects, too cut up for anyone to gain any information from them. You’d need access to every single one to string together anything coherently, and it was impossible to catch them all; you needed the clearing to do that, to command them. Apparently that’s how Sirius’ old defenses worked, and my added memories made it even worse.

The paths were known to us, hidden and looping, and in no time at all we turned an old, ancient oak and saw the cambion standing underneath the branches of a different tree, bone-white mask stark against the shadows and black cloth. Actually, it was a little terrifying to see suddenly like that; something out of a horror movie, even with me knowing exactly where the cambion was. Its arm was raised, a single firefly bobbing in the reach of it, all others gone or avoiding the thing.

The cambion turned to us.

“You have a very odd mind.” It said.

“Thanks.” Sirius muttered.

I shrugged.

The cambion seemingly watched the lone firefly flit away, disappear into the dark. “There are bits and pieces that are obviously older, belonging to the true moonborn of you. They are streaked with suffering. But I see masses of your own influence, dear reveler, growing on the trees like cancerous tumors, only instead of killing the other mind, you are simply growing over it, lending it strength. It is quite curious. You are beginning to become one entity in two bodies, one mind with separate souls.”

We both winced.
“That’s… not ideal.” I muttered.

The cambion chuckled. “Perhaps not. The joining is messy and painful. Crude. Like sewing a pig’s heart into a human’s chest. It will perhaps work, it will perhaps collapse. The wounds are scabbing together, blood unkin to blood fusing and healing. I have never seen something so utterly beautiful and disturbing in one breath.”

Sirius narrowed his eyes. “Oi.”

The cambion shook its head. “I mean no offense. There is something fascinating about the disturbing. You cannot look away from the most grotesque of things, can you? This mind is similar to that. I am sure it will be even more so should you lead me past these defenses.”

“We can lead you,” I answered, “It’s probably the best place to begin, if you want to figure out why this is happening and how we can stop it.”

“Such confidence you have in me, reveler,” the cambion said, following us on silent feet despite the numerous branches and twigs; like its previous trampling of them was definitely purposeful, to get us to notice it. (A rather terrifying thought, that the cambion could just sneak in here as it pleased without either of us sensing so.) “I will do my utmost to live up to it.”

“I appreciate that.” I answered, nodding to it and following Sirius as he led us back. He was less than comfortable with the cambion — much less so than I was — so he avoided the thing while I spoke to it. The contract gave me a bit more confidence in speaking to it, confidence that was lost when all my friends worriedly put it out of me.

“Tell me, reveler,” said the cambion, “What price did you use those scars to pay for?”

I blinked. It was always a fifty/fifty chance of my scars appearing with me in the mindscape, mostly because I kept forgetting they were there. More and more often both Sirius and I were accepting them, not jumping when we saw ourselves in the mirror or through each other’s eyes, but I was surprised the cambion connected them to my Clairvoyance so quickly. It waited patiently for an answer, white mask bright as a moon in the dark of the woods.

Without speaking, I looked at Sirius’ back. He was a shadow in this dark; neither of us could see anything, really, we were just following our instinct at this point. The forest grew darker, unnaturally darker — as if cloaked in vampiric shadow magic — as our minds grew closer. Another sign, I suppose, that the link was becoming dangerous.

The cambion understood.

“Ah. Am I to believe that your mind’s other half should not have survived?”

“There were a lot of possible outcomes that night,” I said quietly, remembering blood and death and vague, vague images of a man riding a hippogriff, “but only one that I would accept. I was a little foolish, I think — if things had gone according to plan, I would have been the one you called moonborn.”

The cambion made an odd humming noise. Too metallic to be human. “How fortunate that it did not come to pass, then, reveler. I would weep at the loss of your pure, human blood.” A considering pause. I waited patiently; the cambion’s words were always interesting, one way or another — carefully chosen, at the very least. I wasn’t disappointed. “Clairvoyance is very tricky,” it said, “A taboo in and of itself. The more you become aware of the threads of Fate, the more power they hold over you. And Lord Black? Well. Seeing through a Clairvoyant’s eyes makes Fate
very easy to pick apart indeed.”

I let that sink in for a moment. Sirius did the same, though he wasn’t going to speak to the cambion more than he had to, especially in such a vulnerable place like our mind.

“So Sirius had to pay the price for changing things as well. Because he did change things, because he had access to me,” I concluded, “Which implies that others can use Clairvoyants for their visions, but it’s not only the Clairvoyant who will pay.”

The cambion chuckled. “Did you not purchase and translate Sollertia Augurium? The Mind Eater has many theories on such things. Theories and ideas, but nothing more — there are too few Clairvoyants and too few ways to test Fate that do not end in death.”

Cheerful.

*Don’t be rude, Sirius, it can probably tell.*

**We’re almost here. Warn it about-**

*The werewolf? It said it’d be okay, but I suppose…*

“You will be alright faced against Sirius’ wolf, won’t you?” I said quietly, “We’re almost to the core of our mindscape.”

“Like I said before, dear reveler,” the cambion replied calmly, “Your wolf was born just months ago, a scrap of magic and instinct and diluted curse. It holds no sway over your mind while the moon is not yet full.”

I gave the cambion an odd little smile. “It doesn’t really hold sway over my mind.”

The half-demon hummed to itself. “Perhaps.”

We were getting close. You couldn’t tell by just looking, the woods all shadows and untread paths and the same things over and over, but Sirius and I both knew the place. The trees became just a bit thinner, mist making the distance blue and faded, and that’s we knew we were in the werewolf’s territory. It hung around the edges of the forest, circling the clearing when it knew it wasn’t welcome — usually by Sirius — and stepping inside when it knew it was. Sirius didn’t often allow that, too discomforted by the newly born scrap of magic infecting his soul, but sometimes…

Sometimes, the werewolf was just a comforting as Padfoot was, less part of Sirius but still a piece of himself. The two had been similarly protective.

Growls and snarls echoed in the trees. The wolf sensed the cambion.

Both Sirius and I gasped as it lunged for the cambion with a howl, sudden and quick as lightning, a huge shadow darting past us and-

And stopping.

I turned and nearly fainted at the colors. The cambion’s colors. Those mesmerizing colors, not really because they were beautiful, but because the way they moved and shifted was so organic and geometric and hypnotizing. By the way Sirius was staring, too, he could see them this time, too. The black cloud and its neon patterns was radiating off of the cambion, wrapped around the creature like a protective and sentient shadow, the two-dimensional facsimile of a face nearly nose-to-nose with our golden-eyed werewolf, tendrils wrapped around its neck. Around a death spot,
which was why the wolf was still as anything.

“Yield.” The cambion said.

The werewolf growled low and rumbling in his throat.

The tendrils tightened, and Sirius’ hands flew up to his throat. I felt something touching mine, an echo of a brushstroke-touch.

“The cambion was welcomed to our mind,” I said quietly, “It is going to help us.”

Intruderwrongwrongstrangerdeathnotpacknotfrienddeathwrongdangerenemywrongintruder-

I turned around, stepping close to the wolf. Sirius looked about a breath away from attacking the cambion himself, the wolf’s senses and instincts nearly overtaking him at this point, spurring on his own distrust and hesitance. The anxiety and desire to lash out was bubbling in my own stomach, turning it, making walking towards the wolf and cambion — still as stones, only the unnatural patterns of a demon’s magic, a winged shadow too amorphous to truly call another sentient creature, moving about them — a little difficult. The werewolf towered over me still, nearly three heads taller than Sirius and therefore a hell of a lot taller than me, but it was crouched, half-ready to pounce, so I could reach up to place my hand on its curled lips, just above the ivory teeth shining with saliva.

His fur was black as night and coarse-yet-soft, the feeling of bone and twitching muzzle beneath my fingers very real. I looked into the golden eye I was closest to, the pupils contracted so tightly it was nearly all glowing gold.

“Not this time,” I told the werewolf, “Stop pushing your mind on Sirius’, and accept. It’s our turn to control, and we want the cambion here.”

Moonpotionsmellsmoonmoonmoonpotionnocontrolnotmemewrongwrongintruderwrong-

I winced. That’s right… the werewolf never was allowed control, because Sirius took his Wolfsbane Potion as religiously as Remus did.

The cambion chuckled, its magic-shadow-creature loosening its grip around the wolf’s throat.

“It might not have been so necessary, reveler,” the cambion noted, “It’s very likely that if you shared your other’s mind while transformed, you might’ve been able to help him keep his control as he transformed. See how the wolf bows to you, how harmlessly it gazes upon you? Your magic is within it. Your hand is practically between its fangs, and yet you stand unmolested. How very, very interesting…”

THREATPACKTHREATHATEHATEHATEHATETHREATDANGERINTRUDERPREYPREY-

The wolf definitely did not like the cambion. Sirius was getting twitchy, not trusting himself to speak and not attack.

“Easy,” I said. Then I looked to the cambion. “Do you think it would help if I stayed near you?”

The cambion tilted its head consideringly. “I could just chain the creature up for the moment, I am far more powerful than the little wolf.”

“Over my dead body,” Sirius hissed.
I winced at the venom in his voice. He was barely holding on, wasn’t he? “But would it help?” I pressed.

“Perhaps.” The cambion laughed. It opened its arms invitingly. “Come, then, reveler.”

I grimaced, but walked towards the cambion. The wolf whined and Sirius’ panic spiked (**Lys, don’t-!**), but I stood safely right in the hollow of the cambion’s hunched shoulders and tall, white mask, and when the magic — still shifting with too many thread-thin colors in a black cloud — pulled back, the werewolf growled but stayed still, claws digging into the earth and carpet of leaves and twigs and moss. He didn’t move, and neither did Sirius, but neither of them enjoyed that I was acting hostage again.

**Why do you always do this, Lyssie?**

*Well, we have to do this, don’t we? And it signed a contract.*

**I don’t like it.**

*You’re going to have to get over it. You heard what the cambion said — apparently we’re growing like cancer all over each other.*

Sirius huffed, but he held his arm out and waited for the werewolf to amble towards him, eyes darting towards me more often than Sirius, and with Sirius’ hand against the wolf’s side, they walked on. The cambion and I — with me oddly enough being surrounded by the black cloth but not tripping over it or anything, prompting me to believe there was something really wrong with the abaya-esque thing it was wearing, because that wasn’t natural — followed after the man and his wolf. The cambion did not feel warm, and it made no footsteps even as I did. Just the slither of cloth, which I was sure was purposeful.

I would’ve hated to see a scene like this in a real section of creepily dark, twisting forest. It was only my and Sirius’ total control over the mindscape that made it less threatening to be walking alongside a werewolf and a cambion, respectively, and leading them to our most vulnerable thoughts and memories. As it was, neither of us enjoyed the cold, slithering sensation of a foreign presence in our head, though we both ignored it as best as we could. We were both overshadowed by larger, darker monsters trailing after us in our heads.

It shouldn’t have been as relieving as it was.

…

Remus was pale as he blinked at the cambion.

“Come again?” he asked, voice faint.

Not that either Sirius or I blamed the man. We both felt a bit faint ourselves.

The cambion tilted its mask to one side. It held a teacup in its hands, cloth cupped around the handle-less sides, still as stone. The blood inside — which was mine — didn’t even ripple as the cambion spoke.

“Should the two minds be separated and the mental link severed, it is very likely that the other —
the young lord, that is — will die from the shock.” It said calmly.

( son of a bitch )

Language.

I swallowed. “But… I wouldn’t?”

The reveler would die, but not the other? Why not?

The cambion turned to me. The blood in the teacup was less than it was a second ago, even though the cambion hadn’t moved at all. “Oh, dear reveler. You seem to be under the impression that your mental link is one made between equals. It is not. In terms of stability, you are far stronger, dear one. The other spent a third of his life surrounded by dementors, yes? And yet, here he stands, nearly completely sane.”

And here I’d thought that Sirius could get no paler. He was paper-white. “You mean I’m still using Lyssie to stabilize. But… But I never- I- I barely feel anything, if there’s a trigger. I don’t- I don’t remember flashbacks or anything, so I don’t remember needing to draw on Lys’ memories or asking her for help, or her needing to help me, or-”

The cambion shook its head. “You humans. Your greatest strength is your ingenious adaptation, your rate of learning. What at first was difficult and needed conscious thought became natural, unthinking. When your mind detects a trigger, it automatically reaches for the reveler’s. You no longer notice, and neither does the reveler. But should you reach out and find nothing…”

“Why does that mean death?” Remus asked, frowning, the book in his hands — *Singing the Moon: Lycanthope Magicks* by Hespasian Volantis — closed and resting in his lap, “Sirius managed to escape Azkaban, he managed to pursue Pettigrew all the way to Hogwarts. Guinevere used to sit with him through dementor-inflicted episodes, no mental link required… Would her absence not just revert him back to that state?”

( undoing all of my progress and drawing a hell of a lot of suspicion… )

People would see it as a random relapse, in that case.

( your family and Harry might be more suspicious about it )

Not that it matters, because apparently you couldn’t go back even if we wanted to, since. You know. Death.

The cambion set down the empty teacup. Not even a stain inside. “Think of the young lord’s mind as… a parasite. It has dug itself into the core of a stronger, saner mind and feeds off of that strength and sanity. What was once a crutch is now a pillar. Perhaps Sirius Black will survive the separation. Perhaps not. But if he does, his mind will never be the same. It has become far too used to the reveler’s. You can see it in the behavior of his inner wolf. Werewolves do not suffer Legilimencic attacks quietly. Yet I saw the reveler stand beside the young wolf, her hand near in its jaws. She is a foreign mind, and yet…”

Remus’ eyes widened. “It sees her as part of Sirius’ mind and magic.”

“A belief only further reinforced by your own mark on her.”

“Sirius’ mind is tricking itself into believing that mine is part of it,” I murmured, beginning to see the true and terrifying problem, “It’s becoming so used to using me to keep itself going that it’s
beginning to absorb mine, perhaps? Which is why we’re merging.”

“Something of that nature, yes.” Answered the cambion. “Though, like I said. A merging implies a relationship between equals, yes? You are not equals. The reveler is stronger, but her Mind Magic is weaker, and the link was formed… misshapen. Lopsided, if you will. The reveler is stronger, but the other is a parasite, and there is little use for strength for something that kills you from within.”

*Kills you from within.*

“I’d rather die than hurt my kids!” — snarling, golden eyes, the wolf with the girl beside it. She looked at it and smiled. — “Hello, Fenris.” — colors converging, blue and indigo and crimson blooming in a sea of gold and maroon and glassy grey and blue, tumors like fungus on the dark trees, water flooding the grass and drowning it. — CHOICE — Partners, you and I. — We are made of our memories, Guinevere. To take away a memory is to take away a piece of a person. An Obliviate? Simply a mental attack spell, dressed up as the Ministry’s favorite tool of protection. — I wish you were born in — You shouldn’t have to watch me die. — ??? — white mask, melting teeth, and a calm voice that should be muffled but isn’t. The cambion bowed. “I live to serve, dear one.” — We are made of our memories, Guinevere.

Stop.

(To forget is in part to die.)

Oh.

So that’s what it is.

“Sirius is going to absorb me entirely.” I realized quietly, calmly, my head pounding with how I’d forcefully triggered a Clairvoyant vision with such an unhealthy mind already, “He’s going to be the dominating mind at the end of all this.”

The cambion nodded. “So it is. He was your anchor in the ritual, no? The purpose of such is to weigh another down. You are going to drown, dear reveler. Not tomorrow, and perhaps not even a month from now. You might delay it with distance and Occlumency. But it will happen. You cannot even fight back. What does one do when the anchor weighs too much?”

“Cut the chain.” I said faintly.

“And so the anchor will be lost.”

(To forget is in part to die. We are made of memories, Guinevere. Clairvoyance likes to protect its Clairvoyant, it warns them when they make a choice that will kill the both of them. But in this case, did that mean my Clairvoyance would live through him? His mind was taking in the parts of mine that made his stronger. Is this why I wasn’t warned, before?)

(How terrifying. It protects me only as much as it needs to survive.)

*Either I die, or Sirius does,* I thought to myself grimly. *But if I do, then Sirius will still have bits and pieces of me. I’m being absorbed. If Sirius dies, that’s it. There’ll be nothing left of his mind, not in me, because I’m not the anchor, I’m not the parasite.*

I should’ve probably been crying by now. This was… *insane.* Mind Magic was *insane.* What would happen to my body? Would I still be conscious in Sirius’ head? Were our magics going to combine? Was I going to be able to be reborn after this? What would happen to my soul? Was this like a Horcrux? Why did it matter so much, who was the anchor and who was the ritual-taker?
There were a thousand questions but I felt very, very far away from everything-

The only thing holding me down was a bubbling ferocity in Sirius, a determination of iron, his heartbeat rising and thudding in our chests, adrenaline and fear and incredulity making our hands shake, our arms tingle.

“Alright, then. Separate us.”

**WHAT?**

Remus’ book fell as he jolted forward. “Sirius?”

There was a grim, determined look on Sirius’ face. Every piece of his mind was flung into his words, mental and real mouths matching each other, focused. (This is my fault- ) “This is my fault. I became too dependent on Lys, went along with it all, and now we’re both disappearing. If I have to die or be institutionalized–”

“I won’t allow it.” I snarled, the wolf in our head agreeing with me; were I a werewolf, my eyes would be flashing gold. Sirius just volunteered to die. Again. “You already sacrificed yourself for me before, and besides, I was the sane one back when we first met. I went along with it. This is my doing, too.”

“You’re not the one whose mind is being fed on! You’re the victim here!” (I’m killing you)

“Shut up! You’re not killing me! And I’m not letting you go off and die on your own–”

You’re not dying, I’m not losing anyone else, I refuse, I’m not going to look at my colors and see yours and wish you were here, I’m not allowing it, I won’t let you die, no more of mine will ever die–

“I’m thirty-four years old, Lyssie, and you’re not even thirteen. I won’t take your life away from you, just because we were too stupid to not bollocks up a ritual from the Darkest witch of her age! I got my revenge, I lived my life, but you–”

(you have so much to live for and so much to give still and so much, I can’t take you away, I can’t be the reason you’re gone, I can’t live knowing I killed my goddaughter, I can’t look at my magic and realize that all the colors I see were yours, too- )

I went still.

“You’re a Soothsayer?”

Sirius swallowed. His vision was filled with crimson and indigo and the faint traces of his own dark maroon and gold and Remus’ violet and steel-grey-blues. It was odd that it wasn’t my eyes I was seeing this all from. When the fuck…?

“From you,” Sirius said, like he was admitting a terrible secret, “I’m a Soothsayer from you.”

(we never noticed… because you tune into my eyes so often. or maybe it’s new?)

I’d believe anything at this point.

All the tension drained from me, and not in a good way. He really was absorbing my mind, wasn’t
he? And my magic, too, apparently. That’s why his colors were so full of mine, now. That’s why his wolf allowed me to touch it. I felt wrung out and brittle. A stale rubberband on the verge of snapping; just one more good pull, and…

The cambion cleared its throat. A completely unnecessary thing, I was almost sure it wasn’t human under there, but still. It grabbed our attention. Me, limp and brittle on the couch across it; Sirius, tense and shaking and ready to die; Remus, pale and silent and eyes burning with gold and tears.

“I take it you two do not wish to separate, then?”

Sirius snarled.

“Of course we’re going to! I’m not killing Lyssie, or eating her, or whatever the hell is going on!”

“Sirius—”

“Quiet, Moony! I’d rather die than hurt my kids!” — ? — Choice? — the woods are filled with water, becoming a dead bog, mud and grime and moss like white scar tissue crawling up the trees. The wolf wades through, skeletal and wounded, devouring the fireflies as they hide — ??? — Sirius looked at the indigo in his colors, she looked at the crimson, their expressions the exact same as they glanced away and tried not to cry. — she disappeared, she was floating in darkness — ??? — “Uncle Sevens, why would I need the help of the perfect descendent of Helvynya Prevett?”

“What is a perfect descendent, anyways?” — wrinkled hands on his dark hair, a fond smile, blueblueblue eyes — she looked up at him and smirked, same eyes, “Well, you’re sort of an idiot, aren’t you, Sirius? Godfather or not.” — “Helvynya Prevett had two sons.” “Estmaro II and Ambrose Weasle,” said the boy, rolling his eyes. — dark red hair, dark as blood, black eyes, angular faces. Identical and beautiful and smiling cruelly. — Arthur and Molly were hand in hand, the gravestones before them cleaned and wiped down for once, a young boy clutching at their legs and asking about his uncles and aunt.

Stop.

“Why ask for her help if you look like you really don’t want me to, Uncle Sevens?” “Because, sunstar… I am a foolish old man who likes to gamble. And I’ll bet on this girl. She will be Prewett and Weasley and Dark. Haven’t had one of those in a while.” — a girl striding across the grass, Slytherin boys of different statures surrounding her. An easy smirk, laughter, and then she turns and pats at the book in her arms. Sollertia Augurium. — the dog pants as it runs, following — “Hello, Sirius Black.” — ??? — “I’d rather die than hurt my kids!” — a hand on his shoulder, gentle shushing, chocolate pressed to his lips. “Go on, Sirius, eat that, you’ll be alright…” — howling at the moon — Remus’ eyes flashing gold, guilt — CHOICE — “You will not die, but you won’t be quite alive, either. With this, though…”

We are made of our memories, Guinevere. — You were one of mine. I never wanted you to die. Are we friends, Lys? — laughing at the sky, blood all over him, howling in the distance, her voice in his head telling him it would all be fine. — ? — “You want to do WHAT?” “She doesn’t have a godfather, does she? I’d like to volunteer!” — a barn owl on her arm, that familiar grin — ??? — the cambion laughed. “My apologies. It was just all too amusing.”

Stop.

I opened my eyes, squinting at the headache. That time, that wasn’t my forceful triggering. In fact,
I think it was Sirius? What a terrible sign. Was this all suddenly coming out because we were now aware of our mental link’s true nature? But also…

*Son of a bitch.*

And immediately glared at the cambion. “Had enough fun yet, then?”

( *Lys?* )

*What, you didn’t see any of that?*

( *bits and pieces. I can’t string it together as well as you can, I’m not the true Clairvoyant here. not yet* )

*Well…*

“Whatsoever do you mean, dear reveler?”

“There’s a way to save both of us,” I declared, making Sirius and Remus both shut up and listen attentively, “Septimus Weasley probably Saw this happen, or some sort of iteration of this, and he gambled on the fact that I would be enough to save both of us. Also, I Saw you laughing at me.”

*Jerk.*

The cambion chuckled. “My apologies. It was just all too amusing.”

“I knew you’d say that.” I grumbled.

“Wait, Lys— You mean—” Sirius glared at the cambion. “You mean you lied to us?”

The cambion sighed. There weren’t a lot of noises it could make or mannerisms it could display to convey emotion that I had a feeling it didn’t quite feel. “Oh, no. You would most definitely never be the same if I separated you two, if you did not die. And it is true, that you, dear other, are absorbing the reveler slowly.”

“But there’s a way to keep both of them alive and conscious… but they cannot separate completely,” deduced Remus, eyes narrowing. Both Sirius and I perked up at the thought, though Lupin’s eyes were trained on the cambion.

A nod. “Correct. There is a way to preserve both individual minds. But…”

“It’s difficult,” I said.

“And you want more payment,” Sirius added.

“Rightfully so,” the cambion said pleasantly.

I shook my head. “I don’t doubt that. You’d be saving both of us. But this means more negotiation, probably. Depending on what you’d need to do — what we’d need to do. And I’m guessing this will take a while, too.”

“I would be unsurprised if you needed to meet with me once a week. Perhaps more. And you would be quite unable to do much afterwards. The reconstruction of a mindscape is already strenuous for humans. But there are two minds, one being a werewolf, and a mental link that you do not wish to be severed. I can do much, dear customers, but… Well. It is inadvisable, should the two of you wish to retain independent thought afterwards.”
“You mean, if you were to do it yourself, one or both of them would be permanently damaged. Possibly connected to you, along with each other.” Remus pointed out, looking sick at the thought of it. Not that I blamed him; I barely wanted the cambion touching me, let alone sharing a mental link with it even half as strong as the one Sirius and I had.

(like I said before, Lyssie. if someone else made a mental link like this one with you… I’d probably kill them)

Is it that bad?

(Lys we have to try REALLY HARD to separate when we’re bathing and/or going to the loo. Lys, both of us are semi-skilled Occlumenses and Legilimenses. Lys. I have a werewolf in my head that thinks you’re my pup and I’m your godfather and you literally, for some reason, are revolted at the thought of romance at your age. Lys this could be so. much. worse… with anyone else, it probably would’ve been)

...Fair point. Very special set of circumstances brought us together.

Didn’t really want to think about what it would’ve been like if I’d been mentally linked to anyone less respectful or good as Sirius. Anyone even a bit less than Sirius is — a bit less kind, a bit less understanding, a bit less pure-hearted — and I probably would’ve had to kill them. But then again… when one winds one’s mind with another, it’s very hard to get into the normal arguments. Misunderstandings are mostly impossible, and clearing matters up is just a thought.

“What would need to be done? And how would it offset either of our deaths or insanities?” I asked.

“The relationship is unequal. By the technical definition, this is not a perfect mental link. No, dear customers… Put simply, yours is a corrupted anchor link with secondary connections of memory and emotions. The anchor mind holds more power while connected, and none when separated. So little power, in fact, that it will break.”

“So we equalize them.” Lupin said.

Another nod. “It will be difficult. It will take time. And more importantly…”

Sirius grumbled out both of our thoughts, “Blood and memory and money.”

“I would not mind your memories, dear other. Did I not say? You are streaked with suffering. I do so love the taste of pain.”

(I hate this thing. I really, really do. I don’t trust this thing with you, Lyssie)

Remus and Sirius both looked like they were on their hackles again. I shook my head.

Neither do I, but I’m not at your level, at least.

It was, at the very least, nice to know that much of my nonchalance with the cambion was my own, and not implanted. The thing had already removed that affect from my head as it observed our mindscape the first time. I was wary and extremely attentive of the cambion, but I wasn’t quite… snarling. Not like the werewolves. Which was probably why, honestly — lycanthropes were probably a bit more sensitive to the cambion than humans were.

“How long? How often? I’ll freely admit that I do not want my family knowing about this.”
“Nor do I want Harry to know,” Sirius murmured, “Not yet.”

Lupin looked uncomfortable, shifting in place a bit, but then he sighed. “A stroke of luck or Fate, I suppose. Seems Guinevere stumbled upon the only creature in the world that could help you two, now. I doubt Albus would be able to. And I doubt that he’d approve…”

Meaning Remus was going to keep quiet and support us in this. Good.

I smiled inwardly. If it’s to save you, he’ll even go against Alby, hm?

*(pack transcends the authority of some manipulative old man, Lyssie)*

*You have a good pack-brother, there.*

*(I do)*

The cambion, undoubtedly, had some sort of inkling of what was going on. It had been in our inner sanctum, after all; it knew bare basics. It hummed thoughtfully, drawing our attention again. *(probably learned human mannerisms just for dealing with customers, or something)* “Once a week at the minimum. A full day; half of the hours to repair and reconstruct, half for all of us to recover. I do not doubt that this is an undertaking for the rest of the summer months, at the very least. The full moons will likely set our work back as well.”

“Should I stop taking the pain-medication tranquilizer hybrid potion during the moons?”

“It numbs your connection with the other, no? True unconsciousness is just as harrowing as absence. Your physical bodies are beginning to react accordingly, I do believe. Anxiety and panic when you are not within each other’s sight. No, do not take the potion from now on… it will merely spur your minds into devouring each other faster, especially because it is a foreign magical presence intruding upon yours and the other’s.”

I shivered at the image. Sirius and I worked together so well, but in a mental and magical scale, it was like we were at war. Our good relationship probably made the war even worse, honestly; made it easier for one or both to blend into the other.

(I noticed that Sirius and I both were doing our best to keep to our corners of our mind. Keep away. Not Occluding, not yet, but we stayed as silent as we could in our minds. Neither of us wanted to die, or be the reason the other was effectively dead, so.)

“What can we do to help this along?” Remus asked.

“…Perhaps infrequent Calming Draughts, when needs must, and constant physical separation. Occlude, always. Try not to speak to each other mentally. This will at least help prepare your minds for the work we will do upon them — they will not fight against our manipulations as hard, with hope. But this is conjecture. There has never been such a mental link like this, before, not to my knowledge. And my knowledge is quite vast indeed, dear customers.”

Remus nodded seriously. I had a feeling he wanted to take notes or something, the nerd.

Sirius sighed. “When we Occlude, sometimes it doesn’t separate us.”

“When you do not consciously Occlude, your minds are recognizing the other as its own, thus you are not separated,” the cambion noted, “One to three hours per day of conscious Occluding, then. You have been sleeping to keep separate, no? One Occludes as the other dreams. Or you both Occlude at the same time. Treat it as you did when you first learned to meditate on your magic.”
I frowned. “I never learned to meditate on my magic the normal way. Soothsayer. Should I lock my Mage Sight down? Dī-konden An-drixtà, rather than the ritual control?”

“Perhaps that will be for the best. My apologies, dear customers, but as I said…”

“It’s all conjecture,” I sighed, nodding. “Right. We’ll do our best.”

“We should negotiate the new contract, then, before we leave,” Sirius said. There was a small, narrow window that was dark through the lace curtains; not that good an indicator for time, since we’d arrived at night as well, but still. “One for a period lasting until the end of the summer months, and all that rot.”

The cambion’s abaya-ish cloak fluttered, and sheets of parchment drifted lazily through the doorway, blowing about like leaves on the wind. A bottle of ink and a very expensive-looking quill followed, dancing around our heads. The cambion’s magic was invisible to my Mage Sight this time; it was cloaking it, somehow.

“Worry not, dear customers,” the cambion said, “I will not ask for much. This is the most fun I’ve had in many, many years, after all. I do so look fondly on the day you first came to my shop, o young and foolish reveler. How fortunate that Fate smiled upon me so.”

“Apparently Fate was being kind to the both of us,” I said, crooking a finger and nodding politely to the cambion when it allowed me to summon one of the sheets of paper to myself, along with the quill. The ink unstoppered itself, and the liquid spilled into the air, bobbing near me helpfully.

“I’m sure we will both pay for it in the end.” The cambion said monotonously, though I felt the creature was more amused by these words than anything it had ever laughed at. The fact that I was learning the cambion’s moods at this point… was a little alarming, honestly.

But I digress. We had work to do.

“Eventually.” I agreed, letting the first drop of ink touch the new parchment.

…

Sirius—
I’m off. You’re getting back at 5, so three hours after that, we’re going to Occlude, alright? I hope you told Harry I said hi. I wish I could say I didn’t know you told Harry I said hi, but I can’t, because I accidentally tuned in when you got all happy at seeing him again, you big sap. Which is why we ought to Occlude before we see the cambion next week.

8pm, Sirius. British time.

Also, Dietrich says he’s pissed off that I can’t stay for any longer than six days, among other things, and blames you entirely. Well. You know he didn’t really say that, but basically, he still hates you. Sorry. I’ll tell Harper you said hello, though, since he thinks you’re a riot.

I’ll see you in a week. Hopefully our heads will be a bit less about to break after practicing this isolationist treatment. The cambion ought to be happy about that.

Love,

Lys

P.S. Name your damn wolf already, the cambion said you should.

—

I signed off the letter with a flourish that was entirely unnecessary (though it felt great, because writing quickly and prettily with a quill was an accomplishment in and of itself), ignoring how Dietrich rolled his eyes at me. The gentleman my best friend was, he had my overnight bag in his hands — it was a worn, old backpack with an old, light Undetectable Extension Charm on it — and waited as I inked a ward matrix down on Sirius’ desk (Bill’s old desk) and sealed it with a drop of blood, drawn by me pricking my thumb with a needle Sirius kept just for these purposes. We took great pains to keep any mention of our mind link or the cambion under wraps, including gentle secrecy wards. My note was folded and laid gently in the center of the matrix, rendered protected unless Sirius dismantled it; which he’d know how to do, since it was our normal code.

Dietrich sniffed. “I suppose he is visiting Potter?”

“Yeah, we try to keep away from each other if we can. When my family thinks we’re hanging around the shed sorting letters together, usually one of us is out in the woods practicing magic or something.” I said, shrugging.

We left Bill’s room, intent on going downstairs to the Floo. I leaned in Percy’s open doorway before we went, though, smiling fondly at the uncharacteristic messiness of the room. My favorite brother was hunched over his desk, surrounded by piles of parchments, his glasses propped up on his head as he squinted at something. Figures the idiot took his work home with him, even on his day off. Percy was such a bloody workaholic, not that I had much room to judge, but still. The man did paperwork when he was bored.
“Perce! I’m off.”

He looked up, distracted. “What? Already?”

I laughed a little, stepping in and saving him the trouble of coming to me for a hug. “We can’t stay long, the international Floo connection only lasts so long. I’ll see you in a week. Try to catch up on your work, maybe by the time I get back we can go to Diagon together.”

I leaned down to hug him and Percy was good enough to turn completely to hug me back. But he pushed me out in front of him, giving me a quick scan, and then turned suspicious and decidedly less fond eyes at Dietrich.

“I’m still unsure whether you should be allowed to stay overnight at your male friend’s house, which is already in an entirely different country…” Percy muttered.

“Lys will be a guest under my protection, Percival,” Dietrich countered calmly, though I could tell he was annoyed, “She will be safe. And she will finally be able to leave this place, when it is so dangerous for you to do so lately.”

Percy sighed. “Alright, I know. Go on and have fun. Write if you need anything, Lyssie.”

“Tell the demon twins and Ron and Sirius I said goodbye again.”

“They’re going to whine and whine about missing you, I swear…” Percy turned a sharp eye on me, and then proved why he was one of the most intuitive people I knew. “Not like you to forget about what time your friend was coming to pick you up.”

…Nothing to do with me and Sirius doing our damned best to keep away from each other.

Not at all.

I smiled sheepishly. Convincingly. “Might’ve been so excited about it that I sort of just… slapped a time down in my letter and sent Serateed off.”

“Sounds like you, actually. Alright, Lyssie, go on.”

I laughed and joined Dietrich at the door, waved goodbye one last time, and then followed him down the stairs. He began to talk about his home in Germany — voice soft and proud and tinged with excitement — and I had to repeat the goodbye ritual to Mum, who fussed and hemmed and hawed, not over just me, but Dietrich too (who looked awkward and alarmed at it all), and then Ginny, who grinned at me and told me to say hello to Harper and try not to get myself killed while she wasn’t there. She was well aware that I was probably going to duel Dietrich at some point, and adamantly believed I was going to get my arse handed back to me, an opinion I agreed with, given how Dietrich had seemingly defeated my brothers, sister, and Harper out in the garden with not a single hair out of place afterward.

The international Floo connection was only open for about half an hour — that’s how much we and Dietrich jointly paid for, and by ‘we’, I mean ‘Sirius’ — so we quite quickly had the fireplace roaring green again. Dietrich stood to the side, nodding at me to go first.

“I will call it for you,” he explained briefly, before turning and snapping out a quick and enviably fluent, “Schwarzvogelschloss, Deutschland! Das Passwort: Où les loups courent.”

“Please follow through quickly, because I think your mother’s going to kill me.” I muttered. I remembered the few things Dietrich told all of us about his no-nonsense, scary-ass mother.
And I very much remembered all the stress I’d heaped on Dietrich throughout the two years we’d known each other — which was very odd to think about, I felt like I’d known Dietrich for forever at this point — stress that probably left a mark that only a mother could see, or some shit like that. It honestly shouldn’t have been this nerve-wracking, meeting my best friend’s parents, but I’d never been good at that sort of thing, last life. And befriending Pandora Lovegood didn’t count, because she died before I had really gotten used to this whole… second life thing.

Point was, I wasn’t good at befriending my friends’ parents because I got up to all sorts of trouble with my friends and felt odd when I came face-to-face with the very people who’d disapprove of the shit I get up to with my people. That, and Dietrich’s mom scared me.

Dietrich sighed exasperatedly. He knew my feelings on the matter. “Harper is waiting.”

As my Second probably predicted, that made me straighten up excitedly. Harper was waiting, and that’s all I needed to know, really. He’d also definitely break the ice, because Harper was the most cheerful, well-meaning person I knew. “Right. Bye, Mum! Bye, Gin! See you in a week!”

(I felt a small probe in the back of my head. A curious feeling, then a jolt of surprise and sheepishness.)

(Sirius couldn’t resist. I understood, though, even if I steadfastly refused to answer the way I wanted to.)

My sister called for me to bring her back something cool (“Dietrich’s bound to have interesting things lying around in his castle!” “If you’re implying that my castle is either dirty or poorly warded against thieves, Ginevra…”) and Mum fussed a bit more, and then I was spinning into the Floo-space. International Floo travel took a second or two longer than transnational, but it was in no time at all that I was breathing in ash-free air and sticking the landing on a Persian carpet that reminded me of Sirius’ colors.

Dietrich had told me that he didn’t quite live in a castle; it was styled like one, but it wasn’t truly one, nor was it as large as some of the fortresses in his country. Of course, Dietrich was trying to be reassuring to the kid who grew up in The Burrow, because I straightened up and managed to intake intricately carved wall crownings, white walls and gold-colored floral details, the high ceilings of what seemed to be a two-story library, and marble portraits and busts, before I realized I wasn’t alone in the room.

“Lyssie! You’re finally here!”

My smile for Harper was reflexive, but my right mind had me turning to the two adults standing just a bit behind him.

The slightly taller figure had to be Dietrich’s mother. She looked exactly like him. Relatively tall, square-ish face, half-lidded grey eyes, white-blonde hair that was styled back and up. There was only a hint of makeup, and she decorated herself plainly, just a thin necklace of pearls and her wedding ring. She wasn’t wearing robes, but her black blouse exposed her collarbones and her skirt was waist-high, tiny grey-brown plaid patterned, and black buttoned. Then the stockings and high heels. Basically, Elisabet Bastion looked extremely put together and pretty and though I knew she was my parents’ age, she looked a decade younger.

The only reason I knew the figure beside her was Dietrich’s father was that he was standing close to his wife. Dietrich’s father was smiling, first of all, a wide and kind smile that actually did quite remind me of Harper in its genuine-ness, and his skin was very much like mine, maybe a bit darker — it only accentuated how much paler his wife was, really. His hair was dark and slightly curly,
worn long — down to his chest — but put in a neat half-tail. He was wearing something very business casual, tan slacks and a navy blazer, sleeves short and showing forearms that were… tattooed. Etienne Bastion had tattoos and looked like he was going to a French club or something, and there was a black wand holster hanging from his belt, looking worn enough and cared for enough that I had a feeling he was a duelist.

Anyways.

Both of them were pretty in different ways, extremely intimidating slightly because of so, and were staring at me.

Thank god for Sirius’ memories. I certainly wasn’t getting as many of his as he was getting of mine, but at least I knew what to do here.

Certainly didn’t make a pretty sight, me in my cut-up jeans and dirigible-plum-patterned socks and old T-shirt, a hand crossed over my chest and bowing the way Sirius was taught, the way Walburga would yell at him to — perfectly. There’s a certain grace to it when you’re wearing robes, though in that case, I would’ve probably curtseyed or something.

“Lord Bastion, Lady Bastion,” I greeted formally, straightening up and wearing a politely friendly smile, clasping my hands in front of me, “I’m Guinevere Weasley. Your home is beautiful, and… ich bin sehr dankbar für eure Begrüßung.”

I’m grateful for your welcome.

(Thank you, last-life-me, for taking German in college for the foreign language requirement…)

I was rewarded by the sight of Elisabet Bastion’s brow ticking upwards. Something that, in Dietrich at least, meant quite a bit of surprise.

“A pleasure, Guinevere,” she replied in English, her accent slightly British, “Ich hatte nicht gewusst, dass du Deutsch sprichst.”

I hadn’t known you spoke German.

My smile turned a little less polite, a little more friendly. “Ich spreche nur ein bisschen, aber ich mag die Sprache.”

I only speak a little, but I like the language.

It was much, much harder to tell what Elisabet Bastion was thinking and feeling, but I was of the opinion that she liked me a little better after that exchange. She seemed a bit more relaxed, somehow. It occurred to me that I could duck into Mage Sight to tell better — not a perfect way, since I was no Assessor or Empath, but I’d get more information like that — but the cambion had discouraged its use, especially since Sirius apparently kept slipping into my eyes enough that he was absorbing the ability…

“Et qu’en est-il de ma langue?” said Etienne Bastion, looking between us cheerfully.

I gave him an apologetic smile. “Sorry, Lord Bastion… I only know a few words in French.”

“They’re all cuss words.” Harper added cheerfully.

Lady Elisabet bit out something sharply to her husband, who looked a little shame-faced. A reprimand, probably, since Dietrich learned every cuss word he knew from his dad. From what I
knew, though they lived in Germany, they’d raised Dietrich on French. He picked up the German and English later, but always defaulted back to French when he could, though English was becoming a favorite of his, since all of his friends spoke it. Etienne Bastion grinned and looked past me, though, and I turned to see Dietrich just stepping out of the Floo, brushing his robes off absently.

“Your mother is a menace, Lys,” he grumbled as he walked up to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with me. Or, like, shoulder to arm, because Dietrich was average in (European) height while I was short enough that Mum and Dad worried I had some sort of nutrient deficiency.

I grinned at him, but stayed quiet as he looked to his parents, his eyes warming considerably.

“Mutter. Père. This is Guinevere.”

“We met,” Dietrich’s father said warmly, his French accent as strong as Dietrich’s had been when we’d first met (it was a little less, nowadays). “You did not tell us your liege-lord spoke the language of your mother, petit loup.”

Dietrich looked distinctly (for him) embarrassed. “Père!”

Harper looked delighted at Dietrich’s dad teasing him.

I could see a future where Harper and Etienne Bastion got along very well. I could also, strangely enough, see Nate getting along with the man, too. All of them ganging up against my poor, poor Second. Meant me and Lu and Jay would have to back him up; I’d bribe Lu — who’d love to rile up Dietrich in revenge for all the lectures and scoldings during tutoring or whatever else — with... shit, I’d have to bribe him with Quidditch, wouldn’t I?

Lady Elisabet put a hand on her husband’s shoulder, expression as bored as Occlumency-calm expressions ever are. “Kannst du nicht sehen, dass unser Sohn beschämt ist?”

Something like… Can’t you see that our son’s embarrassed?

(correct, actually- SORRY)

Get out of here, Sirius! I hissed in our head, pushing my Occlumency a little more; with how far away from each other we were, as soon as we concentrated on other things, the other was just a small blip in the back of our heads. I turned my attention to what was in front of me determinedly.

I smiled at what I saw. Even without being able to sense her emotions as easily as I could Dietrich’s — and wasn’t that surprising, that Dietrich was actually quite expressive compared to his mother? — I could hear the fond exasperation and rolled eyes. Evidently, so could Lord Etienne, who just shrugged it off and strode forward, grinning at me.

“It is very good to meet the friend of my son,” said the man, not hesitating at all to lean down and hug me.

As Molly and Arthur Weasley’s daughter, I got a lot of hugs. I still wasn’t sure what the protocol was when the Lord and Paterfamilias of the equivalent of an Ancient and Noble House decided to hug you. I did a mental shrug and hugged the man back briefly, pulling away and turning a questioning eye to Dietrich, hoping that was the right move.

“The tilt to his head said that he was a little embarrassed, but yes, that was fine.

I smiled a little uncertainly at Lord Etienne. “I’m glad to meet you, too, my Lord.”
“Non! No ‘my Lord’, here, you are a guest! Dietrich’s friend! You must call me Etienne.”

“And I am Elisabet, to my son’s friends.” Dietrich’s mother came up beside her husband, towering over me a little, looking blank but not hostile. “Come. Under our roof, you are protected. We will have a House Elf take your… things to your room.”

“It is near mine and Harper’s,” Dietrich put in, giving a disgruntled look to his father, something his mother raised a brow at. He blanked his face in an instant, looked to me, slate eyes warm still. “But my mother and father wish to show you the castle proper.”

“It is something we have much pride in,” Elisabet said, as Etienne stepped away and blew out a sharp, chirping whistle, which immediately summoned a clean-looking House Elf. He nodded to it, and Dietrich let the straps of my backpack go, the pack rolling into the air and to the House Elf’s hands, disappearing with only a soft pop. “We are in the smallest library, where it is safer and easier to greet new guests.”

She turned to lead us, I assume, with Etienne stepping up gracefully to walk alongside her, and I turned wide eyes to Harper. Smallest library? I mouthed.

Harper beamed and held up four fingers.

Four fucking libraries?

I looked at Dietrich accusingly. “You said this wasn’t a proper castle, even if you called it that.”

My best friend shrugged. We followed after his parents, passing marble busts and paintings on white walls with golden crowning and white shelves full of hardcover books. “A proper castle is one that is built to be a fortress and administrative center for lords or kings,” he said, “This is just a manor in the style of a castle.”

“He has horses.” Harper whispered loudly.

“Castle,” I said, voice strangled.

(There was amusement in my head that wasn’t mine, faint and far away.)

“I do not ride often.”


Harper nodded solemnly. “You’ll learn, Lyssie. I’ve only been here for a couple days, but Dietrich’s the German version of Malfoy.”

Dietrich hissed at that. “I am not!”

“He’s even blonde and everything.” I muttered.

“Lys!”

“All he’s missing are a Crabbe and Goyle.”

“And a Parkinson?” I asked.

Harper shook his head, hard enough that his curls were whipping at his eyes. “He’s got one of those! She goes to Beauxbatons, she’s like his… first cousin once removed or something, on his dad’s side.”
I wrinkled my nose. “You *are* like the German version of Malfoy.”

Dietrich looked mortally offended.

Harper frowned at him speculatively. “Hm… But Dietrich *does* do the whole heirship thing better, you know.”

I nodded. “That’s right. And Malfoy’s bragged about his manor lots, but even *he* doesn’t have four libraries. Maybe a country home or something in southern France, but Dietrich’s a fake Frenchman anyways, so he’s already one-upped him there.”

“I *am* French. You *just* met my father.”

Harper ignored him. “Good point, Lyssie. Though… we ought to catch up to Elisabet and Etienne, even though I think they’re listening, because Etienne looks like he’s about to cry laughing.”

The sudden straightening of Dietrich’s dad, walking up ahead near the supposed entrance of the library, told us that yes, indeed, the two Bastion adults were definitely somehow listening to us halfway across the entire place. Elisabet reached out to lightly cuff the back of her husband’s head. Dietrich sighed at them, and probably at us, too.

“I cannot believe I thought it was a good idea to bring the two of you here.” He sighed.

“Just keep us out of your fancy potions laboratories, and everything will be fine.” I said comfortingly. I knew Dietrich had them; how else would he have made me those tranquilizer-mind-numbing potion things for the full moon?

(Something grateful that came from Sirius, but only just. Like he was vaguely listening to the conversation, just as I was vaguely aware that Ron and Harry really ought to fact-check Sirius’ bullshit when he was helping them with homework.)

(We both grew irritated at ourselves as we kept brushing against each other’s minds on accident. It just felt too natural to stop.)

Harper brightened. “Potions laboratories?”

Both Dietrich and I blinked. Harper trotted off faster, intent on getting to the intricately-carved double doors that was the way out of the apparent entrance library. The two of us watched him go, then whipped around to each other.

“How could you have told him that?” Dietrich hissed at me.

I raised my hands in surrender. “He said he’d been here for a couple of days, I thought he’d found them already!”

“He hadn’t! Now he’s going to go *looking!*”

I opened my mouth to retort, then I stopped. I scrunched my brows together. “Your house is big enough that you have three potions laboratories and Harper still hadn’t found them?” I asked, voice tinged with a little disgust. I shook my head. “And you say this isn’t a castle.”

“Because it’s not.” Dietrich persisted.

“Technicalities,” I said chidingly.

Harper called both of us over, not looking where he was going and nearly smashing into a
decorative table of some sort. “Dietrich! Lyssie! You two are slow! We have to go find Dietrich’s potions labs!”

I had a horrible, horrible image of Harper messing around and somehow tipping over one of the busts. I then had a horrible, horrible memory of Harper and I spilling potions all over one of my old pairs of sneakers and going mad over how it started changing colors before settling on something very Muggle-TV-static-like. And then that happening to any of the very beautiful architecture or art pieces that Dietrich was showing off all over the place.

Bloody hell.

Dietrich sent a poisonous look my way. “He is going to blow up my castle.”

I couldn’t help it. I grinned. “It’ll be his most brilliant explosion yet.”

My Second gave a tired, tired sigh. He side-eyed me, expression calm, then curving up to match the lightness in his eyes. A very slight and gentle smile, one of the rarest expressions in the world, I wager. It was bright.

“Welcome to Schwarzvogelschloss, my friend.”
Chapter 52

Chapter Notes

Oof. I’m SO sorry this is late. Finals and then I moved out and now I’m just kinda floating in Europe without a home, waiting for my flight back to the states... It's been wild. :’D

Anywho! :D Here's the next, thank you all as always for reading (and special thanks to commentors) and hope you enjoy! I really gotta start canon soon. Maybe next chapter, which I'm still working on. :’)

There was very little time left in the summer, it felt, and too much to take care of.

First order of business, after the tour, was to retreat to my room with the two boys.

“We will send a House Elf when it is time for dinner,” is what Elisabet said as we ended on what was apparently their smallest ballroom, which was occasionally repurposed into a dueling hall, “Unfortunately, Etienne and I must attend to business in Berlin. I am sure you will keep yourselves entertained.”

Because. Y’know. Dietrich’s father worked in the magical French embassy as one of the highest ranking personnel there, pretty much second to the French ambassador — who was apparently one of his uncles? — and Elisabet was the Head of the Inter-German Diplomatic Relations Bureau, which was the sole reason all of the different provinces of Germany hadn’t been at war with each other since Muggle Germany united under Prussia almost a hundred years ago, basically.

AKA what the fuck, Dietrich’s parents were legit so important to the government, I cannot believe I actually met them.

“Why were you ever bullied at school again?” I asked Dietrich faintly, letting him lead the way to my room so we could catch up out of earshot of the few and far between portraits and House Elves hanging around.

Dietrich snorted. “Because Wizarding Britain is arrogant.”

( he’s not wrong )

Sirius! Out!

( sorry- )

(Honestly, Sirius was having the most trouble with this whole separation business. Made sense — he was the parasite in this lopsided link, after all. But if I had to constantly kick him out of my head
so we were both safe, I didn’t mind.)

Harper piped up, “English purebloods are pretty racist, actually. It’s why my mum doesn’t like doing business there. S’also why I move between the British manor and the Cairo one, but we’re mostly in the Cairo one. Plus, with the Grindelwald stuff…”

Dietrich’s face darkened. “Grindelwald was not even born here. He was born in Britain. Of course, Malfoy and Nathaniel conveniently forgot about that…”

“Nate?” I asked.


Harper frowned. “Nate was pretty bad in first year. Some of the things he used to say…”

“Connard.”

“Language,” I chimed.

Dietrich grumbled. In French, but with no swear words that I could pick out.

Then he sighed, “Your country is very xenophobic. The center of the Western spellwork, yes, and also the seat of the school with the strongest magical general education, but… picky, in who can come to your country and bring magic back to their own. It is only my parents’ standing in our government that allowed me to be able to choose Hogwarts. And even then, the stigma was strong, and I would make my country and my family appear weak had I complained.” He turned back to look at me, annoyance faded and eyes gentle. “I do not exaggerate when I say that you are the only reason I stayed in Britain, Lys.”

I stopped in the middle of the (enormous) hallway, surprised. I felt myself blushing a little, and had to poke at my Occlumency to lock away most of the embarrassment. I let the happiness stay, though, which had my lips curl up into a small smile.

“I’m glad you stayed,” I said softly.

Dietrich nodded. “As am I.”

Harper laughed. “Me too! Hogwarts wouldn’t be the same without you, Dietrich!”

Dietrich shook his head, turning and continuing to walk, knowing we would follow. (Trusting we would follow.) “I am glad that I stayed, too.”

We walked along, and Harper trotted up to me and took my hand in his, swinging happily and cheerfully chattering. Dietrich told us a little about what he did in this hallway as a kid, or how he’d nearly accidentally shattered that statue over there, all little stories. Dietrich, like most purebloods, had most of his early education taken care of by his parents and private tutors; purebloods across all countries had a thing about not letting their kids mix together unless supervised very carefully, since kids were all little shits and no one wanted an accidental Blood Feud to start over someone stealing someone else’s favorite toy or pulling someone’s hair or something like that. Probably why purebloods were so attached to their manors and shit, since they spent so much time in them.

I mean. Even my childhood was like that, technically. I was attached to The Burrow, myself. My parents and my big brothers taught me everything I needed to know before Hogwarts, and my previous knowledge and Clairvoyance did the rest, the miscellaneous information giving me an extra edge in the Slytherin political scene.
When we got to my room, I stopped and stared again.

*What.*

Dietrich frowned at me, standing in the middle of a room that was larger than my house’s bottom floor. “Do you want to change rooms? Harper and I thought you would prefer the pastel colors and the windows, but there is another nearby which is similar to our common room.”

I stared flatly at him. Then at the large, ceiling-high, white windows framed with steel-blue curtains. There was a balcony to the outside, which seemed to connect to other rooms, flowering plants in pots splashing color outside, if the green of the gardens below and the woods beyond that weren’t enough. The hardwood floors were laid out with pale blue carpets, decorated with flowering, silver borders. The bed was a queen, four-posted, a matching writing desk across the room, some couches and lounge seats making a little sitting area near a white, thin door that was slightly ajar, showing the beginnings of a bathroom.

This was the sort of shit you saw in architecture magazines. I should know — my first set of parents were both architects and interior designers.

(I was eternally glad that Sirius never picked up on that aspect of my head. The reincarnation bit. It didn’t matter so much, compared to all the other garbage in my brain, but… I liked to keep that to myself.)

(It meant more, somehow. It felt sacred.)

This was just a *guest room.*

“You’re so rich, it’s disgusting,” I deadpanned.

Dietrich twitched.

Harper pouted. “Does this mean you don’t like the color? Is it too Ravenclaw?”

Oh, this dear child.

I shook my head. “No, it’s perfect. I just… forget, sometimes, that I hang around with rich people all the time. Let’s settle in, shall we? I’ve got to catch you up. Both of you, actually.”

Dietrich straightened a little at those words. “So you’ve decided?”

There was a constant discussion between the two of us on whether Harper was going to be caught up on *everything,* or just some things.

My boys — all five of them — were on the same level in many things, probably rivalling my siblings in how well they knew me. Dietrich probably knew more about me than anyone in the world besides Sirius, and even then, there were things Dietrich automatically understood about me that Sirius needed a bit more time in the link or a bit more observation and thought to get through his semi-thick skull. Most importantly, Dietrich knew about my Clairvoyance and everything that surrounded it, though the only thing he knew about the future was that there was the possibility of a threat, and I was working — and had been, since I was born — to eliminate it, or ride the storm through at the very least.

(Dietrich asked for no more details than that, understanding that the more you knew, the more Fate could mess with you or punish you. Taboo in and of itself, is what the cambion said.)
I was content with Dietrich alone of the boys knowing everything. Dietrich was arguing for Harper to be let in on the secret, because (and I quote) Harper was a different kind of support and would be able to provide different insight, among other things. My Second wouldn’t push me — I think he still remembered the last time he pushed me, which outed me as a Clairvoyant in the first place, and was being a bit more careful about things — but he made a rather good argument:

Harper was loyal, but more importantly, he was removed from British politics. Where Lu, Nate, or Jay might be pressured by the weight of the secret because of the weight of their last names, Harper was removed enough from the players in the game — the game of British magical politics, that is — that there was very little chance of betrayal.

(We were Slytherins, in the end; secret-keepers and sneak. As much as I loved them all, there were a few secrets I had to be careful with, even among loved ones. Clairvoyance and anything around it was one of them.)

Like Dietrich said. British wizards were slightly xenophobic. Foreigners in-country were unwelcome, shunned, and in return, foreign ministries mostly left Britain to their own devices — that was likely why there was little to no support with Voldemort, the first time around. If there was anyone in the world who would be safest knowing about my Clairvoyance, it was Harper. Harper, who was more Kasiya than Harper, who was minor branch family, who was least suspect to holding a weakness of Guinevere Weasley because everyone looked down on him for his ADHD, equating it to a debilitating mental disease.

But Harper was good at keeping secrets. He didn’t act like he was, but my Third was a Slytherin, and we were sneaky bastards, every one of us. When Harper understood how heavy this secret was, there was no chance at all that he would blab thoughtlessly.

Harper stared between us, bemused. “Are you two talking to each other mentally again?”

I winced.

Another thing most of the boys weren’t caught up on. They knew about the Memory Ward and about me sealing Mage Sight and of the fact that Sirius and I had several temporary mental connections, but… Well. This mind link shit with Sirius, the gritty details, and the fact that the cambion was necessary in fixing it…

We only sent Nate bits and pieces of the contracts to edit — Merlin bless that boy and his complete and utter understanding of secrets and need-to-know information (I treated his own private information network at Hogwarts, including his budding blackmail system, with the same courtesy) — and he wasn’t even one of the main editors. Harper got very select pieces of the contract as well, though he was aware of a bit more than Nate.

But everything to do with the cambion identifying and repairing the extremely powerful and maybe extremely debilitating mind link between Sirius and me… That knowledge… All Dietrich and me, really. Along with Sirius.

“About that…” I sighed.

Harper frowned at us. He looked worriedly at me. “Is it the cambion? Is there something wrong with your Occlumency again? I thought you got it all fixed, that’s why you were doing all of those contract things…”

I sighed. “No. No, this is something different. But before I tell you anything… I need you to know that this information, everything I tell you… You could probably end my life with this, Harper. Not
only is most of it extremely illegal, it’s… it’s personal and-

“Will you telling me mean I can help you better?” Harper interrupted.

Interruptions from Harper were to be expected.

But this…

I was taken aback. Harper did not, as a general rule, get solemn. But here he was, sitting beside me on the arm of a couch, gazing at me intently, still as stone. Harper wasn’t ever still, and he wasn’t ever this serious.

I nodded slowly. “But knowing… you can’t take knowing back, Harper.”

Not unless I draw a Memory Ward, but I’d hate to do that to a friend.

(We are made of our memories, Guinevere.)

My friend smiled, but it was a gentle thing. “Good. I wouldn’t take being your friend back for anything in the world, Lyssie.” His smile widened a little. “Dietrich calls you soeur de mon coeur, doesn’t he? You’re mine, too. Never had a sister before, but if it’s anything like the past two years, but I get to know more and help more, then I’ll never turn away. Promise.”

Dietrich, sitting on my other side, snorted. His voice was quiet. “I told you he would not hesitate. You underestimate how Gryffindor we have all become, because of you.”

I was a bit distracted to reply to Dietrich’s quiet murmur, though; my hand had found Harper’s, and I gave his fingers a squeeze. It was one thing to accidentally blurt out a secret after being stressed beyond compare and pushed, and then following up that breakdown with a quiet explanation. It was another to warn someone of all the dangers and have them say yes anyways. It was another for Harper — who had been generally well-adjusted before I’d come into his life, who hadn’t been isolated and totally foreign and friendless before me — to knowingly choose me and help me. Harper, who seemed to carefree and childish, standing firm in the face of warnings and danger with nothing but seriousness in his eyes.

(My boys were so, so dear to me.)

I swallowed. My heart was full. “I hope we have enough time before dinner,” I muttered, trying to push down the emotional response and the rising tears — I had explaining to do, this was no time to start crying from how utterly amazing my boys were.

Dietrich shook his head. “We will have time. My parents will want to speak to you about schoolwork, no doubt. My father is interested in how you like to use wards while you duel, though it goes against your core nature. They will have a free day tomorrow, and I suppose we will practice dueling, then, with my parents’ oversight. After that, however, they have much work, and I think we will mostly have the house to ourselves.”

“The castle to ourselves.” Harper corrected cheekily.

I blinked at the sudden itinerary. “Wait, but- Er- I mean- This is some serious stuff? Are you sure it won’t take… some time, or something, to sink in?”

Dietrich gave me an amused stare. “When you first explained everything to me, all I wanted to do was polish my dueling skills. I have no doubt Harper will want the same. You are right, Lys — we cannot take back knowing. We will move past it, prepare, and I will finally show you two why I
am proud of my home and why you should be comfortable knowing it is open to you as well, now.”

*It’s not a big deal,* Dietrich was telling me.

*It doesn’t change anything.*

I snorted helplessly. If I was looking at Dietrich’s expressions right, there was also a bit of, *You’re being too dramatic about this, Lys.*

(I felt it was rightfully dramatic, but then again. I’d never been one to do things by halves, this life or the last.)

I felt myself relax. I *was* making a big deal out of telling Harper. Clairvoyance should be treated solemnly, of course, but this was *Harper.* And we were here in Germany to relax and have fun, not dance around each other and have anxiety attacks or whatever. I had to learn to trust a little more, for Merlin’s sake. And relax. I needed to *relax.*

“Alright, then,” I said simply, nodding.

Dietrich gave me a nod. “*Wir beginnen.*”

... 

As expected, Dietrich finding out that I technically almost died again — my mind nearly absorbed into Sirius’ and all that — was… explosive. Harper hugged me for dear life, and Dietrich almost went accidental; it was only his tight hold on his Occlumency that kept him from shattering the windows. Merlin save Sirius, because Dietrich was going to kill him one day.

(I was *so* tempted to send along a warning through the mind link, but I withheld.)

(Sirius picked it up anyways, and we both felt a bit of dread, right before a flash of alarmed sheepishness had us forcefully separating ourselves, making both our physical bodies go very still; which only further alarmed us, so Sirius started moving around and I kept breathing deeply, both of us trying to get out of sync with each other.)

(*sorry, Lyssie. this is… more difficult than I thought it would be. *)

(*I know it is. But you’re trying. We’re both trying. We’ll be alright. Go enjoy your time with Harry and Moony, Sirius.*)

(Explaining that to Dietrich and Harper… well, they were *not* amused.)

And also as expected, Harper — while emotional about the entire ‘I’ve been having nightmares of the Blood War since I was born’ and the ‘I think Voldemort’s going to come back and kill my family’ and also the ‘I’ve been preparing for that since I was five years old’ thing, which is completely understandable — accepted the entire revelation wholeheartedly. And very much wanted to help in this, somehow, some way. In fact, the pre-planned dinner was completely rushed through and we started dueling practice immediately.

Which is where I learned that Etienne Bastion was terrifying.
And his wife even more so.

Etienne Bastion was terrifying because he was goofy and smiley and while you were snorting at one of his jokes, he suddenly had a kill spell trained on you. The man was fast, and not only that, he was dementedly creative in how he used the tiniest spells — he Apparated mid-duel, for fuck’s sake, multiple times — and I’m pretty sure Harper was aspiring to be just like him when he grew up. If I hadn’t known any better, I’d have thought those two were the related ones. Etienne knew his limitations, knew his strengths, knew his weaknesses, and he tailored a dueling style to suit him; he harassed his opponent, tired them out, and expended barely any magic or energy doing it. Or, when he was feeling fun, he did flashy shit to distract his opponent, and then hit them hard.

Yeah. Harper had some serious hero-worship going on.

I did, too. For Elisabet.

Elisabet Bastion was, in a word, elegant. Her dueling style reflected that. She didn’t move as much as Etienne, but when she did, it was like she was dancing. Her specialty was the conjuration branch of Transfiguration. She had a preference for making swarms of sharp objects and directing them in pretty and extremely dangerous patterns at her opponent. She also enjoyed manipulating the environment in tiny ways and using it to her advantage; conjuring a layer of water on the floor and making someone slip, for instance.

She fought by thinking ten steps ahead, and didn’t speak a word while she did. She just looked you in the eye and made you want to cry from how incompetent you were. Harper squeaked when he had her as his practice partner. I clamped down so strongly on my Occlumency that I shunted my emotions to the side for a while, alarming Sirius and making him poke at me to make sure I was alright.

(I love her, I told Sirius quickly.)

( she’s one damn scary woman, Lyssie. ah, but I’ll see you for Occlumency later- )

Anyways.

Yeah, so.

Dietrich was an unholy mixture of his parents, basically. Etienne’s harassing style but Elisabet’s careful planning and elegance. Easy, simple spells for his smaller core, but masterful manipulation of a stressful environment. His Occlumency probably really shone, there, keeping him grounded. It made for interesting duels between him and I, when we were both focused entirely. He still soundly trounced me, as was right, since he’d been practicing like mad and I’d been playing Sirius’ nurse for a year.

I would really have to get back in dueling shape.

And we’d have six days to start me off, I suppose.

Six days of discussing the upcoming potesta situation. Scenarios for fending off Malfoy or whoever he sent for our seat were made, along with possibilities for challenges from others, for how people might attack us after the trials — and especially the famous first trial, my trial — and plans of how to keep our grades high, our tutoring sessions coveted, our respect undiminished.

Six days of polishing what knowledge we could with two masters of diplomacy and dueling. Strengthening my dueling, meditating on our cores, Occluding a little (or trying to teach Harper — in vain — the basics of Occlumency), stretching out our magic stores a bit, preparing for wandless
magic. Setting up schedules for Harper and Lu around their Quidditch outings, detailing how we’d delegate potestas duties, writing back and forth to Nate and Lu and Jay through Dietrich’s owls.

Six days of preparing for the future. I took long hours of meditation on my core and on my Clairvoyance — it was rare and treasured, to have the time and leisure to be able to sort my mind and magic out like this, and I would make the most of it, though Sirius and the mind link made it rather difficult (sorry, Lysie) — trying to parse through the possibilities now that I had two accomplices with me. They would both fight by my side, but I would attempt to spare them as much trouble as I could; they were children and though they both declared they’d be loyal until the end, I felt sick at the thought that either of them dismissed the very real threat of war.

(They didn’t understand yet, I didn’t think. They didn’t know what it meant to truly be willing to kill and die for someone else, someone who wasn’t even blood family.)

(Sometimes I wondered if I knew what that meant. Sometimes I felt like I was preparing for a nightmare that would never come, that I was wasting my life, my second life, and not only mine, but I was ruining the lives of others, too. I was making these two boys who deserved peace… prepare for a war that they shouldn’t have to fight. A war I shouldn’t have to fight.)

(But I had to put those thoughts away. Better to be ready than not. Better to be safe than sorry. Better to fight than to die helplessly, tears and blood on your face, begging for help that won’t come, slipping into ice and blindness-)

Six days.

That was all I could spare. Sirius and I Occluded every night we could, greeting each other fleetingly in the mindscape and then doing out best to block the other out for the entire period of time. It was difficult — we were like salt and water, dissolving together, trying not to. Stray thoughts flowed between us, strong emotion spilled over to the other… Occluding at the same time made us anxious and worried, our subconsciouses panicking over the suddenly missing part of ourselves. Sirius always saw a bit of what I did, and I always felt a bit of what he felt — meditation was difficult, and he usually had to do something relaxing and mindless while I attempted it, so that neither of us traveled mentally to the other, thoughtlessly. We had to go to the cambion, report to it what we observed in trying to separate ourselves, and then begin the process of healing this.

Thus, only six days. I couldn’t be away any longer. I shouldn’t even really leave Britain anymore this summer — I had to go to Knockturn, I had to stay out of sight of the public until their interest was eaten up by the World Cup, and then I would have to go to the damn World Cup. There was too much too do, but I treasured the six days.

... 

“My parents definitely know we’re all in here.”

“Budge over, Dietrich-”

“Ouch, Harper, you’ve got your weight all on my hair-”

“Given that Lys is a female, this is highly inappropriate.”

“-aybe you should cut your hair again? Though it looks very nice like this, sort of a wavy bob and
all that, I like it—"

“There is absolutely no reason for all of us to be in my room.”

“-like it? Sort of a pain, but Ginny’s on a mission to make me grow it out-”

“Or in my bed.”

“-be able to braid it soon, right?”

“Maybe, but braiding my own hair is really annoying-”

“Mon Dieu. Je vous déteste tous les deux.”

“What’d he say?”

“He said he hated us both-”

“Ah, a lie, then.”

Dietrich let out a pained, frustrated, frankly pathetic noise. It must’ve been killing his strong sense of propriety that Harper and I had both crept onto our balconies — all of which were connected, wrapped around this entire corner of the castle — and broke into his room so we could have a proper fucking sleep over. I’d picking my lock with a bunch of improvised tools that Fred and George had slipped into my backpack, actually (I have no doubt whatsoever that they were hoping I was going to go raid Dietrich’s… I dunno, treasury or something) and Harper had done a simple Alohamora. AKA Etienne and Elisabet were practically inviting us to come out of our rooms — we were all Slytherins, dammit — so we did.

(I also mentally made note that I needed to get Sirius to help me with the ritual to get rid of the wand Trace. It would make life so much easier. It might also make me slack on my wandless or make my siblings all jealous and pissy, so there was that to consider as well…)

Anyways.

I snuggled closer to my boys. It reminded me of being sandwiched between Ginny and Ron, warm and together in the dark. When we were all younger, it was a normal thing; in fact, it was still a bit of a normal thing. I was a rather tactile person. It was lucky that Harper was, too, and Dietrich wouldn’t (couldn’t) protest if Harper and I ganged up on him.

“There’s just never enough time,” I muttered. It was the sixth night — not a full moon, but when I was outside the light made my scars sear — and I would be leaving tomorrow. Hence, the impromptu sleepover Harper and I insisted on including Dietrich in.

“Time for what?” Harper asked, on my left.

“For sorting everything out nice and proper,” I answered.

Harper shifted a little. I think he was trying to stare at me, but none of us could really see. “Well, we can’t rightly do anything about the potesta stuff until we get to Hogwarts, even if we’ve got our whole first draft of a schedule done!”

Dietrich nodded. I suppose he accepted that we were here to stay. “We have made many plans for how to react if our structure is threatened. But our position is guarded, Lys. We are who the parvus will look to for direction, academic and political both, and that is all we need.”
“Feels a waste, sometimes,” I sighed, “I could do a lot if I put all my energy into the parvus…”

Sure, we had the escort groups and the parvus-magnus mentor deal and the sporadic tutoring sessions and enough eyes and ears that we usually heard about trouble before it became a big problem… But I could be trying to network the Slytherins into the other Houses. I could be trying to pry their pureblood racism from them slowly, introduce them to Muggle things that would lend credence to the brilliance (if not the danger) of Muggle society. I could organize more clubs, since there were so little at Hogwarts. If I had the time I’d like to get to know my parvus more, learn what they’re good at, encourage them to grow and become little kings and queens in their own right.

But that would be a world where I wasn’t preparing for war.

“We will find a successor,” Dietrich dismissed, “You can give your suggestions and ideas to them, and you will have left behind a better parvus than what you received from Malfoy. We all have other concerns, now.”

“Which’s why we’re giving a lot of the parvus duties to Nate and Jay and Lu,” Harper piped up. But he paused. “I still think we ought to tell them about all this, too.”

I shook my head. “No.”

“Lyssie-”

“We can’t,” I said more firmly, “And it isn’t because I have something against Death Eater names. You know why we can’t tell them, Harper.”

I could see Harper’s pout already. “I don’t like hiding things from our friends.”

Dietrich huffed. “If the situation were reversed… They would understand.”

“You don’t trust that they won’t tell their families about you and your Clairvoyance,” Harper muttered mullishly. He had argued for us telling the others very fervently, and honestly, quite convincingly. The other three were much more discrete than Harper was, and they had more pull in British politics, so their help would be even better than Dietrich’s or his own, is what he said.

Still. I wouldn’t budge, and Dietrich agreed with me.

I sighed. “I hope they wouldn’t.” I reached up to grip Harper’s hand, not minding how uncomfortably warm we all were. German summers were warmer and sunnier than I thought they’d be, actually. “But hope is not enough, Tristan. You’re all my friends and I love you like family, but we’re all Slytherins, aren’t we?”

Harper huffed a little. He squeezed my hand; I supposed he wasn’t actually mad about this, just a little annoyed that he wasn’t getting his way when he really believed in his argument. “Maybe next year? Did your Clairvoyance say anything about that?”

“It just shows… things about you all, if I think about that. Flashes. Things I don’t think I should really know. Probably because I’m not decided on a choice. I could do the ‘what if’ game with Pettigrew, because I honestly would’ve gone up to him and killed him instantly if my Clairvoyance was okay with that, but with this… I’m undecided. A little more wait and see, and I suppose my Clairvoyance is trying to give me as many things to see as I can.”

Harper squeezed again, making my fingers ache. “Does it show you how terrible Lu’s family is?”
I stiffened. Memories of a lonely boy sitting outside drifting in my mind. Isolation and neglect from his parents. Chasing his brother, flying through the air, being ignored. Sneers of ‘Oh, it’s just the second son. The spare.’ The blank-eyed sneers he’d sport in first year, the mocking laughter directed at others, him still staring after Edward Vaisey’s back equal parts jealous and resentful and longing. The expression on his face, which he hid in his robe sleeves, when Harper and Dietrich and Jay and myself were waiting for him after hours of self-imposed, destructively-intense flying and Quidditch practice. Ruddy cheeks and watery eyes and then a laugh loud and free enough to break your heart.

The more you loved something, the more that something you loved became a part of you, the more Clairvoyance would warn you about how very fragile it was, from its very conception to its possible terrible ends.

Lu’s blank eyes, hazel-blue and odd and staring, set into a blood-smeared face. A last smile as he fell-

Stop.

Dietrich was gripping at my other hand. He had learned what it looked like when I sunk into Clairvoyance. It reminded me very strongly of Ginny, and how she felt like as long as she held onto me, she was my anchor to the world.

( Lyssie? are you alright? )

For Merlin’s sake, Sirius.

Flashes of concern and sheepishness but blustering confidence in spite of the guilt. I sighed inwardly, wishing my hands were free so I could massage my temples. That little flash of Clairvoyance gave me a bit of a headache — future visions always did. Sirius, too, by the way he was cringing a bit — it had woken him up, mixed in his dreams.

I’m fine. Fate’s just… reminding me again.

Sirius rubbed his face. He was listening to Harry’s heartbeat, in the room across his, along with Ron’s. They were sleeping peacefully. ( deaths, again? ) he asked.

Always.

Concern and affection and comfort. Heartbeats in our ears. Then, ( I’ll see you tomorrow, Lys. )

Good night.

“Lyssie?” Harper asked.

I cleared my throat. “Sorry. Seems my control is a bit… Well, my Clairvoyance is a little confused, it thinks I’m asking for a novel when all I’m doing is thinking about a line. I think it’s the mind link, it’s very sensitive nowadays.”

“Do you need a Pain Relief potion?” Dietrich asked.

We had, in the end, found Dietrich’s potion laboratory. Harper had to be threatened to leave everything alone. When I was flinching at the pain of Sirius falling straight off of a broom like the moron he was, Dietrich had whipped up a Pain Relief potion for me right then and there. It even tasted alright.
(Dietrich was quite the potioneer. I hated myself a little when my first thought at drinking the Pain Relief was, ‘This will be useful during the war.’ It should’ve been ‘I wonder if Dietrich wants to be a Potions Master when he grows up.’ or something similar.)

“No, I’m fine, I just… have to be careful not to trigger a vision.”

“Which is hard, because you like us so much,” Harper recalled from earlier, as I explained how Clairvoyance chose what to show its Seers. Emotional ties. A defense mechanism that pushed too far, always becoming a nightmare of terrible ‘what-ifs’ and such.

I snorted. “Yes, I like you all so much that my Clairvoyance likes playing theoretical take-aways with me.”

Dietrich shifted closer, just a little. It was loud enough in the quiet of the room that we all noticed instantly. “One thing at a time, my friend,” he said softly, “The rest of the summer for your mind, then the school year for our skill. We will be ready for whatever comes.”

I gripped Dietrich’s hand.

“You know neither of you have to fight with me. You could stay in your home countries and ride the rest of whatever is coming out. You could be safe houses that I can send others to, that’ll help enough. You don’t have to put yourself in danger for someone you’ve only known for two years.”


Dietrich was probably rolling his eyes. “I am no coward, Lys. Britain has become another home to me, as well. If your Dark Lord wishes to take it, he will have to pry it from us. I will bow to no dictator. The Rolphausers and Bastions fought against Adolf Hitler and Grindelwald and all other men who thought they could stand above the rest, deciding who lived and who died by whim, and I shall do the same with this one.”

“Oh, so this is a pride thing, then,” I muttered, feeling a smile make its way onto my face.

“I’m half-British, you know,” Harper said conversationally, “And my Mum’s Light and a Halfblood. If You-Know-Who’s going after my mum, then I’ll go after him first. No one touches my mum. And no one’ll touch you, either, Lyssie.”

I laughed a little. “You two are so ridiculous.”

(Because I was weak? — No, because I was.)

(Stop.)

Harper flipped over, onto his stomach, letting my hand go for a moment before snatching it up again. I had a passing thought that soon we’d be a little too old for this sort of thing to be entirely innocent; a passing thought that I killed dead because fuck if I would let puberty get in the way of me and my boys and me being affectionate with my boys who deserved all the affection in the world. (Or really, just fuck puberty, god, what a nightmare…)

“I think we ought to sleep. We’re going to practice with your wards against tomorrow, aren’t we, Lyssie?” Harper asked.

“You two will probably be better warders than me, being Lighter and all,” I mused, “I can match an averagely powered ward, but I use blood magic to do it, so. And we probably won’t be able to practice much — Sirius is being a whiny little baby, he wants me to come back as soon as
Understandable, really.

If I hadn’t had my boys and all these hours of meditating and Occluding my emotions, I’d probably be an anxious mess right now. The mind link was as strong as ever, trying to bring Sirius and I closer — physically and mentally — in order to merge. If we didn’t know what was going on, I’d have probably gone home days ago, and Sirius might’ve splinched himself trying to get to me. We were both nervous at the distance, holding onto our favorite people to calm ourselves.

Dietrich and Harper knew this, and both of them snorted.

“Tell your pervert of a godfather to… erm… what are the words?”

“Suck it up!” Harper supplied.

Dietrich nodded. “Yes.”

…It was rather lucky that Sirius wasn’t listening in right now, because I had the feeling he’d otherwise be cursing up a storm. Harper was an idiot who shouldn’t be allowed to teach Dietrich new words without quite telling him what they meant. Dietrich would be mortified if he knew what he was really saying when he called Sirius a pervert — I think he thought he was calling Sirius a bastard without actually cussing, but still being a step up from ‘idiot’ or ‘goddamn moron’ as I suggested…

Was I going to let Dietrich keep saying it? After the whole trial fiasco and everything?

…Maybe for a little while.

I laughed, my smile staying on my face right until I fell asleep. I was going back to Britain tomorrow, the rest of the summer to be poured into stabilizing the mental link and the mindscape. Everything else would be letters, right up until the Quidditch World Cup.

…

Our mental forest was drowning, and the water was muddy and stagnant. It smelled like rot and trash, turned to sludge in places. It was clearer and shallower near the center, near the open field that was our core, and in certain pathways in the forest — like the one we normally took the cambion down — but there were fungal growths infecting the trees, scattering into the growing swamp. The air was humid and even as mental projections, Sirius and I felt sticky and miserable.

At least the fireflies were bright. Brighter than the sky, it felt, sometimes.

“You have made it worse,” noted the cambion absently.

The werewolf snarled, and so did Sirius. “On your advice.”

This bastard — he’s making a fool out of us-

I, I corrected mentally. Then I frowned, and looked at the cambion. “They?” I asked.

“It matters not to me, dear reveler,” said the cambion serenely, its hands reaching out for oddly-
complying fireflies, “Though ‘it’ will suffice. ‘It’ implies… a lack of humanity, and though you call me cambion, I feel anything but human.”

“‘They’ refers to any sentient,” I pointed out.

“Which I am, no doubt, reveler, but my reasoning stands even still.”

“True enough.” I capitulated easily. “Has our mind really degraded so much in just six days?”

The clearing was overflooded and overgrown, but it was clearer than the rest of the forest. Brighter here, too — easier to see how odd the place was, how wild it was becoming. The werewolf loping next to Sirius seemed to be furrier and messier, too; he hadn’t grown, but his fur matting and bristling like it was made it seem that way. There was blood on his teeth that wasn’t there before, and scars on his face that looked-

Oh fuck me.

Your werewolf’s got my scars, Sirius.

Sirius did a double-take, violent enough to splash the knee-deep water.

Shit.

“Not entirely unexpected,” the cambion said musingly, the fireflies darting away from its hand as it allowed… no, that was definitely its semi-sentient magic twisting around its robes, creeping around the cloth and shooing the fireflies away subtly. Odd. “Did I not say? I was curious as to how the young reveler would have touched your mind, other. How she shaped your wolf.”

“Lys isn’t a lycanthrope. The reason her scars burn in moonlight is Dark magical trauma — they’re curse scars, she’s rejecting the magic.” Sirius said in one breath, looking frenzied and afraid.

I don’t know why. Being a werewolf isn’t the end of the world.

It is when you’re not supposed to be one because you were never bitten, Lyssie.

I’m not a bloody werewolf, Sirius, I think I would’ve noticed the change in magic by now. You’re a Soothsayer through me, now, you can check yourself — once we wake up, that is.

“Why once we wake up?” He asked, fully understanding that I was distracting him but also taking the way out to calm himself and be persuaded that no, he had not in fact accidentally turned me into a werewolf by virtue of having a mind link with me.

“Doesn’t work in our mindscape.”

He wordlessly glanced at the cambion, who was content to listen to us.

I shrugged. “The cambion’s a Legilimencic half-demon who’s somehow invaded our mindscape, it doesn’t follow the rules.”

“Aptly put,” it said. Then it turned to Sirius (who bristled at the motion, naturally), white mask gleaming in the dulled starlight. “The wolf is a mental construction representing your instincts and abilities as a werewolf. A subconscious personification of your curse, perhaps. Dear other, your wolf was born into this link, and crafted itself of two minds. Of course the reveler’s influence will be seen the more your minds become one.
“There is a certain sentience to the curse, is there not? More pronounced than that of your Animagus form, less easy to control? The goal of a werewolf curse is to take power during the moon and spread itself, and to do that, it protects you, other, its bearer. It is aware in that way. But not so aware that it fully understands the difference between one mind and the next, other and reveler, especially as it has never known a time when you two were separate. You bear its curse, so its mental construction protects you and struggles for control when you feel a threat. The reveler is a part of your mind, so it treats her well, and chooses not to attack her.

“Perhaps if I knew more of lycanthropic Mind Arts, I could say more. But, as I told the reveler, I do not often suffer the presence of Moon Children. They are too often spies for the Ministry… though, without fail, easy to and amusing to irritate.”

This little-!

I cut Sirius’ impending snarl off, “So? Do you know what to do? Where to begin?”

I’d come back from Germany early just for this. A spiteful, childish, impatient part of me was bristling, needing to make it worth it. It was the part that was illogical, dismissing the fact that even a little bit of progress was worth it — otherwise either I or Sirius would die. Still, though. I’d been sad to leave Schwarzvogelschloss and the Bastions plus Harper; they would continue without me, sending letters to update me and otherwise pretend that I was still there, but I wished I could’ve stayed.

Harper had promised that, next time I saw him, he’d show me his progress on the Patronus. I was looking forward to that. (And maybe looking forward to seeing if we couldn’t make it explode as he suggested months ago, not that we’d tell anyone else that — it’d be our little secret until we actually got it to work.)

The cambion hummed to itself. “I cannot cut you two apart… the contract stipulated as such, and it would be the death of the other. Hm… yet I cannot separate you properly to organize the minds… Perhaps if I hacked away the foreign entities… It would be dreadfully painful and possibly fatal, but it may work…” The cambion tilted its mask to one side curiously. “I shall have to limit the connection somehow, without cutting you two apart and reforging it… I do believe, reveler, I need to try mind-walking one of you while the other is deeply unconscious.”

“Let me,” Sirius volunteered immediately.

I blinked. I figured you’d prefer to be unconscious.

I’d prefer the bloody thing wasn’t anywhere near you, so here’s the next best thing I can do.

You really are going to have to get over that.

I wouldn’t let a cambion within ten feet of Harry. The only reason I’m not trying to bite his- its head off is that the thing is necessary.

I pouted. “Does this mean once this is over you’re cutting me off?”

Sirius gave me the evil eye. “I would if I knew it would work, you brat. No, this means that once this is over, there’s no way in hell I’m allowing you to go to Knockturn Alley without an escort. Probably me. Maybe Remus.”

“I’ll go during the full moon.”
Sirius sent me the equivalent of a Stinging Hex, mentally. “I will hire someone to escort you, dammit.”

I snorted at the sheer offense Sirius was feeling. Then I looked to the cambion.

“Should I be in the waking world for this?” I asked.

The cambion shook its head. “I can put you to sleep now, dear reveler. The other might be alarmed, but do not worry — I will be much stronger in this mindscape if half of it is sleeping.” It chuckled. “We are in the experimentation stages, dear other, dear reveler. It will be a tedious few weeks. But rest assured, I signed your little contract — your minds will be salvaged, one way or another.”

That doesn’t sound promising.

And now you’re nervous at the cambion in our head.

I nodded, ignoring Sirius and hoping the cambion was ignoring him too. It tended to allow us the veneer of privacy when we started mentally communicating; I suppose it picked up on how uncomfortable it was for us to know someone could hear our mental speech perfectly, when we were used to it being quiet and secret.

“I hope Remus doesn’t freak out.” I muttered, “My heart rate will change and he’ll be able to hear it.”

“I am warning the quiet one as we speak.” The cambion said pleasantly.

…

The fuck?

It could interact with the outside world while performing Legilimency and entering a mindscape? Hacks! That was complete and utter bullshit! Sirius and I could barely talk to each other mentally without needing to pause what we were doing — it was a degradation of the link, because we used to be able to do that, but still. We had never been able to actually enter our mindscape while doing other things consciously, dammit.

Of course that’d be what bothers you.

Shut up, Sirius, can you imagine how useful that would be?

No.

I would have to put this away until later. “Well then,” I sighed, “I guess we’ll be here all day?”

“Perhaps more,” the cambion said, “It does really all depend on how much can be done before your minds strain, or my abilities do. Your almost-grandsire has expressed understanding of the situation, dear reveler. Shall I put you to sleep?”

Play nice, Sirius.

Oh no, Lyssie. The cambion and I will be having words.

I rolled my eyes at him. “Just think: Harry’s birthday in two weeks, you’ll get to surprise him with those World Cup tickets Fudge couldn’t wait to give to you. Do not piss off the cambion and make it be forced to eat you or something.”
“I wouldn’t!”

You would.

I turned back to the cambion. “I’m ready.”

“Goodnight, then, dear reveler. If all goes well, you shall wake to a lighter mind.”

*I haven’t had a light mind since I was born, cambion.*

*You will, o reveler. I promised you my finest work in return for so interesting a study, and you shall have it. Cambion do not break our contracts, dear reveler. Not when you have so neatly tied me to you, hm?*

It was decidedly uncomfortable, having another voice in my head that wasn’t Sirius’. The cambion had technically been here first, but I was used to Sirius’ voice, the slight echo, the accompanying emotions and senses. The cambion’s voice was ringing and empty — a void in my head that didn’t feel natural. But I pushed the discomfort away, Occluding it into the muck of our landscape to be buried and forgotten (and hopefully cleaned up) and nodded to the cambion politely.

*I am trusting you.*

A laugh.

(That’s more true that you would ever want, the laugh seemed to say.)

*Sleep, dear one,* whispered the cambion.

The world started going dark. I felt drowsy and warm, barely noticing the cambion’s chaotically-patterned magic creeping around me gently, like vines growing onto me, tugging me down. I blinked at the spike of Sirius’ panic and the ripping growl of the werewolf, but there was nothing more after that — only murmuring voices — so I settled in the embrace of mesmerizing magic and darkening woods. The mindscape was blackening, the sky brightening, the wind and water dying down into silence, the fireflies blinking out of sight one-by-one…

(*Sleep.*)
Chapter 53

Chapter Notes

Early chapter BAM! :D Too early, in fact... Finally got back home to America, but the jetlag is strong, and my body still thinks we're on CET time. So yeah! Next chapter will be a little late. I'll probably post on tumblr when I finish it. Speaking of!

Like I said on tumblr: this one's full of dialogue and is purely a transition chapter, basically. (That's why it's longer than usual. And a little... choppy?) We're starting canon next chapter, boys, thank FUCK. Enjoy!

also here's some FAN ART that i keep forgetting to link, so please check it out. many thanks as always...

...

On the fourteenth of July, our mindscape was a mess. Flooded by my lake, the ground turning soft and sludgy, forest debris floating and rotting and making the entire place stink to high-heaven, a swamp. The dark trees were covered in this fungal… stuff, which was apparently me, except it pulsed to the exact beat of my heart — as the cambion not-so-helpfully informed me, that was super damn creepy, the fucking little troll — and there was mist everywhere that wasn’t the center meadow, obscuring everything and disguising it. The werewolf of our head was savage-looking, caked in mud and mysterious blood, and the sky didn’t seem as bright, and there were no comets.

The cambion put me to sleep and Sirius told me that, after he’d bitched at it — and gotten thoroughly annoyed with its utter lack of response besides a detached amusement, the condescending fuck (Sirius’ words, not mine) — the place had gone darker, the sky lighting up with the galaxies. There were only a few fireflies, the woods’ paths were completely pitch-black, the werewolf became more aggressive and had to be chained down by the cambion, the trees seemed to shoot up and grow more tangled and gnarled, there were quicksilver images flitting around the woods like ghosts, the fog thickened, and Sirius had felt extremely twitchy and somewhat lost until the sky lit up with comets. (He showed me his memory in great detail, later.) The cambion had looked at all of this, noting the differences between the mindscape when both of us were feeding it and when one (me) was more cut-off…

And then when I’d woken up the cambion had Sirius and I switch places.

(To Sirius’ extreme annoyance.)

The mindscape’s sky had dulled and darkened into something normal, with crimson and gold comets shooting by with every happy thought. The fireflies multiplied, lighting up the black woods. The fungus on the trees thickened, spreading like spiderwebs, floating in a strengthened breeze. The water level rose up, rippling and filthy. The wolf stood over me like a sentinel, but it was quiet and unmoving, only following me about, as if it were mindless. The paths in the woods
started to rise up, revealing cracked pavement under roots and the forest carpet, but not stone — it was like a road of roots, but cracked and dry, like wooden scales that caught on the fungus and the debris and tried to creep around your feet and pull you under.

The cambion had laughed.

“I had thought so, reveler,” it said between chuckles, “The other is suppressing your Occlumencic defenses. They’re weak, as you two are still connected, but here they are!”

You find it amusing that my mind is trying to drown you?

“I find it fascinating that your mind defers to the other, and these defenses are quiet when his are in place. The paths are clear, but they try to kill you—”

And in Sirius’… the paths are obscured. You can’t find them. They hide.

It had taken an entire day for the cambion to sort out what it could about our minds, with lots of switching between Sirius or I being dragged into deep unconsciousness. Remus had nearly gone feral when the cambion off-handedly mentioned, during a break for tea and blood (for us and the cambion, respectively), that the unconsciousness was more akin to it putting us in a deep coma, locking us down to near a near vegetable state — the closest thing to death it could get us to. Well, really, Sirius and Remus had nearly gone feral. I’d just sort of swallowed my tea and thought that it was a good damn thing the contract stipulated no grievous, knowing harm to either mind, body, or magic of the customers.

Because. You know. The cambion had the ability to put anyone whose mind it touched into a coma.

And it had done it while it was chatting pleasantly with Remus about the Waxing-Waning Effect of Lycanthropy.

Fuck.

Half of all the suffering I’d ever gone through or ever will probably paid off me stumbling across the cambion and keeping in its good graces. Because what the fuck. (No wonder cambion were illegal in Britain, good god what else could it do? It could’ve kept me in a coma for the rest of my natural life and milked me for blood whenever it liked! — A line of thought that made Sirius go pale and green and red in succession, with a bonus appearance of gold in his eyes.)

...

On the twenty-first of July, the cambion presented to us an idea:

“An interwoven mindscape?” Remus asked.

The cambion nodded. The blood in its teacup was less than it should’ve been, even if none of us had seen it drink.

“My first attempt was herding the different elements away from each other, but your mind resisted. Much too similar to separation, I suppose. One cannot organize without looking at individual components, but that was a childishly human attempt at this.” The cambion let its magic out, the
thing taking the shape of a two-dimensional shadow, curving around it; Sirius and I tracked the movement with our eyes, my godfather twitching at the sight — it was the magic that always chained down his wolf, after all, and it made him antsy to see it. “That attempt was doomed to failure, of course, but it would’ve been remiss of me to exclude the possibility of a convenient Occam’s Razor.”

Sirius was still picking that apart, while I nodded.

It was Remus who spoke, though, seeing as he was much less tired than we were — and less cringing at headaches, thankfully, which were a natural effect of rifling through our minds as much as we were doing. (The headaches were painful enough to border on migraines; there was a chamber pot in the corner that both Sirius and I had vomited into on separate occasions, in between sessions of mind shit. They lingered, too, abating probably by only the fourth day away from the cambion.)

“So now you are going to try to fix the link another way?” Remus asked.

“‘Fix the link’ implies destroying it,” the cambion said musingly, setting its empty tea cup down. I obligingly crooked a finger and had it float gently to me, Sirius reaching over to cast an absent-minded Numbing Charm on my arm while I flicked a weak Cutting Curse at my wrist. The cambion’s magic darted forward, thin enough to mimic a string but moving too crookedly to be natural, twisting with the blood and guiding it down to the tea cup without staining either myself or anything else. Remus was the one to lean over and mutter some sort of Healing charm when the cup was full, and remove the Numbing Charm as well.

“But you aren’t doing that.” Sirius stated the obvious.

The cambion picked up the tea cup, nodding in my direction in wordless thanks. We were all getting very efficient at this. “No… I am fixing your minds. Changing the link. Improving it. I cannot separate you two, for that breaks the contract. I cannot kill one or the other because that does the same. And I cannot organize without separating you two, at least temporarily, since that fulfils the latter.” The cambion sighed. “So I shall not organize. I shall cultivate.”

Sirius and I glanced at each other.

“Cultivate?” I asked.

It nodded. “You will need to come in more often, for this. And you no longer have to separate yourselves, or even stop yourselves from speaking to each other mentally. We have been thus far attempting to separate you two as much as possible so I can pick you out of each other and lay down a better foundation for a mindscape — create the rules for and equalize the connection, so to speak. But that will not work — your mind is too wild a thing, too resistant. No doubt in part because of how your link was solidified with lycanthope magic. No, I will allow the growth, and perform small, gentle manipulations: a pruning there, a cutting here, those sorts of things, until it has grown into something useful and safe for you little humans.”

“That sounds… extremely dangerous.” Remus said, disturbed.

“Oh, it is. Which is why you will have to come in more often. I must watch your minds much more closely, be much more thoughtful with what I do. I will likely need the two of you to help as well — you will both be exhausted for it. We are attempting to guide your minds’ spiral into becoming one entity; it wishes to be a tangle, and we must braid it, not cut it into pieces.” It heaved a put-upon sounding sigh, lifting the cup to the melting teeth of the mask and clacking the porcelain against the bone (at least we speculated that it was bone, polished too-white). “The Mind Arts is
usually built upon the details — complex and ground-up. It elicits more control. We must do the opposite, and encourage a rampaging link to grow the way we wish it to, continuously double-back to take care of the details. I daresay I might need to graft some of my magic into your mindscape to keep it running smoothly while you are away from me.”

Remus’ eyes went gold, though his face was calm. They were starting to glow, which was when you knew a werewolf was really thinking about killing you — made his scars stand out from his skin, pale in the weak source of light.

“Grafting… implies that you are transplanting part of yourself into their minds.”

The cambion was undeterred by the angry werewolf. “Correct.”

“Explain.”

(The book in Remus’ hands had a few new gouges in the leather from his nails. His voice dipped into a growl, there. Sirius and I both stilled, tense and wary, though Sirius felt a bit excited for a fight. He felt trapped and aggravated by the cambion, and had been sitting on his feet and taking care of business all summer in between seeing Harry once a week, and having to strain against our link then — he was frustrated, and I think the only reason he hadn’t run off half-cocked like he wanted was that I was hanging in the balance, too, and not only that, I would definitely murder him if I felt him doing something dumb.)

Irritatingly and admirably serene, the cambion did just that, and explained pleasantly, “The ideal would be that I would have access to the other or the reveler continuously, until this is finished. Of course… you have both expressed a wish for discretion, so the next best course of action would be for me to graft some of my magic to their minds to act in my place, and manage the link and its evolution. It will not be connected to me, not while it is separated… think of it as a construct, which I will give specific tasks to perform and certain information to collect, and when we meet again, I shall take it back into my magic and adjust what I must.”

As the cambion explain, it brought up a hand and two of the three of us watched its magic weave up its arm, coil just over its “palm”, condense, take odd, hard-lined shapes of animals and monsters’ faces; too many teeth, silent snarls, contorting unnaturally. It finished and the shape settled into a spider that was just a touch too geometric to be based off of a real species — its legs were long and knife-sharp, flexing in rhythm; the cambion was showing off, basically.

We all did take a moment to digest that, though.

If I was hearing this correctly, though…

The cambion could tear off pieces of its maybe-sentient magic, program them to do specific tasks, and then integrate whatever data they’d collected back into itself afterwards. This was like… Horcruxes, or something. No — it’s not like the cambion was splitting itself (and I wasn’t quite certain about it having a soul, being a half-demon and whatnot, that really wasn’t my area of expertise) but it was like it was… using its magic to, like. Make clones?

Fuck me. The cambion could make slightly stupider shadow clones in people’s heads.

Why the hell didn’t the thing just take over the world already? That wasn’t fair.

“And the interwoven mindscape will come from that?” I asked.

It nodded. “In essence, we are going to guide the minds to merge, and very gently adjust as they do. Repurpose this or that, increase one mind’s influence here, decrease the other’s there. There is
no stopping the entwining of your magic, so we shall just make sure that every strand braided works in your favor. Perhaps one strand will need to be coated with my magic to keep it from merging further, and we will have to invent something for your minds to replicate that ability. That is why my magic must be present; I will be the separating barrier, for I am an intruder in your world, and then we shall teach your magics how to copy what I do, to ensure lack of dependence. I am, after all, not allowed to hurt either of you without prior notice or consent if it’s within my abilities; an addiction to my magic would most certainly be damaging, and I daresay neither of you would enjoy or agree to such a thing. Not to mention, you have a clause in the contract regarding just this."

Sirius and I had both nodded vigorously at that. There was a stipulation in the contract that also said that the cambion wasn’t allowed to hide anything in our heads, especially pieces of itself or influences regarding itself, without us knowing and giving permission. For this… well, it sounded logical enough, and we both gave our permission to begin such a thing, even if Sirius’ was grudging and Remus argued vehemently against it for an hour or two.

There was no choice, really. Apparently our heads were too tangled.

_This does mean more contracts, though, doesn’t it?_

*(You bet your arse it does, Lyssie.)*

_Dammit._

And so we devised a new system (after we wrote up a new contract detailing specifics for the constructs). Sirius or I had to meet the cambion once every three days; whoever wasn’t there had to _not _be very stressed, and it was probably better if they were meditating — but _not _Occluding, at least not Occluding in attempt to isolate one’s mind — but it meant we didn’t draw too much attention to our activities, or our mind link.

Sirius visited Remus and Harry all the time, after all. And he had to sneak off to the Ministry and Gringotts to make token appearances, build his influence back up, address the Black properties and businesses, meet Nicolosia Zabini, all that. Sirius was busy and him being away was _fine_. More often than not, it was him going to the cambion after that.

I, on the other hand, could only chance it every now and then. Luna usually helped; the first time I’d seen her, she’d taken a long look at me and then told me exactly where her Floo powder was and that ‘Mr. Black can sneak his Sickles in between the couch cushions — we’ll find it eventually’ to pay her and her father back sneakily (I wondered if Luna was _also _a bit more Slytherin because of my influence… so many canon characters corrupted, just because I was a sneaky shit). If it wasn’t Luna, sometimes I could say I was visiting Remus, too; we still weren’t close, him and I, and I honestly didn’t know if we could be, considering all the very awkward history, but we both loved the same people and that was good enough. We respected each other, so I suppose I couldn’t ask for anything more.

By the time I was finally thirteen — officially a teenager again, yay (cue sarcasm) — we’d gone to the cambion seven times already, five times on the new schedule, and our mind was already _so much better_. Probably the best birthday present I could’ve gotten, really; it’s always nice to not be threatened with having one’s existence absorbed by a much-beloved godfather.

...
The first thing that had been done was to redirect the water.

The water was mine, my mind being dug up and polluted and flooding, trying to provide for the woods that were Sirius’. We couldn’t drain the water, or cut the trees down to stop their demand, but we could redirect it. We could carve out trenches as the cambion’s magic formed into barriers, giving us time to dig into the earth and tear everything out. At first, it was dirtying and tiring and we could barely do anything, the cambion leaving constructs of shapes damming the water and letting us work, inciting painful headaches and making us exhausted. Then the roots of the trees — cracked and scaled like serpents — began to take the shape of the canals and gorges we were tearing into the earth, smooth stones started to line the empty rivers, and trees moved and parted to let the paths through, water slowly being added as we worked, rising until we had a main river springing up from the newly-formed lake, twisting around the forest — even becoming a waterfall in some places — with canals branching out to reach every bit of the trees and feed them properly, stopping their ravenous hunger. The water cleaned up when we gave it a path to rage through, the stones held firm, and the roots of the trees lined the water and ponds and canals and would drag intruders into the depths if they came too close.

Sirius thought it was hilarious that my Occlumencic defenses were way more violent than his.

I pointed at his werewolf, who now really had to be chained down to be stopped from attacking the cambion the instant it started making constructs — and he couldn’t really refute that.

(“Misty and there’s still weird fungus everywhere, but at least it’s not a swamp anymore,” Sirius noted.

I shrugged. “It’s actually a lot more improved because of that.”

And we don’t get panicky when we’re far from each other anymore.

Thank Merlin for that. Dependency issues would be terrible for a new Lord and a Hogwarts student.

The cambion had chuckled at us. “These constructs can be removed now. They were only redirecting the water, and now that all is well, they can be used for other things. The drowning world symbolized your minds’ dependency on another, the reveler’s lifeblood being fed and dirtied by yours, dear other.”

“What of the fungus stuff, then? Isn’t that also Lys’?” Sirius asked.

“In a way. It is also yours, however. That is why it takes the form of an organism that knows nothing but to suck the life out of others, and shies away from the sun. An unhealthy growth. We shall deal with that soon.”

The worst seems to have passed, though.

Seems to. The water was just the most visible problem.

It did become easier once we’d mapped out the entire forest, though, and let the water trickle through the canals and not just the river. Like our heads were realizing we were giving them a way to... weave together, not melt.

“Well-put, dear reveler,” the cambion said, “For that is exactly what we are trying to do.”
Sirius grumbled. **I guess it was worth the headaches that kept us up at night.**

*Glamours to hide the bags under our eyes was a good idea. We ought to thank Remus, later.*)

That took three sessions.

Three of the *five.*

The forest was, once again, a *forest* instead of a budding swamp. The cambion had decided to shift some shit around and so the lake was no longer in the center of the woods. Instead, there was the lake — which was big, but not so big that we couldn’t see the other side of the shore, and there was even a little baby island vaguely in the middle — and then there were two clearings. One looked like Sirius’ original clearing, albeit a little overgrown, and the other was like our clearing before the flooding — a small little canal passed through, now. Everywhere you walked, there was the sound of the river or a canal.

But the forest was still oddly dark, the trees too large and gnarled and covered in white fungus that looked like spores and spread like bone-colored cell tissue, the mist was thickening in random places, silver flitting in between the trees. The canopy of the trees could be thick enough that you couldn’t see the sky or the comets, and the fireflies always fled the mist. Our mind was better, not fixed. It hadn’t even gone back to what it was before, either — it was still growing, we just had to decided how and guide it there as much as possible.

So the second thing that was done was do something about the fungus.

And that’s what I was still doing, when my and Ginny’s birthdays came around.

…”

“**Well, see, we can’t just rip the fungus out. That hurts the shit out of my head, and it grows over anyways… And they’re fed by the trees, but it’s not like we can just cut the trees down… It’s not like the fungus is killing trees, they’re just feeding off it…”**

“Some of it, the older parts, are hardening. Like the fungus is protecting the trees, after a while.” Sirius noted.

I wasn’t surprised that he was suddenly behind me. I’d felt it the moment he entered the mindscape; I could sense him even better when he waded through the water, or walked along it — my mental senses were stronger where the water was concentrated. I imagine it was the same of Sirius with his trees — he had to guess a little more when it came to mentally overseeing the water, but we still both maintained control, even if the mist and the darkness made it fuzzy from time to time.

I hummed, poking at the white spores. A spider the size of my head scuttled over the area, its form flat as shadow and pulsing with neon colors, blooming in geometric shapes. A construct of the cambion’s — one of three, blank spots in my almost omnipotent awareness — was sticking close to the fungus, observing it. This one followed me as I experimented with the soft, silver stuff, likely recording what was going on, so the cambion would be able to determine the best course of action to contain it later.

We’d been a bit hesitant to allow the cambion to graft its magic onto ours, but in the end, and with
another new contract whipped up, we allowed it. I’d gotten used to the blank spots the cambion made in our head, but Sirius… well, Sirius grimaced at the sight of the construct, distrust radiating off him in waves, the werewolf growling low behind him.

**This isn’t what I came here to get you for, by the way.**

“Oh?”

I experimentally tore a piece of the fungus away. It withered in my hands and dissolved into dust, blowing away with the breeze. A little pulse of pain in my head warned me, but it went away quickly enough.

**Happy birthday, Lys.**

I blinked.

*Oh, it’s Ginny’s birthday.*

Sirius frowned. “Not yours…? Oh. OH. That’s rare — it’s really auspicious when twins are born on different days, you know.”

I turned to grin at him. “We both consider it our birthday anyways, since we were only a few minutes apart — Ginny was born really late on the 11th, and I followed twenty minutes later, after midnight on the 12th. So both days belong to us. Fred and George are always pissed that we get two days and they have to share one.” *But I mean, they get April 1st, and that’s so utterly perfect for them, they’d just ruin it if they stole April 2nd, too, don’t you think?*

**Too right, Lyssie,** Sirius thought dryly. “You’re thirteen, now. Well… soon. That comes with another magical growth spurt, you know. And a party, but you already knew that.”

Another one? I groaned. “The last growth spurt nearly tore my Occlumency barriers down!”

“Twelve is important, though I don’t know why it hit you that hard. Usually affects wizards and witches of Asian heritage more than us, since a lot of their purebloods’ grimoire magicks and rituals are based in their astrology and all that.”

“Well, I suppose I ought to wake up and greet Ginny, then.” I sighed, looking regretfully at the spider construct and the fungus of this tree, still soft and fuzzy.

Sirius shook his head. **Might as well. Day after your actual birthday, I think we can both swing a visit to Knockturn — tell your Mum I’m picking you out a present, which I really am since my other present isn’t for your family’s eyes, and we can grab Remus and make the appointment.**

*Oh good, he’s been complaining that your sessions are always slower since you continuously argue with the cambion.*

“Not my fault,” Sirius muttered darkly, “It’s nice to you, Lys, but it likes poking at old wounds for me. Always making snide remarks about Pettigrew or Remus, or my mum, or Reggie, or anything that I really don’t want to think about before we fix our heads.”

I frowned. That, at least, was true. (And a terrible example of unhealthy repression, not that I could really talk.) The cambion was a touch crueler to the werewolves than it was to me. I was a valued customer that provided a valuable payment — and I was purely human. I think the cambion had a
grudge against werewolves, though; some sort of passing discrimination. The two’s hostility probably didn’t help, but I didn’t think their reactions to the cambion was irrational. If anything, my calmness around it was more irrational.

But it wasn’t like I had control over the thing.

Sirius sighed and shook his head. I **know you don’t.**

I reached forward to touch Sirius’ arm gently. “C’mon, Sirius. Let’s go and celebrate. Forget the cambion for a bit. Lemme go ambush Ginny awake, get smacked by a pillow, and then we can go over some of your letters and paperwork before breakfast.”

“Business as usual, then?” Sirius asked, smiling and appreciating my change of subject.

*Of course.*

Exiting the mindscape used to give us full-fledged panic attacks — being so close together and then suddenly not, it was like we realized we were missing a limb or something. With the cambion’s help and the ordering of the water in our mindscape, we both took sharp breaths as we realized we were alone. I felt Sirius’ hand dart out to his wand, on his (Bill’s old?) bedside table. I myself tightened my hold on Ginny, who had snuck into my covers sometime in the night. We both turned our gazes towards each other, regardless of the floors and walls in our way, hungrily tracking the magic with our Soothsayers’ eyes.

Our colors were mixed together ridiculously. In fact…

*Sirius, I think our colors reflect in the mindscape’s sky.*

( *That’s… alarming, but makes a lot of sense. Darker, in our sky, though.* )

*And no stars here. But I can See it.*

Dark, dark indigo and blue, deep crimson on the edges, silvery strings and rings of gold, pulses of maroon and royal red, silver-green as soft as leaves, sprinklings of purple… Our colors were an impossible galaxy, with tiny, soft patches of pastel flowers growing and fading — Light influences from others, I could pick out Luna and Harper and much of my family (plum purple and that gradient orange and shining, candy red) and even bits of Harry Potter and Remus and…

*I’ve never known who that blue belonged to. It’s yours.*

( *Oh… I think… I think that’s… James.* )

Ah. I see.

( *Blue-purple-grey, sort of, right? That’s… that’s definitely James.* )

I reached along the link comfortingly. Grief darkened the link, made it sit heavy between us; Sirius started to tremble, his head fogging over gently. He wasn’t sinking into an episode, reliving dementor hell, but it was close.

I couldn’t have that. I hoped the fireflies and the comets were out in our head. *He lives in you, you know.*

Sirius smiled. Then he snorted. ( *I’d say that bloody possessed book does the same for you, but that’s not nearly as comforting as what you’re trying to do.* )
It was a lot more comforting than he thought, I think. But I kept that to myself. Sirius was quite irritated with my almost getting my soul stolen before we met. He didn’t trust a “baby Voldemort” at all, and didn’t see value in the Horcrux — only threat. An extremely fair judgement, considering, but… I didn’t share much of my memories with Tom because… Well. It was private, and Sirius wasn’t interested in seeing those memories or understanding them, and that was that.

(It was a bit relieving that we could still separate a little. That we weren’t becoming the same person, or something like that. There were still parts of our heads that were only ours, even if we borrowed from each other worse than the demon twins. I knew Sirius thought it was good I couldn’t see his memories as easily as he could mine; in the end, I knew it was good, too. Mind link or not, we were separate people. I already felt bad enough that his way of thinking was so influenced by mine — it was like I manipulated him into my point of view while he was mentally weak and partially-insane, only it was completely accidental and, at the time, more beneficial than not.)

( Go wake your sister. I think I hear Molly cooking downstairs. I definitely smell it. )

I leaned into Sirius’ senses and agreed, and as he tumbled out of bed to look slightly presentable, I shook at Ginny’s shoulder gently.

She groaned into her pillow — dragged it over, too, I guess — and mumbled something incoherent.

“Wake up, Gin,” I whispered, “You’re thirteen today!”

Ginny was not a morning person. At least, not immediately. “‘M not ‘teen ’til somethin’ like eleve’ or somethin’.” She said, voice muffled.

“Yes, but if you told Mum that, she wouldn’t be cooking our favorites for breakfast, and considering how many teenage brothers we’ve got, we really ought to be downstairs hoarding it all before it’s gone,” I said, grinning at her.

“Hot cocoa?” she asked.

I dipped into Sirius’ senses again. He swatted at me mentally in fake annoyance, but took a deep breath to get all the scents of the house in.

I laughed at Ginny. “Yes, there’s hot cocoa.”

She finally shifted a little, exposing a groggy, brown eye. “How d’you know?”

A cocky smirk I copied off of Malfoy and Lu, at their worst. “I know everything. I’m a Slytherin, after all.”

“Guhhhhh… snake in my bed…”

“I’m a snake in my own bed, thank you very much. More like a lion in mine. When are you going to stop sneaking into my bed? I haven’t had nightmares in a long time.”

Months, really. Ever since Sirius and I forged the link; every time we started to get truly frightened or lost in our heads, usually the other sensed it and comforted immediately. Or our heads did it automatically, in Sirius’ case, where he could naturally draw on my memories of my family — and sometimes my boys — to stabilize himself. Actually, sometimes even the werewolf (who went still unnamed, because Sirius was a lazy berk) would howl enough to pull us from sleep into the mindscape, where we could calm down and be stalked by the werewolf in its version of somewhat-creepy comfort; I never touched the werewolf if I could help it, since it was mostly Sirius’, but
Sirius could be found occasionally running his hand through its dark fur and muttering something insulting but partly fond to it.

Point was: nightmares had stopped. Seer visions were different, but those... well, after-nightmares comfort usually worked just as well, and just as discreetly.

“When it stops being comfy,” Ginny replied, rubbing her eyes and starting to actually wake up.

“C’mon, birthday girl,” I said laughingly, kicking our blankets off, “We’ve got a whole day of good food and laziness ahead of us, and then presents at midnight tonight!” Since midnight of the 12th was in between both our birthdays.

(Not going to mention that you got Molly to let all of Ginny’s friends over?)

It’s payback. And she Floo calls them often enough, but I know Gin misses Morag, Nicola, and Sarah.

(She won’t cry. Ginny likes her friends, but you love yours, Lyssie. )

It’s the closest I’ll get without dragging Harry over here. And he’s coming soon, anyways, for the World Cup.

(Two weeks until the Cup.)

And three until Hogwarts. And then the Triwizard Tournament.

There was a jolt of surprise and disappointment. Sirius was scowling as he thundered down the stairs, intent on the kitchen to help Mum. (How did you-? Never mind. You cheating cheat. Slytherining Seer.)

I snickered at him mentally. Then I grinned evilly. Speaking of cheating... I know who wins the Cup.

Pure. Panic.

(Noooooooo! If you tell me, Lyssie, I’ll never forgive you! )

I even know how!

(Don’t think it! Don’t you dare! )

Krum-

Our bedroom door flew open with a BANG! It felt like the whole house shook, with how hard the door hit the wall. I wouldn’t be surprised if the plaster was cracked or something.

“HAPPY BIRTHDAY!” Sirius roared into the room, scaring the bloody hell out of Ginny, and making me laugh hysterically.

He was grinning, but there was a grudge in his head and a desperation in his voice that he couldn’t quite cover up from me. Ginny starting chucking shit at Sirius in annoyance, and he was cowering away from my hot-tempered sister (who had grown to see Sirius as that insane uncle or ridiculous cousin, and had thusly redacted her initial stranger-shyness) who was yelling at him for scaring her. (“You’re lucky we were already up, Sirius, or I would’ve hexed you!” “You have the Trace on your wand-” “I would’ve made Lyssie hex you
WANDLESSLY!”) Sirius was feeling nothing but relief in his head, though, even as Ginny starting throwing stuffed animals at his retreating, laughing figure.

Fine. I’ll be nice. I sent him a very smug feeling, and grinned to myself as I donned a jumper over my pajamas. It’s my birthday, after all.

( You’re a menace, ) Sirius hissed, not quite hiding his amusement, ( See if I give you your present, now! )

Viktor Krum-

( I’VE GOT EVERYTHING WE NEED TO TAKE THE TRACE OFF YOUR WAND! )

A beat.

I adore you.

( That’s what I thought. Happy birthday, you damn menace. Welcome to being a teenager. )

...

“Tell me why you want to move into your ancestral home, again, Sirius?”

Sirius grimaced. “Dumbledore asked—”

Remus raised a brow over his cup of tea. “You’ve never cared what Dumbledore’s thought before. Well,” he amended, “Not after Azkaban.”

( Not after he let one of the best fighters in the Order get thrown into prison without giving me the benefit of the doubt? No, not after Azkaban, ) Sirius thought bitterly, not that I blamed him in the slightest.

You’re technically not moving in, really, I pointed out, hoping to distract him from another rant about Alby; I was mad at the guy, but not as mad as Sirius was, and it was getting increasingly awkward listening to how much Sirius wanted to punch him.

“I’m technically not moving in, Moony.” Sirius repeated after me, making me roll my eyes, “I’m just cleaning it up. Dumbledore asked me if it wouldn’t be a preferable, with all the wards and enchantments the place’s got. It’s… it’ll be a safe house.”

Mum pursed her lips, setting down another cup of tea for Dad, who smiled at her gratefully.

“Safe is relative,” she muttered, “It’s the ancestral seat of a very Dark family, abandoned for who knows how many years. And that mad House Elf you were talking about! Don’t see why a safe house is even necessary, or why you have to provide it, the Headmaster shouldn’t even have the right to ask you after what he did—”

Dad frowned. “Why is Albus asking you to make a safe house? What for?”

( This Dumbledore excuse gets thinner and thinner by the minute, Lys. )
Sirius had gleefully jumped on the opportunity to order Alby around, of course, and Alby wouldn’t refuse if he knew A) I was really the one asking for it, why the hell would Sirius ever want to go back to the Black ancestral home? and B) he owed us big-time after the trial, but the explanation could wait for now. Despite Sirius’ hate for the place, the Black ancestral home — Grimmauld Place, as it so happened — was protected, private, and a wealth of knowledge and old artifacts and history that could only be helpful. The rest could be tossed out or put in storage or whatever; we’d take what was useful and not horribly morally demented, and that would be the legacy of the Blacks from now on: whatever shit their basically-bloodtraitor son and bloodtraitor cousin Guinevere Weasley picked through.

That was a pretty good method of revenge, I thought. Sirius was not too convinced, but he went along with it, if only thoughtlessly because the first part of all of this meant he could be rude to Alby without anyone yelling at him.

( Why does it have to be my house, anyways? I hate that place. ) Sirius grumbled, predictably, of course.

It’s a symbol, Sirius, I pointed out tiredly, for what seemed the millionth time, Even if you’re not taking the Wizengamot seat, you’re still the Paterfamilias and the Lord. Giving Andromeda access to the place, giving yourself a place to actually receive politically important visitors and shit… that’s important.

( It’s a load of pureblood bullshit, is what it is. )

Pureblood bullshit you need to legitimize yourself. That, and I want a damn place to practice dueling.

( Of course this is about the wand magic. )

Alright, just shut up and repeat what I say, with your own special flair, of course…

“Dumbledore screwed me over,” Sirius said flatly, “But I’m on his side. He wants what I want in the wizarding world, at least politically. But he’s never had an Ancient and Noble House firmly in his corner. The Longbottoms went to ground after Frank and Alice’s… attack, the Bones’ is Ancient but no longer Noble, you Weasleys are the same… Grey politics have all but fallen apart, because while Dumbledore is a powerful figure, he hasn’t got any close allies that can say the same. Legitimizing the Blacks, under my leadership and Andy’s — both of us Dark, but with politics that align with Dumbledore’s — it’d solidify his side and give us more room to push through the laws we want.”

Mum frowned. She had never been interested in politics; Dad was only barely more involved, being an actual Ministry worker.

“Dumbledore is Light,” said Mum.

“His politics aren’t.” Remus pointed out this time, making me grin; Remus definitely knew that I was guiding Sirius along in the ‘adult only’ conversation happening late at night, “Light politics want severe limitation if not eradication of the…” Remus grimaced, here, “…subhuman creature protection laws, so to speak. Grey politics demand more rights for magical creatures and those with their heritage… some extremists want to give goblins wands.”

“Ridiculous,” Mum exclaimed, “They’d declare war on the wizarding world in a heartbeat!
They’d- They’d slaughter us all!”

“Which is why no one sides Grey,” Sirius said, “But that’s the most extreme version. Ever wonder why there’s no part-humans at Hogwarts? In the Ministry of Magic — especially those dealing with diplomatic relations between Merfolk clans or the centaur tribes or vampire covens or any of that? Ministry laws. Dark and Light politics alike.”

Dad rubbed his temples. “The Weasley Family has never been involved with this sort of thing.”

*Before Esperaunce, we were.*

“You used to,” Sirius pointed out, echoing my thoughts.

Dad’s eyes flashed. “And then we sided with the losing side of another war, and our ringleader was labeled a Dark Lord, and my House fell to pieces trying to prove to the world we were Light, throwing ourselves against Grindelwald and You-Know-Who like moths to a flame.” He said, voice low and threatening.

“Arthur,” Mum sighed, laying a hand on Dad’s shoulder.

Sirius raised his hands. “I’m not saying anything about that. I don’t even believe Esperaunce was truly a Dark Lord — the man wanted Muggleborn rights and Muggle integration, he was as bloodtraitor as they come. But the point is this: Esperaunce tried to change the world through war, and it didn’t work. Killed a whole bunch of Muggles and wizards alike for nothing. Dumbledore’s trying through politics, but he hasn’t had a lot of success, even as the defeater of Grindelwald. But with the House of Black backing him completely…”

“You wouldn’t be subordinate to Dumbledore,” Remus said accusingly.

( *Yeah, not over my dead body,* ) Sirius mumbled inwardly.

Outwardly, however, Sirius just growled. “I’m not. I won’t be used. But this is why Dumbledore asked me to fix up the ancestral home — it’s not so much a safe house as it will be a political front and tool.”

Mum pursed her lips. “I suppose Andromeda put you up to this?”

“You hate politics,” Dad said, amused.

( *Well, I can’t rightly say that YOU put me up to this, can I? Moony definitely knows, though.* )

*If it wasn’t me, it would’ve been Andromeda. She’s taking your Wizengamot seat, isn’t she? She’s definitely thinking about these kinds of things. In fact, I don’t know why you aren’t, because a lot of this shit I got from parsing through your memories of lessons and politics!*  

( *I don’t actually like politics, Lyssie. Thank Merlin, Morgana, and Mordred that Andy has a head for these sorts of things and is bored enough after raising Tonks that she’ll take over. Remind me that you two can never meet.* )

You got a letter from her yesterday where she asked to meet me.

“Andy takes this much more seriously than I do,” Sirius hedged, taking a deep swig of tea. He had hoped Mum spiked it, and such hopes were, as always, dashed. “So when the kids go off to Hogwarts, I’ll be headed out to the actual house of Black. There will always be room for you there, of course, if you ever need it. Two of the rooms have Lys and Harry’s names on them already.”
Dad grinned a little. “I was a little alarmed when you asked to be named Lys’ godfather, you know.”

“But you’re not, anymore?” Sirius asked hopefully.

Mum rolled her eyes. “Oh, we are.”

Remus snorted into his tea, and Sirius pouted.

“But she feels at home with you. More than I know, I think, sometimes,” Dad went on, sharp eyes assessing though his expression was friendly.

(Dammit, I swear he knows about the mind link and is just screwing with us.)

There’s no way. He’d kill you if he knew. He’d AK you then and there.

(Oh, because that’s comforting…)

“Well,” Dad sighed, relaxing a little and sipping at his tea, “I know you’ll take care of her. And of Harry. Let me know if you need a hand with anything in that house of yours — my specialty IS, after all, enchanted items. The more Muggle they are, the better.” Dad brightened at the mention of his favorite hobby in the world. “And you are still going to the Cup with us, right?”

“If you two had twice the amount of children, I could bring ‘em all and still have tickets left over,” Sirius said with a laugh.

“I reckon we would’ve gone mad if that were the case,” Dad muttered into his tea.

“Two Guineveres,” Remus mused, eyes playful as he glanced at Sirius, then at Mum and Dad, “You two must have been very grateful that Ginevra was different from her little sister. The world couldn’t handle another one.”

Remus! You dick!

Sirius was laughed uproariously in our head.

Lupin just smirked at him, and basically me. (It was more than a little nice, to have Remus teasing me. Meant he was a little less stiff and awkward, though he truly needed to use Sirius as a literal middle man to get there.)

Mum sighed. “You know, at first, we were happy that Lyssie didn’t take after Ginny. She’d always been quieter, more mature…”

“It’s always the quiet ones, dear,” Dad said sympathetically.

“The demon twins were angels when they were babies. I should’ve known…” Mum mumbled.

Sirius snickered and set down his cup. “Right, then. I’ll see you tomorrow, then, to pick Harry up? He wrote that he wanted to talk to me, today, so I might go off a little early to see him. The Dursleys will be right pleased to hear that he’s leaving for the school year.”

Remus’ eyes went gold. “If they say it to his face again…”

“Then Harry will know they’re thinking it,” Sirius said sharply, “Better they say it aloud and I get to hex them and make the kid laugh.”
Mum slapped Sirius with a dishtowel. “Sirius! We do not. Hex. Muggles!”

“Of course we don’t.” Sirius said with a grin.

She eyed him distrustfully. “Now I’m more than a little alarmed. I know that look. And here I thought you would be the bad influence on Lys.”

(Nothing but a good influence, I say. Though, technically, anything that wasn’t the wreck my mind was was good.)

You were NOT crazy. You were… lost.

(Same thing.)

“You’re an angel for raising her, Molly. In fact: you’re just an angel.”

Dad crooked a smile. “No flirting with my wife, Sirius.”

Sirius laughed. “And you’re practically the second coming of Merlin, Arthur.”

“No flirting with Molly’s husband, Sirius.” Remus said, slapping a hand to his face and not quite managing to hide the grin.

Stop flirting with either of my parents, idiot, I put in.

Not that Sirius actually had any intentions towards anyone of that nature, but he did like to compliment my parents a lot. It made him feel better about mooching off of them for so long, despite the fact that he was helping pay for the Burrow’s upkeep and continuously spoiling me and Harry (Mum and Dad’s practically-adopted-son) and generally spending time with us Weasley kids when they were too busy. It made him feel like he was back before Azkaban, because apparently he liked to flirt with Mum during Order of the Phoenix meetings and during actual firefight just to irritate other people.

Really… it grounded him, to my surprise. He tended not to when my siblings were about, but Mum and Dad understood that he was scrabbling for footholds in the present, or at least a foothold in our household, and this was what he found. After bowing to my mother and thanking her the first time he’d ever come to our house, it was nice to see him comfortable. I hadn’t even know that they had a friendship of sorts before Azkaban.

(I can’t help that your parents are lovely, Lys.) Sirius said teasingly.

In the mindscape, I stood up from looking at the hardened, white roots of a tree, and I crossed my arms, pretending to be unimpressed. You can help whether you’re flirting with them or not. My parents are very pretty people but I can and will castrate you. Josie taught me the spell.

(Jesus Christ that’s terrifying.)

“We’ll Floo over sometime in the late morning, Sirius,” Dad offered, “I’ll have the demon twins and Ron with me, I suppose. Unless any of them want to go earlier, with you.”

“Doubt any of them will be awake that early,” Mum said, waving her wand and magicking all the dirty cups into the sink.

“I wouldn’t be,” Sirius said agreeably, “Good night, then, you two. I’ll see Moony off at the fireplace and head up, if it’s all the same. Might do a bit of packing, while I’m awake.”
There were two choruses of good night’s from my parents, and then Sirius and Remus were in the living room.

“I know that was all you, Guinevere,” Remus said, looking through Sirius eyes to glare reproachfully at me.

Sirius grinned and shrugged. “She’s not listening. Too busy helping the bloody constructs fix up the spores.”

I was indeed doing that, but I was also listening. True and untrue. After all… the cambion had devised a way to keep the fungus down. It was a representation of the link, and of my memories and experiences being fed into Sirius’ mind, so we couldn’t get rid of it, but we could certainly lessen it; control it. The spider constructs had been destroyed, and instead, there were… well, in the same form of cambion-magic, there were tiny quetzalcoatlts flying around — about as long as I was tall, but as thin as my bicep at their thickest — weaving with the fireflies, somehow curling around tree branches and fungus and eating the stuff without actually… hurting me?

I didn’t get it. They were doing something before eating that made it so I wasn’t hurting, and neither was Sirius, but I hadn’t figured it out, yet. I would, so Sirius and I could create our own mental constructs to mimic the cambion, but it was taking a bit, and there were other aspects of the mind link we were helping with.

Remus sighed. “While she’s supposed to be sleeping, too. You two really shouldn’t be using glamour like this. Aren’t you exhausted?”

“Yeah, but we’ve gotten used to being tired. Take naps and meditate where we can, too. For the glamour… well, Lys has got a lot of magic to spare, even when mine’s behaving oddly. Magic… doesn’t feel quite the same, with the… link. Especially what we’re doing now.”

*It didn’t feel the same after Azkaban, probably, but you were too out of it to notice.*

(Too crazy to notice, you mean.)

*I really don’t enjoy you calling yourself that.*

Sirius ignored me. “I’m just getting used to it again. Plus, new werewolf and all that…”

Remus winced. “Yes. That would… also change things.”

*Dammit, Sirius, look what you’ve done.*

(He’s going to have to get over it some time. We’ve transformed together for months!)

*Yet you still haven’t named your wolf.*

Remus looked amused, but was trying not to be obvious about it. To Sirius, and me now I suppose, it was a very familiar expression. “I know that look. Guinevere is scolding you.”

Sirius frowned. “Is it that obvious?”

“When you know what to look for. You made the same face when Lily yelled at you during the war. Or when Marlene caught you trying to sneak off without being seen by her or Madam Pomfrey. What is it this time?”

“She’s saying I should name my wolf.”
The older werewolf shrugged. “Mine didn’t have a name until James gave it one.”

Because Remus obviously rejected it until then, which is probably why he has that many damn scars on himself. I put in.

I had read up on werewolves, and so had Sirius; Remus, apparently, had never done so when he was a child — his parents tried to deny he was a werewolf up until the moons, and then they just happened to have a rather loud creature in the basement for three nights. Werewolves — their mental manifestations, which automatically grant a layer of Occlumencic defense — really don’t like when their human hosts reject them. They get antsier, more violent, more prone to self-destruction and blood frenzy. Naming your wolf is a good way of connecting to it, tempering it.

“If it weren’t for…” Remus muttered.

Sirius pressed, “What?”

Remus smiled weakly. “Something the cambion said, quite a bit ago. With… Guinevere, standing with your wolf with her hand in its jaws… It reminds me of the old Norse stories. Fenriswolf and Tyr, you know? But… my sire…”

“Fenrir Greyback,” Sirius growled.

He nodded.

Sirius snorted. “I wouldn’t wanna name him after that bastard.”

You could be close, if you wanted?

( Hm? )

I shrugged. Fenriswolf has other names, doesn’t he? All mythological figures do. It’s fitting to name him after the wolf that was said to be a creature of a swamp. Just like our mindscape at its worst, right? I kinda like it.

“Lys says Fenriswolf could have other names or titles.” Sirius said.

Remus frowned thoughtfully. “There were… There was Hróðvitnir, or Vánagandr. Fame-wolf and ‘monster of the river’, I think? I’m not sure, it’s been a while since I studied the Poetic Edda… Or any of the Eddas, really.”

Vána. I said immediately.

( What? )

It’s also a Lord of the Rings reference. Also, monster of the river — it’s got both of us in there. C’mon, Sirius, it’s perfect! The cambion said even if he was mostly yours, he was also a little bit of me, and always would be. He’s still got my scars!

“Lys likes Vána.”

Remus snorted. “The Queen of Flowers? I suppose I’m glad I stuck with Moony, then.”

“Wh-” ( You gave me a girl’s name! )

Holy shit, Remus read Lord of the Rings- She’s a goddess, her husband was the Valar of the hunt, that’s cool as fuck!
Vána likes it.

The wolf in our mindscape looked actually quite pleased, huddled around me. He was a lot cleaner and neater after fixing the swamp and the river. I patted his snout and he blinked golden, glowing eyes at me, but nothing else. There were loose, cambion-produced chains around his neck, weighing him down, but he seemed more or less calm now that one of us was actually in the mindscape with him. Vána only really got pissed at the constructs when neither owner of the ‘scape was there to allow it; the werewolf snuffed as I thought that, making me sort of wonder if it wasn’t growing closer to me, reacting more to my thoughts rather than just guard me silently. I smirked at Sirius.

Yes, he does.

Because Vána’s part of me, too, and Moony is only Remus’. Also, you refused to call him that in remembrance of your dog Animagus. You were pissed at him for a long time for basically eating the poor thing.

Sirius groaned. “I guess my wolf’s a queen of flowers, now,” he mumbled.

Remus gave him a pat on the back, though he didn’t look entirely that sympathetic. “It’s not all bad, Sirius. Think of the World Cup tomorrow.”

“Which I can’t even enjoy properly because I’ve got to double back to go see the cambion. Who, in the end, is the reason why my badass werewolf is now named after a flower goddess from a fictional Muggle book series. Along with you.”

Be nice to Vána and Remus.

Remus shook his head. He couldn’t hear the argument, but he could probably imagine it well enough. “Good night, Sirius, Guinevere.”

Good night!

“She says good night. And I say you’re a bastard.”

“Of course you do.”

With a flare of green Floo flames, Remus was gone. Mum and Dad had already trudged upstairs, studiously ignoring Remus and Sirius’ hushed conversation before the fireplace, so Sirius flicked out his wand and started putting out the lights, grumbling the entire time. He wasn’t that mad about it. The name was pretty good, all things considered — he didn’t want to name the werewolf Fenris, after all. Much too close to the bastard who ruined Remus’ childhood, there.

Something will happen at the World Cup tomorrow. I warned as soon as all the lights were off in the Burrow, looking up at the mist beginning to crowd the patch of forest I was standing in. Vána edged closer to me, sniffing the air and seemingly waiting for a threat.
Sirius’ lightheartedness slipped away in a second. (What do you mean?)

Purebloods partying together. Old purebloods, drunk and celebratory and together.

A flash of anger and disgust. (Death Eaters, then. Are we allowed to stop it?)

I’m not even sure how we’d go about doing that, or when it really starts. But I See flashes of masks, fires. Screaming. No one dies, I don’t think.

(Oh, so it’s just a bit of fun, is it?)

You know I don’t think that.

(Sorry. It’s just… Do any of ours get hurt?)

I hummed a little. A quetzalcoatl construct latched onto my arm, curled around me, searching for something to eat. It slithered off into the air, wings beating — even though it didn’t use wings to fly — and not quite disappearing. There were fifteen of these things in the mindscape, blank spots to my head. Vána was nearly pressed against me as the mist thickened and the fireflies were all but gone, silver ghosts fluttering around the shadows of the trees, fast enough that you’d blink and they were gone.

No, I don’t believe so. Scared, sure. But as much as that pisses me off, like I said… I don’t know how to stop it, and it’s not terrible enough that I want to push my Sight and find out how. That said, I probably wouldn’t be able to.

(Why the warning?)

Keep your wand about you, that’s all.

(Oh, then I’m allowed to fight?)

There was a bit of bloodthirsty eagerness, there. I knew the feeling. It would be nice to be able to attack some Death Eaters without any consequence, especially ones who would terrorize any of mine. That, and Sirius was just… antsy. And a bit more violent and quick to move than I was.

I nodded. If you go out to meet the ones causing trouble, then you’ll be fine. I don’t think any of them will be caught, though. There will be a lot. Dozens.

(I’ll be ready.)

Don’t shoot to kill. Choices get weird when you do.

(No AKs or Cutting Curses, then.)

And stay away from the forest.

Sirius grimaced. (Something important happening there, then?)

I imagined a green skull in the sky, and kept that thought away from Sirius carefully. My Sight nudged a few more examples into my head, making me see the decrepit face, the crooked teeth, the serpent coiling around the bones, the glow of the fires. I Saw running and trampling feet, the Muggles spinning in the air and crying out, my sister clutching at my hand. I Saw Lu darting out of his tent, Nate sitting still as stone in his, their wands in hand and fear in their eyes — as much as they tried to hide it, of course, and they did.
My heart hurt, seeing that. But I took a deep breath and cleared the visions away.

Destiny, I answered Sirius, And I don’t intend on tangling with her. Not for this one.

( You do what you need to do, Lys. And I’ll do the same. I don’t have to use lethal spells to make the Death Eaters regret ruining my godson’s first Quidditch World Cup. )
Chapter 54

Chapter Summary

WAHAHAHA so the chapter’s twice as long as usual to make up for how long it took. Also, I literally finished it 2 seconds ago, so it's probably shit quality. :'D

Let's goddamn get canon started,fellas! :D Please enjoy, and my heartfelt and eternal thanks to returning readers, and especially those who comment! Y'all know who you are! Well, really, all my readers -- old and new -- are much beloved, so please know I literally only write this fic to please y'all at this point, haha! Thanks and see ya in the comments! :')

... 

The feeling of your feet getting hot under the blankets, damp with sweat and catching on the cloth, but the rest of you being perfectly normal temperature? Or even cold? Yeah, that feeling was the fucking worst. Waking up to that sucked.

Waking up to high-pitched squealing and my bed bouncing — jarring me out of the mindscape — and noise filtering up from downstairs wasn’t exactly pleasant, either.

“BILL! CHARLIE!”

Waking up to my biggest brothers, though?

My eyes snapped open and my Mage Sight flicked on, strong enough to make me dizzy — though that might’ve been me standing up too fast, too. I followed the gentle clouds of jungle-green and lime and soft yellow and sunset orange and teal, then the mauve-steel-blue-salmon-rose-peach, both of them ringed with gold and pulsing with gentle blues and flash-quick reds. I followed them all the way to the grinning men they belonged to, the taller with his arms wrapped around a laughing Ginny and the stockier with his arms open and waiting.

“Oh.” I said stupidly, body lunging for Charlie and smiling hard enough to hurt before I could think any further.

I’d forgotten, y’see, that the World Cup meant Bill and Charlie were coming. It’s not like it was even a secret, either — I’ve just had so many other things to worry about, so many other things to do, that I’d… just forgotten that these two were scheduled to arrive today, just missing Ginny and my birthdays, to everyone’s lack of surprise but also regret.

But it was okay, because I was hugging the stuffing out of Charlie, and Ginny was doing the same — much more successfully, by Bill’s wheezing chuckles (Ginny was much stronger, physically, than I was, of course) — to our eldest brother.

“I forgot you two were coming,” I muttered into Charlie’s chest. He smelled like outside,
bonfire, and something earthy underneath. Just like I remembered from his last visit — years ago, at this point — which I hadn’t even really realized I’d remembered until I had the scent again.

I felt the rumble of his laughter against my face.

“Not really surprising, since you’ve had a busy summer, Lyssie,” he said gently.

He tapped the crown of my head twice, not meaning to be strong but unknowingly hitting a bit harder than I think he meant to, like he was asking for attention. I looked up at him quizzically.

Charlie took after our mother more than our father, with his wider-set jawline and his brown eyes and his curlier hair; he’d added a bit of scruff to his face, which was heavily freckled and tanned with outdoors, though in my opinion he was quite a handsome one, in the rugged sort of way. But he was frowning at me, his brows scrunched together.

Wasn’t until I felt his hand tilting my chin up and tracing the left side of my face that I realized why, of course.

Charlie’s fingers traced the ridges of my scars, very, very gently.

“Your eye alright?” he asked quietly.

I nodded, feeling oddly nervous. I honestly forgot about the things most of the time. It’s not like I looked at them often.

He sighed, then pulled me closer and gave me another encompassing hug, hand resting on my hair. “I’m glad you’re okay, Lyssie. Nearly had a bleedin’ heart attack when Mum wrote to tell me you’d tangled with a werewolf during the full moon.”

I squeezed his ribs, hopefully comfortingly. “It wasn’t that bad.”

Charlie sighed again, and seemed to be trying to get me to disappear into his robes. “I was sort of hoping that the only one of us in danger of magical creatures would be me, for a while, you know. Me headin’ off to be a dragon keeper wasn’t a challenge, Lyssie.”

I laughed, relaxing. That was a thankfully very subdued reaction — I suppose he got most of the shock and awe out when Mum wrote him about the full moon incident in the first place. “I had to get one over you somehow, didn’t I?”

“Charlie, quit hogging Lys. You’re neglecting Ginny. And you! Lyssie, get over here!”

I was abruptly released from Charlie, who yelped — I had a feeling there was a Stinging Hex involved, with Ginny giggling — and then I had Bill staring down at me, his own eyes (blue, like me and Dad and Percy and Ron) drifting between mine and the scars. He, too, had probably been written about the things prior to now, since he seemed rather calm about them; just observing them, taking them in with my face, adjusting to the fact that it had been close but I had survived.

Fenrir Greyback smiling terribly, teeth large and pointed — glints of yellow fangs and copper-gold eyes and slats of moonlight on the Hogwarts corridors — “A Weasley, aren’t you? Always wanted to bite a Weasley. Shame about the moon-” — ? — throat tearing — teeth gnashing down, blood welling in his mouth, spraying out with every laugh. He bit and tore — “BILL! NO!” — Moony howling, blood on his claws — Sirius, his back shredded open, a bite mark ripping into his shoulder, the slashes of claws on his face — Bill with tears across his face — ? — a little boy approaching the garden gate, Greyback waiting beyond in the field — monsters in the dark-

Stop.
I swallowed.

Bill smiled at me, just a little. “Do I get a hug, then? It’s always nice to get hugs from pretty girls, even if they’re little brats who worry me.”

I obliged Bill immediately, trying to suppress the rise of magic in me, the fuzzy images of darkness and iron-salt taste and dusty scents that pressed against my senses insistently, and closed my eyes against his shirt.

*One day, you might have scars worse than mine,* I could tell him, my eldest brother, as I watched Fenrir Greyback laugh with a mouth full of red, red blood and the white moon behind him, not full but lingering — a reminder.

??? — *Fenrir Greyback standing in moonlight — claws dripping red, fangs dripping white — ???
— Bill looking down the corridor, wand in hand, breath unsteady — a scream — ???
— she leaned up to whisper in his ear, the fang earring in plain sight — “Greyback went past that way, I think, and Lestrange is over this way, but I don’t know—” — *CHOICE — ???
— the whisper was chilling even in the sunny morning. “One day, you might have scars worse than mine,” she said. — ???
— “DEPULSO!” she roared, skidding to a halt and smashing against the wall — breathing hard, heart pounding, pain starting to cloud in her lungs — Bill turned to the left, face grim and heart brave and unthinking — Greyback lunges — teeth in her heart, blood welling his his mouth — ???

Stop.

I squeezed my eyes shut. They were talking, chatting around me, Ginny joining in, but I…

*(What’s a few scars to your life, Lyssie?)*

Surprise overwrote the creeping fear. Sirius was suddenly present. No doubt he’d felt the edges of my fear, tuned into the link just in time to catch the last of the Clairvoyant vision. I… I hadn’t even really noticed that he wasn’t there, when I first woke up. A sign our mental maintenance was… well. *Working.* Though maybe not entirely, because he’d either interpreted that vision ridiculously quickly — and thus was acclimizing himself to *my* Clairvoyance, which wasn’t supposed to be possible — *or* he’d connected to my thoughts closely enough to glean *my* interpretation of the vision. Likely the latter.

Neither of which mattered so much in the current moment.

*He might die,* I thought, voice small even in our heads.

*(If he doesn’t fight Greyback, then you will.)* Sirius reached forward, a gentle comforting feeling poking at my worry. Fireflies in the dark, shining through the mist. *(You can’t wrap them in cotton, Lys. We’ll take care of it. But not like this.)*

I mentally nodded. Even if I didn’t like the implication that Sirius wanted me to allow Bill to suffer to save my life — and even if I understood intellectually that doing so was probably the best option, especially considering the fact that he only *might* die, not that he was *certain* to die — this wasn’t the time to be messing with Fate. I needed more preparation, more prior payment; tiny increments to guide Fate down the path I liked best, or at least away from the paths I liked least.

I was beginning to believe that I would never be able to control it entirely. Only block out certain paths I didn’t like. Ones that ended with dead brothers, certainly. I’d always told myself that Fate was out of my control, that I never saw the entire picture, that my ability was just a little leg up and not something game-changing… but, well, it was being pounded into my head more and more as
time went on and, even as my manipulations were paying off — Sirius’ freedom being the first and foremost — I seemed to have less and less control over everything.

This mind-link shit, for instance. It was certainly a consequence of my choice, one of the payments I made for keeping Sirius out of Azkaban, but I hadn’t Seen it coming in the slightest.

“Lyssie?”

I startled at Bill’s voice, looking up at his now-worried countenance.

I smiled weakly. “Sorry. Clairvoyance.”

His face pinched a little; a different worry, a more knowing one. “Right now?”

Ginny turned to me, reaching out to hold my hand. It seemed like a more unconscious gesture than anything; subconscious programming of ‘Lys had a vision; follow = Lys needs comfort’ or something like that.

“It wasn’t bad. I’m just… a little tired, now.”

Future visions always tired me out a lot more; the less set in stone they were, the more choices available along the pathways to this future, the more tired I was. When I was younger, it would half-drain my core to See this stuff. Thankfully, stretching my core and soothing it out via meditation did wonders for its capacity, and thus my Clairvoyance.

I shook my head, smiling. This wasn’t a day of worry. My brothers came for the Quidditch World Cup — they deserved to have a vacation, not worry about their little sister even more. And I’d told myself that I needed to damn well relax, didn’t I?

Until after the Quidditch World Cup, I promised myself mentally, here and now, that I’d put the work aside.

( About bloody time. I’m getting back to Harry, now that your crisis is over, ) Sirius thought, teasingly on the last bit.

I sent him a mental eye-roll. You should be grateful. Most teenagers have to be bribed and threatened into working as hard as I do naturally. I have to be bribed and threatened to take a break.

( Your problem, Lyssie, is that you make sure even your hobbies can be counted as work if you look at them right. And then you get stressed that you’re not playing efficiently enough, even though you’re literally playing. )

I think Harry’s probably wondering why you’re reading that book upside down.

( Am I- shit. See you, Lyssie. )

Really did love the fact that mental conversations could be done in less than a second.

“I’ll be less tired once we eat,” I said brightly to my siblings, “And I smell Mum cooking, so…?”

Ginny grinned. “Probably their favorites.”

I smiled back with equal smugness. “Conveniently, they’re our favorites, too, right, Gin?”
“Too right.”

Bill muttered, loud enough for us all to hear, “Oh Merlin, they’re channeling the demon twins.”

Charlie clapped him on the shoulder. “What were we expecting? When the responsible brothers leave, all they’ve got are the reckless ones.”

Bill snorted, glancing at Charlie slyly. “I seem to recall something about you traipsing about the Forbidden Forest. Something about wandering into centaur territory and getting an arrow in your shoulder?”

Ginny and I gave each other alarmed looks, then whipped our heads back to our brothers, who were leaving ahead of us and arguing casually about whether being shot by a centaur counted as a serious injury or not.

“Erm, hello, why is this the first time I’ve heard of this?” I called, trotting after them.

Charlie grimaced. “Keep it quiet, would you? Mum thinks the scar is from a shard of a Greek Krixis’ egg. Told her one of them hatched while I was cleaning the dam’s pen.”

“Are those the ones that explode when they hatch?” Ginny asked, likely remembering — same as me — the picture books of dragons Charlie used to read to us in place of bedtime stories. Always made Ginny a little petulant, since she liked Harry Potter stories and stuff, but I was always happy to listen to Charlie share his favorite things with us.

Bill snickered. “You still owe me for that one, little brother. Both for not writing Mum when you got shot in the first place, and backing you up when she saw the scar.”

“You got shot by a centaur.” I stated flatly, looking at Charlie’s sheepish smile.

My brother shrugged. “Torvus apologized eventually.”

“You’re friends with the centaur who shot you?” I asked, exchanging incredulous looks with Ginny.

“Now you have to tell us, Charlie,” Ginny said pleadingly.

“I don’t have to do anything! Thanks a lot, Bill, you prat.”

“If you don’t tell us, Lys will probably go to the Forbidden Forest and find out herself!”

“I would not.” I protested.

Ginny looked at me evenly, which probably communicated her complete rejection of that statement more than words would.

We bantered back and forth, all of us, all the way down to the kitchen, where our conversation came to an abrupt halt — both due to the breakfast waiting for us, along with our other brothers, and the fact that I wanted to hear the story and having Mum roaring at Charlie for recklessness wouldn’t be extremely conductive for that.
Directly after breakfast — which was oddly full and crowded, with so many of us there and larger than we were last time this happened, though we were all as loud and cheerful as ever — Dad and Ron and Ginny started to get the fireplace ready to Floo over to Hermione’s to fetch her, Charlie and Bill decided to settle a little and rest in the attic (where they’d be staying, since Ron declared that he’d just bunk up with Sirius and Harry in Sirius’ room aka Bill’s old room — I suppose otherwise Sirius would’ve had to share with my two oldest brothers, and that was a bit more awkward), Percy went tromping up to work because oh dear Merlin the Archives are worse than I thought Mr. Crouch will need this done and Josephine will make my life difficult if I don’t do it properly, the demon twins retreated to their room to possibly blow up more shit — Mum glared at them, having been nagging at them all summer in between all my dramatic shit — and Mum started cleaning and getting ready for a large lunch in the kitchen.

The shed was technically more Dad’s, with all the Muggle junk everywhere — the car’s absence only freed up for room for hoarding more Muggle shit, but Sirius and I still had owls drop their letters off in here, in helpfully marked bins that we’d cobbled together by maybe cutting down a tree in the woods and seeing how well magic could lend itself to untrained carpentry. (It was… okay. Dad might’ve helped a little. Or a lot.) Sirius and I had been bored, after all, stuck in the Burrow with nothing much to do, in those earlier summer days.

Truthfully, Hermione and my two eldest brothers were supposed to have arrived much earlier. I think with all the upending of the Ministry and the fact that me and Sirius had to sneak around popular wizarding spots for fear of being mobbed put a damper on those plans, though.

Dad and Percy were overworked, since the Ministry was, and Sirius was constantly either in the shed — letter writing and reading, which was an important thing for people of his position, no matter how bloody boring he found it, dammit — or Bill’s old room (which fluctuated between being called that or, now, Sirius’ room) trying to work out the details of bringing back the House of Black, among other things. My siblings weren’t nearly as limited as I was, especially with Sirius forcefully paying for our Floo powder, so they were in and out all the time, and if I wasn’t taking care of correspondence, then I was at Knockturn with Sirius, recovering from Kockturn with Sirius, or playing around with magic in the woods to keep myself sharp and not bored.

(I probably should’ve felt overworked, but seriously, blowing shit up with magic was both fun and stress-relieving, and it had the lovely added bonus of helping my casting. That, and reading letters from my boys wasn’t just all business — I did like Slytherin politics, sometimes, even if it gave me headaches other times.)

Anyways. Point was: the Weasley family was busy, and everyone was only arriving today to spend the night (or a few hours, at least, considering how early we’d have to leave) before the Quidditch World Cup. At least they were staying until the school year, but anything more than that, and we probably would’ve been strained for space. Mum would’ve been stressed, at least; all of the Weasley siblings, plus Sirius, plus maybe Remus, plus Hermione, PLUS Harry? That was a lot of people, and a lot of chaos.

Which is why I hid out in the shed for a bit.
LYSSIE

I can’t believe I don’t get to go to the WORLD CUP. Mum wouldn’t let me! She and Dad are busy but EVEN YOU’RE GOING. You don’t even like Quidditch or flying or any of that! I told Mum I could stay with Lu or Nate or maybe you, you’d figure something out along with Sirius Black I suppose, but she said no! I CAN’T BELIEVE THIS-

—

An extremely distressed letter from Harper. More of a scribble, really. Harper was probably really bloody upset about the fact that he wasn’t allowed to go to the Cup. He calmed down as he kept writing, even telling me to say hello to Nate and Lu when I got there and signing with his love, but still. I mentally noted that I’d have to cheer him up when I next saw him. Perhaps let him try out some wandless magic? He’d been trying to meditate on his core lately, at my advise, so maybe…

Come to think of it, I had to do the same for Lu. He was very interested in wandless magic and out of all of the boys had the largest core — therefore the core most suited to wandless — so he was probably ready soon. Provided he was truly going through the exercises and feeling out his magic and his core, getting used to it all; might not be, given that the Quidditch World Cup might as well have been a religious holiday for him. His letter was remarkable in how messy and excited it was.

—

LYS,

THE QUIDDITCH WORLD CUP IS SOON. I know you’re going. My bastard father says the Ministry’s all up in arms to get your family tickets, plus I think Black was a Beater or something when he was in Hogwarts, so I KNOW. I KNOW you’re going to be there! You and me, Lys, we’re going to go WATCH the bloody QUIDDITCH WORLD CUP-
Adorable, really. His family was well-off enough to quite be able to get VIP seats, but they would be pretty high up. I’d definitely see Lu at the Cup, if not during the game itself. He wouldn’t mention it in his letters, but I knew he was as excited to see me as I was him — it was hard for him to get out from under his father and brother’s watchful gaze, already on thin ice for being affiliated with me at school, and with me avoiding Diagon Alley, there was… well, there really was nowhere that was safe for me to meet with him. Or Jay or Nate, the former even if he wasn’t in America having tentative and very painfully awkward meetings with his new betrothed.

The latter, well. Nate was a homebody, content to be locked away in a dark room to plot and laugh maniacally. He probably could’ve made it to Knockturn to catch me, but then I’d have to tell him what I was doing in Knockturn, and the bastard was too intelligent and knew me too well to buy my excuse of visiting Remus; and I wasn’t going to tell Nate about the cambion. As far as he and Lu and Jay knew, my dealings with the cambion ended when I wrote a contract making sure it wouldn’t use any of the memories I’d previously given it against me.

I noticed with annoyance, actually, that Nate didn’t write me anything about the Cup or meeting. I had a terrible and probably accurate feeling that he’d do something stupid like scare the shit out of Lu and I around a corner, or pop up at the worst moment — something like, me and my family’d be walking back into our tent and have simultaneous heart attacks because he’d be sitting there, waiting for us. Nate would definitely do that.

Lu, bless him, had given me details on where he was, so I’d be able to track him down and hang about until the game started. I wrote down our family’s own location, mentally checking with Sirius about the accuracy (Yes, that’s right, we’re a bit on the edges. I probably could’ve gotten us better spots but Arthur and Molly were adamant about me not spending anymore Galleons on them… ) before sealing the little letter — more a note, really — and preparing it for Serateed when she came back from hunting in the woods. It was mechanical and somewhat relaxing, just going through everything and making notes for Sirius and finishing up this business; I didn’t much like Quidditch, but I’d enjoy the Cup all the same.

…

“Oh, Lyssie~!”

“Oh, dearest sister!”

Oh Merlin preserve me, they sounded much too cheerful. They were singing a little. And Sirius sniggering in the back of my head gave me no confidence at all. Fred and George had been testing their new prank tricks all over the place; I usually only got caught a few times, since the two usually tested on our other siblings before they got the courage to get me, and I learned from that. Mum was being driven up the wall by it, really, but Sirius thought it was excellent that there were little Marauders around and quietly (or not so quietly, sometimes) encouraged the two.

I put the letters away, smiling fondly. “What is it this time, you demons?”

The two of them poked their identical heads into the shed, grinning at me and inspiring zero
“Confidence.”
“So suspicious!”
“I’m hurt!”
“It’s like she doesn’t love us or something, Gred.”
“That can’t be right, Forge, we’re her favorite brothers!”

I snorted, shaking my head. “We all know Percy’s my favorite brother.”

They put on faces of exaggerated, bewildered hurt. “Lyssie! How could you?!” they both cried.

I joined them, eyeing their hands. Fake wands were their favorite these days, since no one trusted any candy they gave over anymore. We all remembered Ron’s Ton-Tongue Toffee incident two weeks back; Mum had whupped them so hard, me and Ginny had been whispering about what to do to stage an intervention and rescue. (We didn’t have to, since Percy chose right around then to come home half-dead from overworking and Mum’s attention zeroed in on him, letting the demon twins scamper off and disappear into their room…)

“Nothing this time, little sister,” Fred said, shaking his finger at my nose.

“We had our fun,” George sighed wistfully.

Fred nodded. “Harrykins’ berk of a cousin. It was worse than Ron.”

George’s eyes glinted. “It was much worse than Ron.”

I smirked. “Good.” Then I frowned. “Mum and Dad didn’t yell?”

They both grinned like sharks. “Mum and Dad don’t know, and Sirius, Ronniekins, and little Harry won’t be telling.”

George swung an arm around my shoulders, which wasn’t hard at all, with how much slighter and shorter I was than the both of them. Halfway to the kitchen Bill and Charlie stumbled out the back door, smiling at the sight of us, wands in their hands. Pieces of furniture parts were following them, bobbing in the air rhythmically.

“Mum rope you into chores, then?” I asked.

“Wouldn’t be Mum if she didn’t know how to make us lazy sods work,” Charlie said, nodding to the tables following them in pieces. “Come help out, Lyssie? I know you’ve got your wandless.” He made wiggling motions with his fingers.

(You’ve got your wand.) Sirius pointed out.

I’m not advertising to the world that we took the Trace off my wand, Sirius.

I smiled, ducking out of George’s arm and flicking my Mage Sight to a very low intensity — not nearly enough for the Burrow’s wards to even be a sparkle in my eyes, which was just enough for human colors to be faint, near-translucent wisps. Easier to direct wandless magic that way, though, since it was so wild and wasteful without the fine control of a wand. Charlie’s green and Bill’s mauve, the clouds twisting into spiderweb-thin strings, wrapped around the pieces of furniture, letting them fly. I grinned and nudged my indigo-red to join, overpowering a few table legs’ colors with my own, taking control from now-blinking older brothers.
The take-over was gentle, which was a testament of my control and my magic’s recognition of Bill and Charlie’s own; normally, taking over a spell like that without warning would jolt the original caster a little more, but my brothers only looked a bit surprised, before their own magic withdrew completely. Fred and George stood off to the side, shuffling out of the way of the table parts as the oldest and the youngest of us started bringing them out.

There was a large BANG! and then Bill laughed.

“Losing control there, little brother?”

Another BANG! A green-tinted table leg was nearly hurtled to the ground because of a wine-colored one.

Charlie snickered. “Your control is practically accidental, big brother! How embarrassing!”

BANG! CRACK! One of the tables, more or less assembled, barreled into the other, breaking off a leg.

“Oops. You’re so clumsy, Charlie.”

BANG! BANG! CRACK!

“C’mon, Bill, you can do better than that!” Fred called out as Charlie’s table swept under our eldest brother’s, the legs spinning madly as they followed and hit the other one more. It was all a great clatter, too, and the screws were all whizzing around dangerously, like demented metal schools of fish following the larger, wooden sharks.

“Hear that, Charlie? Fred’s on my side!”

“Yeah, will I’ve got the other demon twin, right, Charlie?”

Fred gasped something about betrayal, George laughing, and my own table — which was square and stout, smaller than the other two’s, was floating around us bystanders, ready to block flying bits of debris if needed. I crossed my arms, breathing deep and letting the magic pulse out calmly, controlling the flow as gently as I could.

“What on earth is going on?”

I glanced back to see Hermione and Ginny coming towards us with quizzical expressions.

“Our big brothers are really proving their senior-given maturity, that’s what,” I answered with a grin. I smiled at Hermione, who had gotten taller since I’d last seen her; she looked uncomfortable in the heat, hair tied back severely. “‘Lo, Hermione. Welcome to the Burrow. Had a good summer so far?”

To her credit, Hermione’s gaze lingered on my scars only for a moment, before she decisively looked straight into my eyes with a friendly smile. I could read her determination not to be rude in her expression, clear as day.

“Hello, Lys. It’s been rather boring so far, except for reading the papers. Yours?”

“Well, I’m half the reason the papers aren’t as boring as the rest of the summer, so that ought to tell you something,” I snickered, keeping half an eye on the tables crashing against each other. “Did Ron tell you? We’ve had to screen our mail and cancel our Prophet subscription to get away from it all.”
“It was the *Witch Weekly* that really did Mum in,” Ginny said conspiratorially, “There was a special on scar-erasing ointments and disfigurement-correction that mentioned Lys and Sirius all over. Said some not-so-nice things about werewolves.”

George leaned over. “You talking about *Witch Weekly*?”

“Oh, Mum *loved* that. You should’ve heard her, Hermione. *How dare those snobby old hags decide my daughter’s disfigured? The nerve of them!* She sent a Howler, too.” Fred added, his voice pitching up to mimic Mum at her more fretfully annoyed.

“As if that wasn’t the most tame one,” sighed Ginny, shaking her head.

**CRASH!**

I very quickly shifted my table to block a piece of leg that splintered from Bill’s table. It saved George from some nasty bruises, since Bill was already mounting his magic up to slow the debris when he noticed me guarding. Ginny started laughing at Charlie’s panicked face, Hermione squinting at the wanton destruction and not-really near-miss.

“Bloody hell, Charlie!”

“Watch out for friendly fire!”

“Sorry, George!”

There was a SLAM! from somewhere up and behind; a window, most likely. And a furious voice followed it, too. “WHAT ARE YOU TWO DOING? YOU ALMOST HIT GEORGE!” Percy roared out from his room.

“Bloody hell, he sounds just like Mum…” I heard Fred mutter.

“Sorry, Perce,” Bill called up, glancing at all of us again — probably to really make sure that Percy’s irritation didn’t have any standing — “No harm done, though. Lyssie was watching, after all. How’re the archive reports coming on?”

“Very slowly,” Percy replied scathingly, “And one of them’s got a great bloody mark right through the paragraph, which is when I saw *splinters* flying.” With that, he shut the window promptly; message delivered, at that point: shut the bloody hell up and stop endangering the little siblings + Hermione.

A message my big brothers received, since they started assembling the tables, casting strong *Reparo’s* on them, *actually* setting up the dining tables. I joined them, and conversations rose up in bubbles, crossing over for sentences and topics and then regrouping into two’s and three’s again, as was natural when there were so many bloody people in one space. At one point, though, I was Summoning silverware while Bill and Charlie Summoned the plates, and I spotted another three brunettes come out of the Burrow, two of which weren’t there this morning, walking along with Ron.

(I *got Moony!*)

*And Harry, of course.*

“Look, Moony,” Sirius said brightly, his voice in our heads loud enough to carry over to me, “it’s your favorite almost-whelp!”
Ohhhhh my god, Sirius, why do you DO this?

That was it was called. The werewolf who bit you was your sire, the werewolf a sire bit and turned was their whelp.

Moony closed his eyes and took a deep breath — it looked like he was counting down from ten and/or praying for patience or maybe death — and Harry started blinking rapidly, eyes widening a bit as he looked between the two of them.

“Are you stupid?” I hissed, both in our minds and out, releasing a lot more of my colors, twisting more of it into strings to more quickly control more silverware, finish setting up quickly. Remus HATES being reminded that he almost bit me, dammit, Sirius!

(He’s got to get over it, Lyssie. Remus will deny it until he’s blue, but we all know how THAT ends up in the end.)

His greatest. Fear. Sirius. HIS GREATEST FEAR. Is biting a child. His Boggart in a room full of schoolchildren turned into the full moon. He almost lived his GREATEST FEAR two months ago! Did you get over your dementor PTSD in two months, Sirius?

He grumbled to me in our heads.

(Shit, now I really knew we were separating mentally — we were starting to disagree on shit, unable to see the others’ point of view as easily as we used to. And mentally, we were both aware of this, and resisting the urge to melt into the link and fix that. The cambion warned us not to dive into the link; use it, use the communication, share memories, but never get lost in it. We were each others’ anchors from reality, thus reality was our anchor away from each other, and at this stage in the reconstruction, we needed that.)

I trotted over to the four of them, not showing any of my irritation at Sirius.

“Just get in? Hi, Harry, Remus.” I greeted them.

Ron frowned at all the forks and spoons twirling about. “Is this you?” he asked.

I raised a brow. “Yeah. Why? And how’d you know?”

He shrugged. “It just feels like you. Dunno.”

Oohoho~ It appears my brother’s got magical sensitivity.

(Not surprising, given all the stuff your brother and his friends — namely, Harry and Hermione — get up to.)

I wonder if Hermione’s magically sensitive?

“‘Lo, Lys,” Harry greeted warmly, “We came in a while ago. Caught the end of the table war, I think — Percy’s overworking himself, Ron said.”

“Percy’s convinced that the Ministry will collapse without his archive reports.”

“And you’re convinced Slytherin will be in shambles without you plotting,” Sirius threw in.

I crossed my arms. There was a very slight strain in my magic, a sort of mental sensation coupled with a flutter beneath my breast bone; it wasn’t painful or dangerous. More like the strain of
muscles when you held something heavy too long and you needed to shift a bit. Just as well, the table was almost finished and Mum was starting to set out the actual food.

“That’s because it will fall apart if I don’t prepare now,” I sniffed, “As if Malfoy will be able to organize anything alone. Your cousin’s an idiot, Sirius. A lazy, coattail-riding, helpless, mewling, ungrateful idiot.”

Harry snorted, despite himself. “You sound like Snape, except you’re insulting Malfoy.”

“He’s my Head of House. I had to learn something from him.”

“Severus did have quite the cutting remarks,” Remus added, sounding amused. There was a flash of relief in our heads — if Remus could tease and joke, he was mostly okay now. Sirius had not, in fact, broken him again.

( I do not break Moony. )

Yes you do. I can see his mind shut down right before my eyes.

“You all should claim a spot at the table before Mum really sets up,” I suggested, jerking my head to the side and back, “You’d all want to gossip and giggle about the World Cup, I suppose. Except for Remus, he can sit with me and Percy and talk about intelligent things.”

There were protests from Harry and Sirius and Ron, Sirius grinning and Harry’s lips twitching and Ron actually annoyed, but I waved them off, getting back to the table. Seven o’clock came by and dinner was loud and delicious, the table groaning under food enough for ten Weasleys, Sirius, Remus, Harry, and Hermione. I was sitting near Hermione and Remus and Percy and Dad, though Quidditch-talk was all over the table, conversations rife with it in between inhaling Mum’s food — she’d really outdone herself today, I think.

At the dinner table, I listened as Charlie and the demon twins chat about the World Cup:

“It’s got to be Ireland,” Charlie was saying with his mouth completely full (the brute never grew out of that habit, though that’s the only thing I remember Mum scolding him about), “They flattened Peru in the semifinals.”

"Bulgaria has got Viktor Krum, though," said Fred conversationally.

“Krum’s one decent player, Ireland has got seven,” our second oldest brother replied with a grin (thankfully after swallowing), “I wish England had got through. That was embarrassing, that was.”

“What happened?” asked Harry.

“Went down to Transylvania, three hundred and ninety to ten,” replied Charlie with a deep, I-was-a-Quidditch-Captain-and-this-hurts-me-personally sigh, “Shocking performance. And Wales lost to Uganda, and Scotland was slaughtered by Luxembourg.”

Sirius sighed. “It was brutal, that was. I followed along on the wireless.”

And then I turned my head over to Dad and Percy, who were muttering about archives and disorganized bastards and too much work, with Remus chiming in every now and then, and Hermione listening interestedly:

“Probably hasn’t been cleared up since the Dark Ages or something, really.” Dad said brightly.
Percy looked scandalized. “You mean someone filed enchanted horse bridles in the section cordoned off for the DMLE? No wonder Mr. Crouch needs all the help he can get, the Bagnold Ministry was disgusting.”

“The Bagnold Ministry was full of spies and saboteurs, Percy,” said Remus dryly, “Millicent Bagnold herself was a wonder, though. Ex-Auror, I think, right, Arthur?”

“Ex-Auror,” Dad confirmed with a nod.

“Which I’m sure made her an efficient Minister for wartime, but if the state of the record rooms is any indication, her peacetime politics were probably dreadful. Shame that Mr. Crouch never had the chance to run for office…”

“He might’ve, if it weren’t for that last trial. The Lestrange-Crouch one.” Dad pointed out.

Mum and Ginny were at the other end of the table, drawing Bill into a conversation. By the pointed looks at his earring, the fang one, and Bill’s own sheepish, reluctant face, I had a pretty good idea of what was going on down there.

Dinner seemed to finish in the blink of an eye, everyone headed back to the house to get an early night. Ginny and I were housing Hermione in our room, on some sort of comfortable-looking thing on the floor, all three of us girls talking quietly and drowsily — warm food and good company and a cool breeze in the window made for sleepy teenagers, I suppose. At some point, I passed by the window, buttoning up my pajamas, and winced as moonlight made the scars burn.

Hermione, sitting on her bedroll and blankets, noticed.

“Do your scars hurt?” she asked.

I settled in my bed, rubbing at my face. The texture was odd; rough and raised, but thin, cutting smooth skin. “In the moonlight, they sort of do. They ache a little sometimes anyways. Depending on how much, I can somewhat tell what moonphase it is.” Hermione was looking a little worried, but I grinned at her. “Harper was really annoyed that about, he was going to buy me a moonwatcher for my potions and rituals but I became one instead.”

Hermione observed the marks quietly. “But that’s… all? You’re alright?”

Her worry was very touching, honestly, considering the fact that I wasn’t all that close to Hermione. But I also remembered that Hermione had been there when I’d gotten these scars, and the last she’d seen of me, there was a great bloody bandage on my face. Mum and Dad and Sirius threatened to sue the shoes off of the *Prophet* if they tried to print my photo without permission, so Hermione really wouldn’t have seen me since last semester.

“It was only a scratch, with claws, even. If it had been fangs, that’d be different. But werewolf claws don’t have the curse.” I said reasonably.

“Actually, why is that?” asked Ginny.

I frowned.

*Sirius, I have a question that I don’t remember the answer to.*

( *Head’s the seat of the curse. Fangs are closer, so.* ) Sirius mumbled, already half asleep; he probably had a foot in the mindscape, trying to start off where I left in figuring out how to train our heads to trim down the spores and web-like gunk in the trees without hurting us.
“This will require a very long explanation about werewolves, the magic of the werewolf curse, and all that.” I muttered, recalling the chapter of that werewolf book now.

Hermione looked excited.

Ginny was falling asleep.

I chuckled to myself. “Have Remus lend you *Moon Lover* by Sirach Abrams sometime, it’s the least offensive and most politically neutral lore book on werewolves he’s ever found, apparently.” I started, getting ready to sleep little but get to know a possible future sister-in-law. And, well, if that never happened — because Ron was honestly a moron — then, at least, a friend.

... 

The next morning begun at an ungodly hour, and I grumbled quite a bit.

*(Bloody hell, I’m not a morning person.*) Sirius muttered.

At least we made some progress last night, I thought snappishly, *Stupid bloody cambion and its stupid bloody magic, making us chase ourselves in circles. I should’ve let Vána eat its damn flying snakes. It was such a simple fix, dammit.*

Sirius nodded along to my vicious complaints, just as annoyed, though he was a bit more subdued at my more angry reaction. Maybe a bit threatened. He might even be thinking about how scary I could be, and was remembering back to when we were taking Pettigrew down and we were both very onboard the ‘let’s hurt Pettigrew as much as possible with his Memory Ward stuff’ train.

*(Never was a morning person, either.)*

“Why do we have to be up so early?” Ginny yawned as we girls trudged into the living room to meet everyone else; she wasn’t quite a morning person, either.

“We’ve got a bit of a walk,” said Dad cheerfully.

Definitely a morning person.

I suppose Bill and Charlie and Percy were, too, since they’d apparently woken up and gotten focused enough to be able to Apparate to the World Cup already. I was rather excited for when I’d be able to Apparate, though I could do without the gun-shot like POP! that came with it. I’d made Percy stop doing it every morning because I nearly slammed one of the cooking pots into him — magically, that is — the last time. He missed a concussion by an inch. Fred and George nearly peed themselves laughing, and Ron wasn’t that far behind, wheezing for breath after spraying his damn breakfast all over the place.

*(“I thought you liked Perce, Lyssie!” George had roared with laughter.)*

*(“Shut up! I was startled!”)*

*(“I think Perce was a bit more startled!” Fred sniggered, banging his fist on the table.)*

Percy was looking very pale, glancing between the dented wall, the pot that had toppled to the
“Sirius is going to cry when he hears he missed this!” Ron snorted.

Sirius, however, had been giggling madly in my head, crowing about needing to teach me to save memories in Pensieves so he never forgot how terrified Percy Weasley had been this day. Part of me agreed with that, if only for the blackmail material it could become. Nate would’ve been proud of me.)

“Walk?” asked Harry, sounding a tad alarmed, “What, are we walking to the World Cup?”

“No, no, that’s miles away,” Dad said, smiling at Harry, “We only need to walk a short way. It’s just that it’s very difficult for a large number of wizards to congregate without attracting Muggle attention. We have to be very careful about how we travel at the best of times, and on a huge occasion like the Quidditch World Cup…”

“Better shut your Mage Sight off, Lyssie,” Sirius warned, reaching over to pat my head in greeting, “The wards around the Cup are going to be bright and loud. Bet your hearing-sight’ll be going crazy if you don’t cast a Dī-konden An-drixtā.”

You ought to do the same, then.

(My Mage Sight is so weak that I’ll probably be fine.)

“George!” Mum snapped out. We all were startled out of our drooping eyes for a bit.

“What?” asked one of the demon twins, in a tone that he probably thought was innocent but definitely wasn’t.

“What is that in your pocket?” Mum asked sharply.

“Nothing!”

“Don’t you lie to me!” she nearly snarled, then pointed her wand to his pocket in a swift and practiced motion. ‘Accio!”

Several Ton-Tongue Toffees sped out of George’s pocket; he failed to catch them in time and Mum had them in her hands with a furious expression on her face. This led to a complete turn-out of their pockets using several shrill Summoning Charms, then a scolding on O.W.L.s again, and the twins were so angry that they didn’t say a word to her in goodbye. It was with a rather sullen air that they walked behind us, and I lagged a bit to trot in between them (damn their long, lanky legs).

My scar ached at the presence of the moon, still, but I managed to grin at both of them.

“Good thing you two have me, then, hm?” I asked.

They looked confused, and it was George who realized it first; understanding dawned on his face in the form of a devious grin. “How many did you save?” he asked smugly.

How many, Sirius?

(Enough. You know, it’s really honestly impressive that they’re going to open a joke shop in the future.)

Just don’t tell them that, they need to work for it.
“Well, technically, I didn’t.” I said nodding to a smirking Sirius, who pointed his thumb on his backpack.

The twins laughed and crowded him, muttering quietly, the three pranksters clogging up the back. I rolled my eyes at their sudden change of mood, and trotted back up to the more main group. Ron and Harry and Remus were walking all together, Dad up with Ginny and Hermione. I joined up next to Ron, who was excited — why wouldn’t he be? — though he rather sleepily dragged me into a one-way argument on Bulgaria vs. Ireland. We trekked to the Portkey like that, the air cool with morning and the moon finally going down; it was about time, too, since my face really disliked it and I took to harshly slapping the scars to make them stop itching.

Eventually we met up with the Diggory’s, who greeted us jovially — at least, Amos did — and had the portkey already; after some ogling at the famous Harry Potter, or rather, Amos Diggory bragging about his son (which was a bit annoying, but we listened politely), Dad announced that it was probably time. Luna had actually been Side-Along Apparated yesterday — something about waiting until the last possible minute, Xeno was very understanding about it all — and the other magical family hadn’t gotten tickets, so.

Anyways.

“It’s a minute off, everyone,” announced Dad, gesturing to the boot-that-was-a-Portkey.

Harry had a very quizzical look on his face, staring at it.

I suppose it looked ridiculous. I mean, it sort of did… But, admittedly, it was rather clever that Portkeys were all strange objects that Muggles wouldn’t look at — only, if they did look at them, did the Portkeys transfer Muggles, too? A question to be asked to Dad later. I had a feeling that they wouldn’t, or maybe there was a way to make them that made sure they wouldn’t… but we were counting down to the Portkey, squeezed together in a circle and quietly waiting.

And then-

Ergh. The spinning and the pulling and the weird sensation of being anchored by a finger but not being pained by that? The lights were all funny, too, wind whipping around us all, hard enough to make my eyes water. I hated Portkeys. Took them as sparingly as possible, since Floo was so much easier — just a bit less convenient when it was outdoors, and more expensive with the cost of the Floo powder — but I felt a bit better when we all slammed into the ground, and me, Dad, Amos, Remus, and Cedric were the only ones standing. Least I wasn’t sprawled on the grass, though I was leaning on Remus a little.

( You totally pushed me, ) Sirius complained.

You were on the other side of the Portkey from me!

Sirius paused. ( Right, okay, then the demon twins definitely pushed me. )

“Seven past five from Stoatshead Hill,” a man announced, standing behind the others on the ground and across the rest of us standing.
The tent was set up and while it took a while, as Dad was curious about the process Muggles used to put them up; Harry and Hermione really pulled through for us — I enjoyed watching Dad get in their way and the two of them having to politely ask him to get out of their faces. He just had a lot of questions about everything, when everyone else was rather keen on getting in the tent and catching a quick nap or something. I myself wasn’t allowed to leave until the tent was up, because apparently I’d definitely never find the campsite again if I didn’t remember what the tent looked like — bloody protective brothers, Percy and Ron’s shoulders were coming up to their ears a little more every time someone glanced at us walking to our nice site marked WEEZLY and recognized Sirius or Remus or me. The Trio were sent on their way to get water when the tent was up, Dad frowning at some matches and trying to figure out what made it so they set on fire with just movement.

I decided that Dad was hopeless after he broke the sixth match and asked if I could wander around and look for Lu, now that the tent was up. I knew where he was, after all. There was a section near to the actual stadium that most of the larger, richer purebloods bought up almost immediately; he’d be there, which meant I had to walk quite quickly to get there, spend a good amount of time with my friend, and then be back before Dad burned down the tent trying to figure out matches. I estimated that’d be around dinner time; he knew a little about the periodic table, but he’d never be able to guess about the phosphorus and all that. I barely knew how matches worked.

The crowd was wild, though.

Tents and tents and tents, of all colors and sizes, magical and Muggle-alike. Dad had been right when he laughed about how some people just had to show off. There were some weird, gaudy tents — though the peacock one we passed earlier had been hilarious.

People were everywhere, too, the rumble of the crowd-noises a constant white noise in the background. Kids were running around, screaming their heads off, men were sitting together in circles passing cigars and pipes between them, laughing and roaring and making gestures with wild movements that looked vaguely Quidditch-related. Families were meeting with other families, things were flying through the air, someone set off some poppers for some pre-teens who were ooh-ing and ah-ing at the magical shapes.

It really was a big party.

Well. Meeting up with Lu was rather easy, if not a pain in the arse, since I’d simply had to walk to where all the non-gaudy, expensive-looking tents were; there were a lot less people in this section of the campsites, too.

It had the unintended side-effect of getting pampered Purebloods to point and ogle at the girl with the crazy-looking scars on her face, of course. The older years I saw were polite and we exchanged respectful nods, the in-coming fourth-years were mostly of the unfriendly variety (Parkinson, Crabbe and Goyle) though I’d somehow, thank Merlin, slipped past Malfoy somehow, anyone younger than me looking very curious, pompous, disgusted, or intimidated to hell and back.

As it was, I was spotted by no one other than Edward Vaisey first.

“Oy! Weasley-girl.” he called.

I turned (sighing a little) to see Lu’s older brother. They shared the caramel-ish color of their hair, though Edward’s was obviously more looked after, and they had similar eye-shapes even if Lu’s were a weird sort of blue and his were brown.

“You must be Edward Vaisey.”
He nodded curtly. “Lucas has been looking for you. I’ll show you to the family tent.”

Hm. I was oddly nervous, following Edward Vaisey. I wanted to make a joke about meeting the parents or something, but I didn’t think Lu’s older brother — who he hated with a passion and could only stand through their mutual agreement that Quidditch was the best thing ever — would like that very much. He led me to an elegant looking tent of dark green, tall and perfectly pitched (no doubt via magic), which had an interior much like how I imagined Pureblood mansions to be, themed with the same green. It was empty save for, thankfully, Lu.

Lu brightened as he recognized me (there had been a fierce scowl on his face when he saw his brother, who had already turned and left) and bounded up to me, grin on his face.

“Lys! I was going to look for you but I figured you’d be moving about-”

“Right in one, Lu. Had a good- Merlin, you got tall!”

Lu had been just a bit taller than me last year, and now he was maybe a bit more than a half-head taller. His hair was a little more rugged — he obviously wasn’t taking much care of it, though it was still nice-looking — and his shoulders were wider. He’d dumped his robes on the floor next to the couch he’d been lounging on, only having a striped button-up on, the collar popped and the sleeves rolled up to show his forearms all scratched up. Probably rolled in the grass or something after skidding off his broom. There were Muggle bandaids on his cuts though, which I’d given him as a joke for his birthday back in January.

Lu didn’t waste any time, engulfing me in a hug.

He grinned again, not seeming to study me as much as I him — Lu wasn’t much for observation, not really, not when it wasn’t Quidditch. “Not all of us are vertically challenged, Lyssie,” he said, obviously enjoying his height advantage. Then he frowned at my face, his eyes darting towards the scars, which he hadn’t noticed at first.

I raised a brow. The left one. The skin pulled but it didn’t hurt anymore, and Lu followed the movement closely, eyes suddenly sharp, suddenly watching. “I’m very used to short-jokes, Lu. Don’t even try.”

He stared for a moment longer, then gave a slow nod. Then the tension disappeared in an instant, Lu electing to follow me and ignore that they were there. Shrugging, he replied, “Worth a shot. C’mon, wanna walk around? Look for Nate? He’s somewhere around, but he keeps being cagey about where. His mum’s a huge bitch, though, he probably just wants to keep us away from her.”

Huh.

Oddly enough, this just made me think about how, two years back, Lu would’ve rather punched Nate in the face than imagine that he was anything other than a bullying, cruel, little shit. Nate used to pull Lu’s strings, so to speak. Yank him around, make him do shit by manipulating the bloody hell out of Lu; used to goad Lu about it, too, call him stupid and prove that he could still do it — because Nate was smart, and he knew how to read people, how to say what they wanted to hear, how to say things that made them doubt themselves, and he was willing to use all that and more to make others do the work and make fools of themselves while he kicked back and laughed.

Lu hated that. Lu hated the fact that he didn’t catch onto manipulations quickly, that he was straightforward and reacted predictably, that that meant Nate managed to make him into a puppet ringleader who was thought of as an idiot. Lu hated that Nate used him and treated his friends like shit and could get away with it all.
And here he was, casually claiming that Nate was protecting the two of us from his mega-bitch mom, just because he could.

“Nah,” I said, smiling at Lu and knowing that he didn’t see how happy I was, “Nate’ll find his way to us eventually. Passed a dozen potesta on the way here, he’ll hear about the both of us meeting soon enough.”

“Of course he will, he’s Nate,” said Lu, laughing a little. He gazed at my scars again. “Lys, you know your face looks bloody awesome, right? Oh! Hey, c’mere, Lyssie, I want to show you how my wandless Summoning Charm is going- Merlin’s pants, Lyssie, when you showed us last year you made it look like it was just a snap of your fingers, but I died when I got it yesterday-”

Leave it to Lu to say my face looked awesome, and then immediately get distracted with wandless magic and showing off. But then again, wandless magic. Even I brightened at the mention of doing cool shit without needing a wand.

“You’re actually practicing?” I asked incredulously.

Lu looked offended. “Of course I am! You think I’d pass up a way to Summon my broom if I get knocked about in the air? I think I’m going to make the actual team this year, since whatever-his-face graduated…”

Oh dear. Lu’s going to explode when he hears Quidditch is canceled…

( I know, ) Sirius said glumly, ( The first year I could come and watch Harry play, and it’s the Triwizard… )

Oh, get out of here. Don’t you have to Apparate to Knockturn to see the cambion?

( Yeah, we’ve got a session due. I’ll tell the stupid bastard you said hello, shall I? )

Tell it I’m cross with it, too.

( I’ll tell it a lot more than that, believe me. )

Lu held out his hand in concentration, saying clearly, “Accio parchment!”

The parchment in question slid slowly and clumsily toward him across the sleek coffee table, and by the time it made it to his fingertips he looked like he’d run a marathon. But still, he looked at me and beamed proudly, and I returned a similar smile. My Mage Sight was off — I didn’t want to get a migraine from looking at the mess of magic all around us — but I imagine that Lu was expending a lot more magic than was necessary, wasting enough to make him tired; that was just a matter of practice, really, of figuring out the specific control needed for this spell.

“Not bad, Lu.” I said, flicking a finger at the parchment and plucking it from the air as it flew towards me, “I couldn’t manage much when I first started. Did you feel your magic move through your hand?”

“Yeah, weird feeling. Warm. Kinda soft almost. Bloody hell, Lyssie, you Summoned it wandless and silent? Is that your weight limit, then?”

I put on a very offended look. “As if it is! Have you no faith in me?”

Lu grinned, smile sharp. “Let’s see it, then.”
I answered with a laugh, then waved my hand lazily at a stack of textbooks on Lu’s (maybe? it was messy enough to be) bed, and smirked at Lu as he watched in abject fascination as they zoomed towards me, but very gently landed in my outstretched hands. Several of them at once, too. I hadn’t been able to do that last year, really, but a summer of practice really made a difference.

“Most impressive. Miss Weasley, was it?”

Both Lu and I jumped nearly a foot in the air when we realized that the tent flap was filled with three observers: Edward, looking stone-faced but not managing to hide uncomfortable shifting — he hadn’t had robes on when I’d found him, but now he did — and two people whom I assumed were Lord and Lady Vaisey. It had been Lord Vaisey who spoken, who was obviously who the Vaisey brothers took after, caramel-colored hair streaked with grey in such a way it didn’t diminish from his handsome Pureblood features. He had Edward’s brown eyes and a thick frame that must’ve been made from years of dueling or something, which I could spot very obviously even though he wore dark, elegant robes. Lady Vaisey, on the other hand, looked like… a patient with a terminal illness. Watery eyes that had Lu’s odd coloring, her frame slight and wiry, her dirty blonde hair done up but not hiding its thinness. Shame, really, she looked like a breeze would blow her over, and had an expression that reminded me of someone smelling dung and wanted to get away.

I stood at once, turning to Lord Vaisey and — not wearing robes or skirts or anything — bowed at the waist shallowly, right arm held up with my hand on my chest. A respectable Pureblood bow, usually done by boys but recently becoming more universal (especially since it would look really fucking stupid if I curtseyed in jeans).

“Lord and Lady Vaisey.” I greeted properly.

Lu and I were suddenly standing ramrod straight, of course. There was a tension in the air, and I could almost see it seeping into Lu. His face went hard, jaw clenching, eyes darting between the robes on the floor and me and his father constantly. I really didn’t enjoy how utterly uncomfortable he looked, and how his shoulders hunched a little.

“A Weasley with manners,” said Lord Vaisey, his face like stone, eyes cold as anything. “A surprise. But a pleasant one.”

I didn’t manage a smile. The previous happiness and excitement I’d had, meeting up with Lu, melted away into irritation. Whatever Lord Vaisey was, he was also someone who made Lu unhappy, and I hated that. I felt myself shutter down into potesta mode; pleasantly blank, harder to read, tongue sharpening behind a neutrally-set mouth, mind whirling with possibilities: insults, observations, declarations, ways to hedge, ways to get away, excuses, lies, stories, anything that I could use. The transformation was like a snap in my head, caution and wariness rising up to twist into my Occlumency shields and clear my head and expression.

I nodded respectfully again. “My apologies for the late introduction. I am Guinevere Weasley, eighth child of the Ancient House of Weasley.”

Lady Vaisey gave a very condescending smile. “Pleasure to meet you,” she said, not meaning it in the slightest, and I didn’t even have to really be good at reading people to know that, “It is always… wonderful to meet yet another Weasley. I’ve not much opportunity to speak with your Lady Mo… well, with your mother.”

It’s not a pleasure to meet another of your brood; thank Merlin your mother isn’t high enough in social circles to speak to me.

Not really subtle, but that was insulting in itself, sometimes.
Bitch.

I gave her a very cold smile. One of those smiles that promised retribution in some form or other. It usually sent the kids younger than me running, and my own boys shivering where they stood, sometimes. The ‘Claws knew to fear this smile. So did Lady Vaisey, by the way she flinched slightly — only slightly, barely enough to qualify; she was an adult pureblood after all.

“It was a similar surprise to hear of a Weasley Sorted into our family’s traditional House.” Lord Vaisey commented — to still my glare and silence his impertinent wife — conversationally, “From what I’ve heard, you are an… enigma, Miss Weasley.”

I returned his intense scrutiny with an unfazed look. “That is one way to put it, I suppose, Lord Vaisey.” I replied neutrally.

“Mother, Father, may we leave?” said Lu, looking a bit strained, “We promised to meet Nathaniel Wilkes, in our year.”

Lord Vaisey looked at his son sharply. “Do not interrupt when I am speaking with someone, Lucas. You were raised better than that.”

“Yes, Father,” he mumbled, looking mutinous but cowed.

I guess it wasn’t surprising; ‘A Heir and a Spare’ was the motto, and with Edward being completely healthy and sane — though he was a mediocre student and Slytherin at best, something we always talked about that never failed to make Lu cheer up — it made sense that Lu would be a bit… well, neglected. Plus, with how Lu thought? His casual manner of going about things, his teasing? He was probably suffocated in this kind of family.

It made my teeth clench.

“Miss Weasley. What is your ranking at Hogwarts?” demanded Lord Vaisey, suddenly.

“First in my year, ninth overall.” I replied without missing a beat, even if I was a little thrown by the sudden questioning, “If it interests you to know, Lucas is fifth of our year and twentieth or so overall.”

Lu gave me a grateful smile. Lord Vaisey didn’t look impressed with the additional information; he actually ignored it, the fucking arsehole.

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“You are academically successful, then,” he said, his eyes calculating.

Lady Vaisey added in, “What were your best classes?”

“Charms and Transfiguration, though I scored considerably higher than average on every exam I took.” Thanks to Dietrich in Potions, Nate in History, Julius in Defense, and Harper in Herbology. And Lu taught me how to fly from point A to point B.

“Hm. I suppose your worst class was Defense? You seem to bear… marks of your failures there, poor girl,” she went on, fake sympathy oozing from her voice though her strange blue eyes — the only thing Lu got from her, thank Merlin — were filled with smugness.

Lu stiffened beside me, and I wanted to snarl.

Instead, I smiled coldly. “I’m afraid I managed to score a near perfect score in Defense for the past two years, Lady Vaisey. Waste no sympathy on me; these are proof that I fought a werewolf and
walked away unbitten.”

More like I was attacked from behind and was saved by Harry, but she didn’t need to know that. Fucking cow.

“Not every wizard can claim such a feat.” Lord Vaisey stated coolly, “Nor can many claim to perform a flawless wandless and wordless Summoning Charm. Tell me, girl, is that your only wandless ability?”

Holy shit. Okay. There were several ways to go from here.

Taking into account that I needed more reputation in the pureblood world outside of Hogwarts, the fact that a gossipy bitch was right there, I wanted to help Lu stand up to his overbearing father (if he were friends with a very powerful person, he’d be looked at as more useful than previously thought, maybe?), Edward Vaisey annoyed me just by existing and I wanted to show him up, and this bastard was going to question me until he had something substantial… Well, I decided to perform a little.

A mental check showed nothing on my Clairvoyance, which meant this wouldn’t be a fatal mistake, which was good enough. I could worm my way out or deal with anything other than fatal payments, after all.

Thing about wandless magic? You could do anything with it. You could perform spells with wandless, but you could also play around with them. The very impressive Spell Crafters, the strongest Arithmancers, were geniuses at wandless magic and their craft both; they would usually be playing around with wandless magic, making it do things that there were no spells for, then make spells for them. So there wasn’t quite a spell for this, but it was a combination of Incendio and something else I haven’t been able to find, some sort of pyrokinesis.

Hands out, fire flickered into being — orange-white at first, but then changing into the colors of my boys as I remembered them: steel-blue for Dietrich, coral-red for Lu, teal for Harper, moss green for Jay, wine red for Nate — and I moved my arms, willing the growing flames to follow my movements. It was elegant and pretty magic, rather difficult at first but now quite easy with use (I was very good at destructive magic, and I remembered early days of coloring the flames the way my siblings’ colors were, and having them watch with awe as I did); streams of fire acted like ribbons, spiraling around me as I watched in ostensible apathy.

(I will admit that I came up with this because in the last life, it had been my dearest desire to be a Water Bender; turned out I was much better with fire, and so I suppose I became some sort of magical fire bender instead.)

“I’ve got a lot of tricks up my sleeve.” I said, feeling very smug as every Vaisey present dropped their jaws in shock at the level of wandless control I had, “This isn’t even the most difficult I’ve done, I’m afraid.”

Slowly, the flames evaporated and I looked into Lord Vaisey’s eyes. His curiosity should be satisfied with that. Though it was a bit of a lie; fire manipulation magic was quite difficult, especially spell-less — probably the most difficult I attempted. Everything else I did, I followed the pattern of wand magic, mimicking it.

“May Lucas and I be excused?” More of a demand than anything…

But Lord Vaisey nodded anyways. Slow and thoughtful. “I look forward to meeting you again, Miss Guinevere.”
“Likewise, Lord Vaisey. C’mon, Lu.”

We slipped around Edward Vaisey, still thunderstruck and silent, and when we had exited the very pureblood section of the camp and dived into the more crowded, crazy part of the fields, Lu grabbed me and bodily turned me around, eyes wild and excited.

“Please tell me I’ll be able to do that!”

I laughed. “Not for a while, dolt. It’s easier if you start younger.”

“But- Fine. Still! You stood your ground against my dad!”

I shrugged. “I’m good at that.”

Lu looked at me, his eyes sparkling. “Thank you. I know what you’re doing — my dad’ll definitely pay attention now, if I’ve got an ‘ally’ like you. Mind, he’s probably going to force Edward to play nice, too. My stupid bloody brother’ll probably be friendly now, trying to get in your good graces.”

“Ergh. Not what I wanted at all.”

Lu laughed, loud and free — just the way he should always be laughing. “Yeah, I don’t think anyone’d want Ed on their coattails. But that’s all the stupid bastard knows how to do, since he’s too magically incompetent and idiotic to do anything by himself.”

Definitely something he heard from me or Dietrich or Nate and was repeating.

I raised a brow. “He’s got good magic. Strong, though it’s atrophying.”

Lu nodded knowingly. “Definitely doesn’t know how to use it, or something. I think I’d have ended up like him if you and Dietrich didn’t push us so hard to study. Thank Merlin you two stepped up, or me and Harper and Nate’d be gutted.”

“Nate’s still gutted,” I snickered, shaking my head and grabbing Lu’s hand. He looked at me oddly — not the cuddliest of my boys, Lu — but he accepted it soon enough. “Nate’s the laziest idiot I’ve ever met. I think he thinks he can convince everyone else to do any work for him.”

Lu shrugged. “Always been like that, Nate. Should we go look for him now?”

“If only to get away from your parents, I suppose,” I said, smiling and squeezing Lu’s hand.

We set off, laughing about the others and not saying that we both wished they were there with us, looking for our wayward friend. At one point, I think I saw the demon twins running around selling Ton-Tongue Toffees to people. And there was Oliver Wood, who’d finally won his bloody Quidditch Cup last year and Lu wouldn’t stop mumbling at the inequity of it all as we passed. A thought occurred to me as one of our ‘Puff yearmates — Lloyd Wright, Halfblood — told us he saw Nate going that-a-ways or something. And then Adaline Mercer told us something similar, twenty minutes later and in a completely different direction. And then Silvester Cornfoot, half an hour after that.

(We never found Nate, no doubt being pranked into chasing after his shadow, but Lu and I had a grand old time anyways. When we had to separate and go to our own tents, neither of us really wanted to let go of the other’s hand, but we did anyways.)

(I was, more than ever, looking forward to Hogwarts and being with them all again.)
It was strange, walking back to my family’s tents; I went to tell Dad I was back — and everyone else, really, since they’d probably get all hissy that I was off alone for the first time in public since the trial hit the papers — and I’d walked in the tent flap to see everyone staring at me. A mixture of emotions, really, mostly shock and horror… the demon twins were grinning though. Ginny looked like she was going to start giggling hysterically, sitting near their bunks on the floor. Hermione and Harry were listening intently to a very quietly muttering Ron in the living room area, lounging around the squishy couches, but all three were glancing at me nervously and with growing dread.

“What?” I asked, worried a bit.

Maybe something had happened while I was out…?

Dad stood up from his place at the table-area, looking dazed. Bill and Charlie had been sitting with him, looking like they were flanking him to give him peace of mind. I swallowed at how he faced me, his face full of vacant confusion.

“Lyssie?” asked Dad faintly, “Will you please explain to me why I was just approached by Royston Vaisey and asked for a marriage contract?”

I burst into laughter.
Yo! So this is a long chapter, too, but I really... Just need to get to Hogwarts and every character ever is clamoring to be heard before then. :'D So, enjoy this rather long chapter that wraps up the World Cup!

Also, as ever, thank you to my readers and commentors! :D The fic wouldn't be half as long or crazy without all y'all. :'

(You know the Two Way Translation Charm?)

I frowned. Wracked my head for it a little, and found it in Sirius’ memories. I do now?

(Think you can spontaneous cast it wandless?)

I sent Sirius a disgruntled look. We were all seated at the stadium’s top boxes: my family, Harry and Hermione, Remus and Sirius, all of us crowded together and excited and loud because of it, the Ministers sitting next to our group, the Malfoy family a few rows down, various purebloods, various Ministry workers of high standing or position, an empty seat beside a House Elf more terrified of heights than I was. I was nearer to Sirius, Remus, and the Ministers, while the Golden Trio were nearer to the side with the House Elf and the empty seat.

(I tried very hard not to think about that empty chair and what it meant and especially what it could mean; the best way to keep one’s mind off of things was, of course, to distract yourself.)

“Dimitri! Levski! Dimitrov! Ivanova — oh, I say!”

Bagman’s voice was magically amplified as he announced excitedly. I think he was around here, too; closer to Dad and the Trio, probably.

So my mind drew in the Two Way Translation Charm and remembered Sirius casting it a few times in the past, the memories fuzzy with age and a sort of grey, misty film; I wasn’t sure if it was going to slip into that haze that the dementors left in Sirius’ head that seemed to be coming back more often, which we both frantically beat away the moment we detected it, or if this was something new, something telling me that the memory wasn’t mine. Like a marker, maybe.

But I examined the Two Way Translation Charm and sighed. I was half-watching the game, which had begun as soon as the mascots and the Quidditch players were all announced, through Sirius’ concentration and my own eyes, so this wasn’t too bad — we’d both gotten insanely good at multitasking.

“It’s time-out!” yelled Bagman as the crowd started murmured, a hundred thousand of them
making the stadium vibrate with their voices, “Trained mediwizards hurry onto the field to examine Aidan Lynch, after what was quite a masterful feint by Bulgarian Seeker Viktor Krum…”

Yeah, doesn’t seem that hard. Wish I could apply Mage Sight to your memories, though, I could copy any spell you’ve performed better that way.

( We’ll figure that out later… Oh, and next time is your turn with the cambion, the bastard was especially annoying today. Knew I wanted to get here quick, I’d bet. Translation Charm? )

The giant screen which had previously been showing advertisements was replaying whatever had been going on down there. A Wronski Feint, the screen announced in large, golden letters. My brothers on my other side were chattering among themselves and practically fanning themselves over the skill of the foreign Seeker.

What even for? If you want to talk to the Bulgarian Prime Minister that badly, cast it yourself.

( I draw a wand near him and he’ll Curse me, or have his bodyguards do it. )

My eyes narrowed. There was a roar from the crowd, loud and rumbling through my lungs, and sparks were flying in the air. I was NOT going to turn on my Mage Sight — the bloody stadium was already glowing gold without it, the magic was that strong here, not to mention the hundred thousand fucking witches and wizards all crowded in it — but I knew how to cast a clumsy, magic-wasting human-presence-revealing spell. A whispered Homenum Revelio got me faint outlines of…

Merlin’s balls, there’s got to be thirty of them up here!

Sirius snickered at me mentally. ( Two Prime Ministers and a lot of the Ministry’s best. And some of the rich bastards, too. It’s a lot to protect, eh? ) We both flicked eyes towards the Malfoys, who’d had some sort of stare down with Dad and the Golden Trio just before everything settled, though both of us were too far away to have done anything with how quick it’d been. ( Might’ve exaggerated a bit. They might not Curse me, but it’s rude as bloody fuck, and the whole point of this is to be NOT rude, sad as it is. Fudge’s doing enough of that for everyone here. )

“Ireland pulls ahead! One hundred points doesn’t seem too difficult now, I say!” Bagman laughed.

I cringed at Fudge narrating loudly and slowly and very condescendingly at the Bulgarian Prime Minister, whose face was stern and stone-like, thick brow jutting over dark eyes, staring down his large nose almost impassively. There was a tick in his jaw that could either be amusement or annoyance, I didn’t know the man well enough to be able to tell. Fudge really couldn’t just ask to cast the Two Way himself, could he? Or he was too stupid and scared to. Or maybe him acting like a bloody idiot was an excellent distraction, so he didn’t have to speak to Sirius or Remus or myself, all of us watching his movements like hawks, when we weren’t watching the game.

Need a whole hand for this, I thought after quite a while of studying the spell.

I breathed deep, inhaling the smell of too many bodies pressed together, the breeze bringing hints of rain, the electric sting of months of magic packed into a single area, and I felt my magic wrapped around me. That sixth sense we magicals had, that magic sense that was the base of all Soothsayers’ abilities, weak with my forceful suppression of my Mage Sight via rituals, it reached out and I twisted my magic none-too-gently, making it crawl with memories of the Two Way Translation Charm and my intent and my budding amusement at the soon-to-be embarrassment of Minister Fudge — if he thought I forgot how he tried to humiliate me in court, the man was
delusional — and I whispered:

“Loquatio.”

The first go around, the magic was too wild, my intent was too slippery — the spell failed, and my fingers stung for the effort. Huh. I would’ve thought that fifteen minutes of going over the magic in my head would’ve been enough…

I frowned at the not-quite-blisters, jumping when the crowd started roaring.

“And Mostafa takes the Bulgarian Keeper to task for cobbing — that’s excessive use of elbows, to our young Quidditch fans!” said Bagman, the crowd jeering for a penalty. “And… Yes, it’s a penalty to Ireland!”

I’ll get it this time, I promised inwardly, sensing Sirius’ nod in reply; there was something going on with the Veela, but werewolves and women didn’t really get affected by that sort of thing, so we were alright.

“Loquatio.”

It actually took a few times, and I really slowed down the casting and had to gently coax my magic into the motions — figures, really, I never wandlessly cast quick, not once in my life (without consequences) really — but eventually…

(Thanks, Lyssie.)

I snorted in our heads. Are you REALLY going to skip watching the Quidditch World Cup to enact petty revenge on Fudge by embarrassing his government and making friends with Bulgarian Minister Oblansk?

(I’m a Marauder, aren’t I? Besides. Oblansk’ll want to be watching, too… I’ll just be chatting with him as we do that.)

“Two penalties for Ireland!” The crowd screamed in laughter and triumph, the Irish leprechauns purposefully provoking the other side. “And Volkov and Vulchanov had better get back on those brooms… Yes, there they go… and Troy takes the Quaffle—”

Remus is surprisingly into this game. I noted, eyeing the werewolf on my left, tensely watching the game.

(He’s not too big on playing, since werewolves are banned from going pro, but he used to watch me and James when we were all younger…)  

“FOUL!” the stadium roared as one.

I glanced at the Malfoys, who were a few rows down but nearer to the Ministers than my brothers, and consequently, Harry and Hermione. Sirius was next to the Minister, something he grumbled about but allowed since he did want to annoy Fudge — I think Fudge thought this would up his popularity, if it was known he watched the game with Sirius next to him, cheering on the same team — and most of our family was spread off to the other side. Apparently Andromeda and Tonks were somewhere in the crowd, with Tonks’ friends rather than up here; they wanted to avoid the big wigs of the Ministries, I think.

My brothers and father were watching the game avidly, talking amongst themselves. They were the rowdiest of the lot up here, though to be fair, there was a lot of noise. Politics didn’t quite penetrate
the World Cup, and neither did propriety.

“Looks like the Veela are angry,” Remus muttered next to me.

I followed his gaze. “I’ve never seen a Veela transform. We didn’t go over them in class, did we, Remus?”

“I did with the fifth years and up,” he admitted, “Not every Veela can, though seems these ones were chosen on whether they could or not…”

I watched in interest — and my brothers and Harry in an awe-filled sort of horror — as the Veela, silvery and willowy and lovely, transformed, angry at some slight or other by the Irish leprechauns. Fire spouted along them, white-gold as their hair, flinging itself out in jets and splutters, scorching the grass black and making the crowd start panicking and pointing. I think they were starting to spout their scaly wings, bright as lightning, but Ministry wizards were pouring onto the field like ants, trying to stop an international incident.

They weren’t really succeeding.

And all the while, Sirius and Oblansk were chatting, the spell twisting their hearing so they felt they were speaking in their own native languages.

( Y’know, Oblansk isn’t so bad a fellow. Looks real serious, though. )

Doesn’t look like you at all, I said dismissively, switching seats with a suspicious-but-not-enough-to-protest Remus.

Sirius guffawed. Out loud. ( You made my joke! )

I regretted everything. Sirius’ stupid ‘serious’ jokes were about as funny as dad-jokes. I’d made a dad joke. Shut up and embarrass our Ministry before the Veela are driven off the stage and the game starts again.

…

By the time the game ended, everyone in this VIP box up here knew that Sirius Black and the Bulgarian Prime Minister were chums, Sirius could probably cast a few spells wandlessly — how else did he manage a translation charm without the security after him? — and the Weasley clan was just as loud and boisterous as ever, even with its youngest member’s very public scars and all the drama that mentioned their name during the summer.

“KRUM GETS THE SNITCH — BUT IRELAND WINS — good lord, I don’t think any of us were expecting that!” announced Ludo Bagman.

Huh. The game was a lot more vicious than I was expecting, with how bloodied the players were as they were shown on the large screen. Viktor Krum especially, with his nose probably broken and his face solemn despite the fluttering snitch in his hand. And it lasted longer than I was expecting — the drag of exhaustion was tingling my every movement, enough that I clung onto Sirius’ hyperness to keep myself from yawning.

( Lyssie! Oblansk invited me to meet the team! )
My brain did a spit-take. Or the equivalent of one.

What?

“I vant you to meet my countrymen,” explained the Bulgarian Minister with his deep, grizzly voice just then, as I focused my attention on the two of them, “Perhaps you vill support Bulgaria next time if you see for yourself our players.”

Fudge looked poleaxed; I suppose the Bulgarian Minister suddenly speaking perfectly understandable English did that to a person. That, and the man of his equal position favoring a Lord who was very unhappy with the Ministry nowadays.

“Of course, Minister,” Sirius replied with an easy grin, “Mind if I take my godchildren with me?”

( Sorry I can't take you all… ) Sirius murmured.

Nah, it makes sense, I assured him, already planning on having to soothe jealous tempers later for this. Ron especially would be annoyed — he was hitting that moody part of puberty that made him a git when he wasn’t thinking things through.

“Harry Potter, yes?” The Minister asked, brows rising along with the rest of him; everyone was beginning to exit the stands, most of the hustle of wizards eager to go party at the campsites disguising the quieter conversation — even my family hadn’t noticed.

“And my goddaughter.” Sirius said, nodding and angling his body enough to show me.

I promptly stood and bowed to the Bulgarian Minister politely. I was wearing jeans and trainers and some old flannel, and my hair was still a wavy mess that was too long, but there was nothing for it. My sudden movement drew some attention from my family, all of them having been ready to set off but pausing at the last of us two hanging behind.

“Guinevere Weasley, Prime Minister,” I introduced myself. At his puzzled look, I gave him a little smile, nudging Sirius; I could be casual, since Sirius was the same and he was leading this one. “He only recently became my godfather, so it’s not really well-known.”

Oblansk looked between us, then focused on me. On the scars, in particular. “You are the girl who vos scratched by a verevolf.”

“My sire,” Sirius supplied helpfully, jerking his head to Remus, whose expression was very deer-in-the-headlights.

“Oblansk looked at us, no doubt trying to figure out what the hell was going on. I’m not sure if our story made international news or if anyone outside of Britain would really know names and all that, but before him, the gaggle of loud redheads separating him from Harry Potter seemed to be perfectly friendly with two werewolves, one of which attacked one of their own, and the other of which was her godfather. It must’ve been a very weird thing to reconcile all of a sudden, coming off of a Quidditch high and all.

But the man nodded agreeably. “I see you haff many more stories to tell, Lord Black.”

Sirius barked out a laugh. “On the way to the field, then?”

“I would not mind. Come, follow — bring your godchildren.”

( Grab Harry, explain quick, and follow? )
Got it. We’ll be right behind you. Am I to believe that the Prime Minister making those odd finger twitches is communicating with his guard?

( More subtle than Fudge’s whispering, thankfully. Man looks quite flummoxed, eh? )

Like a man whose date got stolen mid-dinner.

( I’ve done that before, I’ll have you know! )

I rolled my eyes, then glanced to Remus. He still looked shell-shocked. I mean, I would be too, what with being thrown about — like a kid showing off his toys — to a foreign minister, fucking Sirius, that idiot. “Sirius got an in, me and Harry are the only ones he managed to bring, we’ll meet you back at the tents, yeah?” I said, shrugging.

He gave me a wary glance. “Please don’t pick up Sirius’ habit of making me be the responsible one after pulling something chaotic and probably hazardous off.”

“Just this once,” I promised with a smile.

I pushed past him and made eye-contact with Harry.

“Hey! Potter! Want to meet Krum?” I called, loud enough that a certain blonde ponce stilled in the background, having been trading sneers with Ron.

Harry blinked at me. “What?”

Sirius and the Prime Minister were slow, speaking enthusiastically as they gingerly stepped around seats, but that wouldn’t last. I shoved past Charlie, who was spluttering, and the demon twins who were leaning forward and trying to pester Ludo Bagman about money, and reached over Hermione to latch onto Harry’s wrist. I gave his hand a few tugs.

“Meeting the Bulgarian Quidditch team, yes or no?”

“Er- Yes!” Harry answered quickly.

“Then let’s go! Figures this is the one thing you won’t be impulsive about…” I muttered the last part, ignoring my brothers and dad and sister and their token protests, dragging Harry past the others and following Sirius with no more fanfare.

We’re right behind you, I told Sirius.

( The guards are probably encircling us as we speak. )

That’s not ominous at all.

“And you two are both godchildren of Lord Black?” came the Bulgarian Minister’s accented voice suddenly.

Harry seemed to freeze up, but I trotted up to Sirius’ side, dragging him with me. I gave him a push so that we were on opposite sides of Sirius, and he grinned and nodded proudly, placing hands at our backs. It was quite… parental, actually.

“Harry’s my heir,” Sirius explained casually, “Has been since he was born. This one-” He tapped my head, drawing Oblansk’s gaze back to me. “-saved my life, so I had to sign up as her godfather so I could spoil her without too many people complaining.”
Oblansk studied me curiously for a moment. “I read off the trial. Your Minister vos not so polite to you, I remember.” Then he looked amused, glancing between Sirius and I and Fudge, who was a ways back. “I haff a feeling I vos used to embarrass my British counterpart.”

Sirius looked only a bit sheepish. “Well, you turned out to be an excellent conversationalist, Minister, so what can I say? Good things come to those who are petty.”

The man laughed, a deep and harsh-toned thing. He then turned to Harry. “Off course it is a great honor to meet the Boy-Who-Lived, yes? I do not think I haff to tell you how famed you are, even in my country. I haff heard you are a Seeker, also?”

“Er… yes, I-I play for my school Quidditch team…”

Harry was as awkward as any normal teenager dealing with an intimidating-looking government official trying to make smalltalk in what was obviously not his first language, but he was honestly handling it pretty well. Sirius was also helping smooth the transitions, interjecting with lots of jokes, coaxing smiles out of Harry and harsh laughter from Minister Oblansk. We four, along with our guard — all of them under impeccable Disillusionment Charms, they were near-invisible if you weren’t looking for the wrongly-reflected light — made our way to the elevators of the stands, private and quiet because of so, taking it directly to the Quidditch pitch.

The stadium was half-empty by the time we made it into the fresh night air, slightly chilled at the sudden release from the close-quarters of the elevator, but the players were still on the field. The Bulgarian team was closest to our side, standing in a loose semi-circle, facing who I assumed to be their coach as he spoke to them in rapid Bulgarian; Sirius was catching bits and pieces due to the spell, but I ignored that and listened with my own ears.

Actually meeting the players is more Oblansk showing off, blurs of faces and shaken hands, and Harry and I exchanging blank looks — though his take on a more stunned or awed tint — as Sirius brightly greets and jokes and is just… his charismatic, careless self. “Self.” (It’s not that it’s a mask or anything, but it’s not quite all him either — he’s definitely playing it up, but the man’s as dramatic as a Slytherin on a good day, so it’s not all that surprising.)

It’s not until I’m shaking hands with Viktor Krum that I actually tuned in, really.

The blood on his face was what caught my attention.

I gave him a bit of a wince. “You alright? Shouldn’t you see a Healer?” I said as I shook his hand.

Viktor Krum returned the wince, though it might’ve been an attempt at a smile. “It looks much worse than it is,” he said, accent just as thick as Oblansk’s, “Soon, I vill see a Healer.”

I sent a mental poke at Sirius, my thoughts flying by nearly too fast to understand, and he gave the slightest nod. Nice, I got permission from the godfather.

“Well, no need to wait. May I heal you? I need the practice, anyways.” I said cheerfully.

And the good impression, my thoughts went.

Sirius snorted inwardly at me.

Viktor Krum frowned, though it was decidedly confused and not wary, which was a good sign. “You haff ability to heal?”

I nodded.
His darted away from mine, looking behind me — (He’s checking with Minister Oblansk, ) Sirius informed me helpfully — and when he looked at me again, he gave a short nod. I grinned, flicking my wrist and extending the wand from the holster strapped there — a present from Sirius, with a mild Undetectable Extension Charm since it was fitted to my forearm and definitely too small for the entire length of my wand, which I’d worn for the first time today. I wasted no time in using my lovely Trace-less wand to heal up the small hurts Krum suffered during the match, my magic unused to the Light spells and thus wasting more than necessary as it sealed the cuts, wiped away the bruises, and cleaned the blood.

Heh. The positive opinion of Viktor Krum would surely be a boon later. Not to mention, Oblansk would look kindly on me treating one of his Quidditch players. My Clairvoyance was keeping quiet on it, meaning nothing about this would kill me immediately, and that was honestly good enough for me. I might get some visions later that’d hint more… but that was for later.

Viktor Krum’s face was mostly fixed, the bruises on his eyes having faded back into his natural pallor; he gave a grateful, though gruff, half-bow. “Thank you, Gven-vera Veasley,” said the Seeker; no smile, but that was unsurprising.

I returned his gratitude with a nod. Krum seemed a man of few words, so that should satisfy him well enough.

The rest of this little meeting was a lot of Oblansk showing off, the Quidditch players looking a little restless until they shook hands with the famous Boy-Who-Lived, Harry being very quiet and awed and a little out of his depth, Sirius being enthusiastic, and me keeping an eye on the sky. It was lit up gold from the stadium and the lights, tints of orange from a hundred thousand campfires, but that was good. No sign of green, so no Dark Mark yet.

I wasn’t really looking forward to seeing the damn thing for the first time, in person.

…

The reasons I wasn’t going to warn my family about the riots were twofold:

One. We would be okay. This wasn’t an organized attack, it was a bunch of drunks deciding to terrorize people and set fire to shit — they could be scared away easily, because they weren’t looking for combat. They were looking to bully the weak, give the world a scare, feel powerful; there was no bloody way my family would be in fatal danger.

Two. This didn’t matter. It wasn’t worth changing Fate to get them out because of reason #1. I probably wouldn’t have to pay much to get my family out, with how little it affected anything, but there’d be something. And considering how big a wave I made with Sirius Black being cleared when he had been Fated to die with the world hating his name… well, I still wasn’t fully convinced that the consequences of that particular choice were over and done will, laid bare before me, and so more good — but probably much more bad — might be on my heels for that. And I didn’t want to add to that.

So.

That said, when the screaming began, blooming out of the rowdy celebrations and overtaking them, I had my wand in hand and my eyes narrowed. For a moment, my whole family looked up at the
tent flap in confusion, pausing in their games and snacks — we were supposed to be asleep, I think, but Sirius and I gently insisted to my siblings and father that we deserved to stay up and soak each others’ presences up more, and really, why would any of my family complain about being able to party more? — but Sirius and Dad glanced at each other briefly and they darted out of the now-silent tent in an instant. When they came back, Sirius caught my eye and gave a grim nod, and my fingers tightened on my wand. So it was truly beginning, then.

The relaxed, somewhat drowsy atmosphere was all panic and tenseness now.

“Grab jackets, all of you, we’re getting out! Quickly!” Dad snapped at us all, following on Sirius’ heels with his wand out and his eyes frantic.

The screams outside the tent were intensifying, along with the rumble of fleeing, and it was too bright out there. Fire. Bill and Charlie’s faces were set as they started rushing up, Bill joining Dad and Charlie herding the rest of us. Everyone else looked confused and bewildered, but we all knew something was wrong. I grit my teeth at the fear-tinted confusion on all their faces, immediately taking my sister’s hand with my less-dominant arm; Ginny held onto me, searching for an anchor, and I squeezed her hand.

The more afraid they get, the more pissed off I become, I murmured to Sirius.

The werewolf in our heads was pacing, snarling — very telling of Sirius’ own frustration. (I know the feeling,) he murmured. His eyes were slightly brown, like he was holding down the golding; Remus, sticking close to Harry, wasn’t even bothering holding down his instincts, eyes shining.

We were all out the tent, and while it was definitely darker outside than in, there was a sort of glow coming from the western side of the campgrounds, the side where the majority of the Bulgarian supporters — the regular wizards, not the rich pureblood sect — had set up. There was a rush of bodies streaming around us, jostling and towering and panicking, people fleeing the fire and those who started it. Dad and Bill had gone into the other tent to make absolutely sure no one was there, and Percy and Charlie hadn’t left the other after pushing the demon twins out; Sirius and Remus were counting us, keeping us together as we waiting for our others, when the stream of people seemed to taper off. That’s when we noticed them.

Vána in our minds howled in anger, and I heard Remus’ deep voice snarl. We saw the firestarters. The Death Eaters.

Or a group of them. It was a cluster of black-robed, white-masked wizards or witches, which is exactly what I expected of them. They wore pointed, black caps or hoods — some with veils, some with collars large enough to pull against one’s nose, some like balaclavas — and their masks were all blank, inlaid with silver and other metal, each mask unique and well-made and emotionless. Their wands pointed out, drunken shouting and laughing bursting from them every now and then, and above them, a serpent-like trail of magic was being fueled, ending in a sort of viscous-looking blob of magic that held four figures. They spun and struggled and the more they did, the more the Death Eaters laughed, as ones not fueling the magic trapping and tormenting their prisoners blasted fire everywhere, giggling as they did.

Sirius’ rage was nearly burning; it felt like it was some angry bull, charging through my head, smashing everything it could on its way, heralded by Vána’s howls.

“That’s sick,” Ron whispered at the sight, our pace slowed with horrified fascination.

(They’re torturing CHILDREN!)
Will you go fight?

( You're DAMN right I am! )

“Sirius!” Remus snapped.

My godfather whipped around, furious, looking like he was about to bite Remus’ head off if he told him to leave it well-alone, but our elder werewolf only stepped forward, wand in hand. He gave Sirius a nod, which he took as permission to start in the direction of the still far-off Death Eaters, ducking behind emptied tents.

Remus whipped around, grabbing Harry’s shoulder. “Go. Stay with both pairs of twins and Ron and Hermione.” He instructed curtly, before rushing off to follow Sirius and make sure his friend didn’t get himself killed.

As he did, Dad and Bill stepped from their tent, fully dressed and wide-awake, catching sight of the crowd of Death Eater’s with faces darkening. Charlie and Percy were the same, from the tent most of us had left. Bill and Charlie started off, following Sirius and Remus’ path unknowingly, and Dad went after them, fiddling with his wand and his glasses, calling out behind him:

“We’re going to help the Ministry! You lot — get into the woods and for Merlin’s sake, stick together. We’ll come and fetch you when we’ve sorted this out!”

Percy lingered behind just a tad, facing a quiet Fred and a shaken-looking George.

“There’s more than just this group,” he said tersely, “We don’t know how long it will take — we don’t know how many there are, how many Muggles they might have. It could take all night. Find somewhere safe, hole up, draw wards, whatever you’ve got to do. Keep them safe.”

That was probably the only time I’d see the demon twins nod seriously at something Percy told them to do. Our older brother disappeared after that, intent on catching up to the rest of our family, and Fred and George grabbed the rest of us with gruff voices and constantly swiveling gazes, pushing us away from the throng of Death Eaters. We didn’t go straight east, but curved to follow the trampled path of the crowd, towards the woods.

Ginny clung to me, but she was stronger and bigger than I was, and clumsy with fear, near-tripping the both of us, so I peeled her tight hands off of my arm and let her latch onto George. She accepted the change silently, which was all I could hope for at this point; I think her seeing the torment of the Muggles put her into shock. George guided her more easily than I would’ve, sticking near Fred, who led us.

We fled into the woods where the canopy and sea of underbrush blocked out the fires and the sky, making it pitch-black. I could tell our tight group had loosened because of it, hesitating when the Golden Trio fell behind and us twin pair pulled ahead, Fred mindlessly searching for somewhere to hole up and keep us safe like Percy told him. My mind raced as we ran in the dark, and my own thoughts — anger at the Death Eaters, fear for my family, reassurance from my previous thoughts looking at this very incident, irritation with myself, exhaustion, the tingle of my Clairvoyance, the sudden remembrance that, no, I hadn’t meditated yet — were so chaotic that I started half-looking at Sirius’ mind. He was huddled with other Ministry workers, my father and brothers, Remus, and some Aurors — they were trying to figure out how to attack the rioters without putting the Muggles in danger…

Ron yelped, and I half turned and ran into a very pointy bush for my trouble.
“What happened?” came Hermione’s voice faintly.

I was surprised at how separated we all were, working on untangling myself from the fucking forest and wondering if I should get the demon twins back-

_Trembling hands, pale and fine, on black cloth — his glasses glinting with lamplight, frown cutting his oval face, dark eyes — white mask — the Muggle twirling and twirling in the air, a toy to the Death Eaters below, laughing and jeering and drunk off their asses. His wife was upsidedown, her nightgown slipping, raucous laughter rising at the sight of it — Imperious posture even with her ruddy cheeks, sunken black eyes, her hood drawing up around her greying hair. “It was your father’s. I keep it, always. Come, Nathaniel — there are animals to be culled, parading as human beings, these Muggles.”

Stop.

_The Aurors waved their wands together, jaws clenched, streams of magic pooling together and crackling across the air towards the Muggles — screaming, horror, he was going to die tonight because of these lunatics — the blue-tinted magic ripped into the Death Eaters’ — roars of anger — Fabian and Gideon’s bodies hanging like puppets, broken and splintered and red — blistered fingers — the Quidditch stadium glowed gold and reflected fire — black-cloaked masks clustering the grounds like ants, destroying everything in their path — the magic tore the Muggles free. They fell, shrieking, but — Bill and Charlie and Percy’s colors, mauve and deep green and sky blue — the Dark Mark in the sky, green and glowing — caught in the air, to the Death Eater’s bewildered disappointment — “Secure the Muggles, then scatter the crowd—”

Stop.

_Lu burst into the tent, tearing the cloth — silent — stood dumbfounded — Nate sitting in the corner with his chin on his knees. In front of him were folded black robes and a white mask, too big for him — she donned the hood and smirked as she pulled the mask on — ? — the moon was bright and the werewolves howled — “You’ll love it, Nathaniel, the feeling of crushing all before you with your brothers and sisters, pure, all of them, by your side. Join when you finally grow a spine, would you?” — Hazel-blue, colored in concern, peered up at Nate — worried frown — fires in the distance, running, chest heaving — Edward Vaisey grinning at the Conjured mask his father held out to him.

“Nate?” he asked, hushed and horrified — Nate stood in the center of the tent — fingers pushed his glasses up. He smirked, and Lu flinched at it, which he hadn’t done in — first year, the boy with white-blond hair and a blank face.

“Easy target, him,” a dark-eyed boy said with a nod and a sneer, “What do you think, Lucas?” “I think the pig’s forgotten that he isn’t British,” laughed Lucas Vaisey, eleven-years-old — ???? — Nate stood there in black robes with a white mask in his hands. “Nate… What are you doing?” Lu asked.

_Stop.

_The moonlight shone down on a bloodied face — “We did it, Sirius…” — the wolf howling, the girl standing in the water, the water rising and muddying and filling her lungs — ???? — Rosewood braid and white mask, covered by a black veil — Nate staring at the mask, new and Conjured, unblinkingly. Lucas hesitated, unsure what to do — “You don’t belong here, Bastion. Why don’t you go back to your mummy and daddy?” — ? — red hair, long and wavy, flying as she ran down the halls of Hogwarts — a pearl in the hollow of her neck, tiny and cloudy-white.

-his hands went as white as the thing as he clutched it — a smile that was broken. Lucas swallowed at the sight of it. “You don’t have to, Nate. You never have to.” — she cooed at the baby, swaddled at her breast, and looked up with crazed eyes at — ??? — the Muggle children were silent and crying, huddled into Percy’s arms, just like his little sisters used to — Sirius blasted spells at the crowd, careless with anger. He laughed and — Bellatrix Lestrange huddled in her cell, cooing — Nate put the mask on. “My mother’s waiting for me, Vaisey.”

Stop.

I gasped into the dark.

My eyes were used to the low-light enough that I managed to rip myself out from the underbrush. There were no voices nearby, not anymore. My visions took a bit too much time for me to either catch my twin and my brother-twins, or the Golden Trio. Which suited me just fine.

Lu was near enough that he could run to Nate’s tent. I recognized the color, and I’d have to find a large tear to signal. Or… I could give myself a migraine and switch my Mage Sight on when I was in the area, and sort through the magicks, track down the two I wanted. Lu’s tent was to the west, near the stadium.

“Point me,” I murmured, watching my wand shoot out blue-white globs of magic, forming into a compass for my benefit.

I didn’t care that both my boys had white masks in their hands tonight. What I cared about was that Lu had run, and Nate’s smiles at his were empty and broken. They hadn’t joined the rioters yet, and they were hurting. Simple facts. There were drunk Death Eaters all over the place, parts of the campsites were ashes and flames, the forest was dark, the stars were out, my family would be pissed at me for this…

And west was that way.

…

I was beginning to regret that unspoken agreement we all had, that if we didn’t bring up our families first, then the others weren’t really supposed to ask about that. It was mostly in place because, you know, I was a bloodtraitor and they were purebloods — some really high-standing, at that — and that was just… I mean, I knew their families probably despised mine, and I grew up hearing scathing comments about Death Eater names, so. We were all friends despite that, and Hogwarts was isolated enough that the real world, and the real world’s politics, didn’t matter for most of the year.

My friends were a mix of backgrounds, and my thinking — vaguely, because much of my first year wasn’t really thinking, it was just me trying to thrive in Slytherin properly — was that I wanted to show Slytherin that I didn’t give a shit about your pedigree. Who you were and what you did was more important than your thousand-year-old history; that stuff only mattered insofar as how that history affected your skills, the way you thought, and how you interacted with me. And really, as long as I knew those three, I didn’t really need to know your whole family history anyway.

This is probably why my boys flocked to me in the first place. And to keep them, I kept to that
silent rule: all that mattered when you were mine was who you were and what you did, not whether your Death Eater dad might’ve taken a shot at my Order of the Phoenix mum. That, in the end, became habit.

And that, in the end, was what was causing me to swear repeatedly under my breath and I tried to regulate my damn breathing and not collapse from lack of oxygen in my blood. Fucking anaemia strikes again. That, and plain old lack of physical fitness.

I was in the fancier sect where I knew Lu’s tent was set up, having had to bypass ruins of tents and fire and fleeing wizards and pockets of Death Eaters still roaming about. As I’d thought, it wasn’t too dangerous; the worst that could’ve happened was getting grazed by a rogue spell — which wouldn’t happen since I stayed far, far away from anyone fighting — or being trampled by hysterical crowds trying to get away. Keep your head on your shoulders and don’t run through fire, and you’d be fine. And there was no more room for panic, anymore, not for me — my boys were hurting and I didn’t know what I’d do, but I needed to get to them.

Thank fuck that Sirius was very, very preoccupied; even he’d be pissed that I voluntarily left my family, especially since it’s not like I had a solid plan or anything. Vána, however, as little as I was connected to the werewolf, seemed entirely approving of my choice.

I found Lu’s tent first, hesitating outside of the cloth barrier. I knew he wasn’t in there; my vision was a mixture of present and past more than future, which is why I wasn’t bleeding from my stomach or anything.

“Oh, dammit, this would be the easiest way. I hope I’m not too late…” I muttered, waving my wand over myself and letting a Finite wash my Dī-konden An-drixtā away.

There was a blaze of color ripping my eyes and an explosion of sound in my ears, before I grabbed my magic with the aid of the Brightstalker ritual — the paint long gone, but my fingers remembering the lines on my palms — and lowered the intensity of a sudden flux of a new sense to nearly nothing. My head ached from that, and even lowered to whispers, the magic singing in my heads was discordant and chaotic. I hadn’t realized my eyes were closed until I dared to open them a crack, watching ghostly wisps of color tangle all over the place. The damn campsite was a mess of magic, and it was with great reluctance that I glanced at the direction of the stadium.

Ugh.

Nope, nope, nope, too bright. Even from all the way over here. There was so much fucking magic packed into that thing…

Lu’s magic, Lu’s magic… if it was too long ago, it would’ve faded… I winced and was forced to let more of my Mage Sight touch my senses, the whispers growing to murmurs and the colors brightening and thickening. There! A chord of coral-red, threaded with beige and steel-blue and royal blue and gold. That magical sense that never left Soothsayers told me that was Lu’s; it was barely faded, easy to follow — he had left only recently.

No wonder Helvynya Prevett called Soothsayers the “bloodhounds of the magical world.” And she wrote in her early years that, while she herself was being tutored on such Seers, the greatest of Soothsayers could track for miles, for hours. Magic faded for me in less than half an hour, unless the source was near; Alby had even less than that.

If I expected a meandering trail from Lu of all people, I would be disappointed. At one point he’d run through someone else’s tent. The tent in question was empty — or so I hoped, it was hard to tell since this sect was unpredictable, and I’d seen some witches mulling about, ignoring the riots
— but it was pretty much a straight line to another sent, sleek and silver and black, smaller than Lu’s, somewhat isolated.

The flap opened as I arrived, and I stumbled to a stop — my legs were burning — in front of the two boys I’d been looking for in the first place.

Nate wore the black robes and the veiled hat of a Death Eater, the mask in his hands. Lu trailed behind him with a frown on his face, his mouth open to say something, wearing his normal messy robes. They both froze at the sight of me.

There was a tense silence.

(Merlin, what was I supposed to say in this situation? Was I supposed to tell Nate not to go, expect him to choose three years of friendship over a lifetime with his bitch of a mother? Maybe yes, but this was Nate — he would resist me out of the sheer principle of the thing. And did I even have any right? I was his school friend, not his liege lord or whatever the fuck. What did I understand about this sort of thing, besides fighting against it?)

(What was I supposed to say? Was I supposed to scold him for... for following his family? For not doing as told? I didn't have power over him, not here, and not now.)

(Worse yet — what if he wanted to go? What if... Maybe not now, I could tell by how shaken he was — and even I agreed that right now was a terrible time to go Muggle baiting or whatever, since this was the World Cup and the Ministry was everywhere, but... In the future, what if-)

(What was I even doing here? What right did I have... What was I trying to do? I ran before I thought about it, desperate and worried, but... Now that I was here, standing in front of my friends and waiting for the Dark Mark to light up the stay — not that they knew that — what was I doing? For all they knew, this was some long-forgotten last hurrah of an organization they didn’t understand. An organization their parents glorified but they didn't understand. Or did they? Maybe I was the one who didn't understand.)

As always, my panic made my mouth run.

“It doesn’t suit you at all, how are you supposed to wear your glasses with that mask?” I blurted out.

Lu’s jaw dropped, and he looked at me like I was the stupidest person on the planet — which was exactly how I felt, once the words registered — but I was the tension in Nate’s frame seem to still, and then flake off of him. His face had been grim, but now it broke into a sly smile; the relief that hit me, seeing that stupid smirk, was ridiculous.

“This would suit you better, maybe,” Nate said, waving the mask a little, “to cover up those awful-looking scars you got like an idiot. Malfoy’s going to have a bloody field day when he sees you, you know.”

I sniffed. This was familiar, at least. “He already has. But I was sitting with my new godfather to watch that game, and with the British Minister trying to suck up and Sirius intent on embarrassing him to the Bulgarian one, Malfoy would’ve been an idiot to try to get a word in.”

“That, I would have loved to see,” sighed Nate dreamily, mockingly. He snorted. “You’re going to scare the pants off of everyone, Lys. They’re so obviously claw-marks that you couldn’t hope to pass yourself off as anything but a bloody Hit Wizard in the making at this point.”

“Well, if I cover them up, that won’t be a problem, right? Give me the mask.”
Nate stilled, looking down at the thing in his hands like he’d forgotten it was there. I felt my heart squeeze in my chest.

“Give me the mask, Nate.” I said quietly.

He hesitated.

Lu walked up quietly, putting his hand on Nate’s shoulder. Nate was taller and lankier, compared to Lu. He was more foreboding, wearing hastily-conjured Death Eater’s robes, but he jumped when Lu touched him.

“It doesn’t bloody matter, Nate,” said our friend in a low voice, “They’re a bunch of drunks that want to hurt some Muggles. The Ministry will break them up soon enough. It doesn’t matter if you’re there or not.”

I could see Nate’s thoughts racing behind his glasses. Then he gave a short nod, and it was Lu who, sighing in relief, ripped the mask out of Nate’s hands and tossed it my way. I flicked my wand out of its holster in a moment, and snarled out a very weak *Bombarda*, watching in satisfaction as it shattered and unraveled, no more than bright pieces of silver on the ground. Fucking Death Eater mask. Fucking Death Eaters.

“Oops.” I said savagely at the pieces.

Lu made a noise of complaint. “You should’ve done that wandless, Lyssie! That would’ve been cool.”

I leveled a flat stare at him, but I was grateful and relieved. If Lu had been told to wear a mask — and I don’t think he was — then he’d chosen not to, and not only that, he’d gone straight to Nate and had been trying to convince him not to go. Keeping him safe.

“Considering my last bout of wandless magic made your father think it was necessary to offer mine a marriage contract with my name on it, I think I’ll hold off for a bit.” I said, knowing that this would distract Nate; he looked shaken, for him at least, and I still wasn’t sure how I was supposed to broach this subject completely and seriously. Not right now. I had to stop being impulsive and emotional and figure out what the hell I was trying to do.

(For some reason, I always pictured fighting against the Dark Lord with my boys by my side. I don't know why I automatically assumed they would side with me, why I thought it was obvious that they would. Why did I think like that? Was I so used to being powerful in a mere *children's game* that I thought it paralleled the real world perfectly? Stupid. I was a bloody idiot and I needed to think.)

(I needed Dietrich. We talked about the complications of our group and their Death Eater backgrounds, but until I saw Nate with a white mask in his hands, I never realized just how close the threat was. Just how strong it could be. Idiot. I would do anything for my family — why did I assume that no one else would, that Death Eater parents couldn't be as worthy of loyalty as mine?)

(Arrogant idiot. I was going to get someone killed if I didn't think.)

(If I didn’t get ready for things like this.)

As I thought, Nate jumped on the new line of conversation with glee.

“A marriage contract?” he asked, eyes sparking and smile somewhat terrible, “Why, Lucas! Lyssie! Am I to believe that you could possibly be called Guinevere Vaisey in a few years? Ooh,
Lucas, is it for you or for your fuckwit brother? Or both?”

“Bloody hell, Lyssie, did you have to tell him?” Lu groaned.

I laughed, not quite free of the tension, but feeling much better with Lu seeming to just… ignore it. Nate seemed more relaxed as Lu spoke, too; which was odd to see, since Lu always had a bit of a grudge against Nate for manipulating him so easily when we were firsties.

“Sorry, dearest, I’d just like you to know that my father had a mental breakdown at the thought of him handing me off to yours to join the family.” I snarked. Then I folded my arms, tilting my head at Nate. “And it’s for Lu, his brother’s betrothed already.”

Nate laughed. “You’d get Lucas the Paterfamilias position in a week after you two married.”

Lu’s cheeks were turning red. “No one’s getting married! My dad’s just being stupid! Lyssie’s a bloodtraitor, anyways, she doesn’t do marriage contracts.”

“You don’t read very much, do you?” sighed Nate pityingly.

“You wanna die, Nate?” Lu snapped back at him.

Of course Nate would get his equilibrium back by teasing Lu mercilessly. I sighed at them, shaking my head; at some point, I don’t remember when, the veiled cap had been removed, nowhere to be seen. Nate seemed to just be wearing particularly black robes, now; just like Hogwarts’ robes, if you didn’t look too close. He and Lu hissed at each other, back and forth, until Lu swung his arm around Nate’s neck and trapped him, Nate yelping at the sudden attack, dragging him like that… towards Lu’s tent, where I’d come from.

Away from where his mother would come back to.

Lu caught my eye and nodded, and I knew that he understood — even if it was only intuitively — that Nate waiting here for his mum wasn’t a good idea. Better that Nate, on the way to join his mum, “accidentally” stumbled across Lu, who accosted him into his own tent, and the riots were swept by the Ministry before anything else could be done. Even better would be if Lu’s prospective betrothed were there, a witch from a very Light family, and they truly couldn’t have left even if they wanted to; the Wilkes name couldn’t stand up to the Vaisey one, after all, and the Vaiseys wanted me.

Plan made, I followed after them, snickering as Nate struggled in Lu’s hold and then sighed, resigned to being put in such a humiliating position.

“Our dear leader isn’t even going to help me, is she?” Nate droned.

“Your dear leader thinks this is hilarious. My brothers do this to each other all the time, but at least they know how to get out of it.”

Lu jostled Nate purposefully. “He wouldn’t be able to even if he knew how, Nate’s a stick.”

“My heartfelt thanks, Lucas, how I love being called a stick.”

“You’re welcome, mate.”

Nate shuffled awkwardly as Lu dragged him, so eventually he was let out. He fell into step, sandwiched between his shorter, louder friends. Didn’t protest at all, didn’t look back. He started unbuttoning the robes, leaving them behind — they were hastily Conjured, they’d eventually fade
if someone didn’t get rid of them first. When he was finally in his own robes and clothes and nothing else, I saw his hands shaking, and didn’t hesitate in grabbing the closest one, which made him startle, though he didn’t shake me off or anything.

He gave me an odd look, even as we sedately made our way back to Lu’s tent. “Are you supposed to be here? Where’s the rest of your litter?”

“The woods,” I said, shrugging, “And they’re going to kill me when they find out I ran off again.”

“Then shouldn’t you be going back to them before they notice you’re gone?”

I smiled, and if a little of the dread pooling now was for the lectures and yelling and disappointment and anger that was sure to be waiting with my family, well. We’d all heard my mum’s Howler back when we were firsties; Nate would understand. “Oh, they know by now. And I can’t get any deader, so I might as well stick with you two. Better than charging around alone.”

Lu yawned. “What’s the worst they can do? Ground you?”

“Yep.”

“No letters ’til Hogwarts, then. Might as well show me more wandless while you’re here, right? I won’t be able to learn without your letters.”

I gave Lu a look. “You think you’re being sneaky, but I assure you, you’re really not.”

Nate shook his head. “We really ought to teach you how to be more Slytherin, Lucas.”

( The Death Eaters scattered once we got the Muggles, but- Lys. )

I winced inwardly. Here we go. Hello, Sirius.

“Well, I ought to get you and Lyssie to bulk up a little. You didn’t even know how to get out of a headlock, Nate — and you call me pathetic—”

There was the feeling of poking and prodding in my head. Sirius was connecting to me more fully — a sign that we were more disconnected than before and he had to try to get the connection’s old strength back. A good sign. One that he ignored in favor of seeing through my eyes and feeling my senses.

His mental voice was flat. ( Why are you not in the woods, safe with your brothers and sister? )

Funny story.

“-ot all of us want or need to be big brutes like you, Lucas.”

“I could put you in a bloody headlock again, Nate, it seems to shut you up really well—”

He growled. ( Lys… )

And then the Dark Mark went up.

Lu, Nate, and I stood right outside of Lu’s tent, looking at it in quiet horror and amazement. What pockets of Death Eaters there were had Apparated straight away as the roar of magic went out and the glow of green overpowered the fires. Sirius jolted in surprise as well, horror flooding him; horror and misty, dark tendrils of memories…
Shit. Sirius, you’re wavering.

(Yes… I- I remember… the last time I saw- the last- I- James and Lily…)

Your memories and nightmares are getting mixed, Sirius, there was never a Dark Mark cast over their home. Harry’s safe, remember? He’s waiting for you in the woods-

(That’s where the Mark came from- FUCK. Dammit Lyssie- You’re with your friends? Stay there. Purebloods would be the safest now.) That last thought was sneered. Sirius was starting to run towards the woods, towards where the Mark went up, along with every other Ministry wizard around him. (We’ll talk about this later.)

I know. You know I have a good explanation, don’t you?

(You always do. If it’s good enough is up for debate.)

“Bloody hell,” Lu whispered at the sight of the skull and serpent in the sky.

Nate was conspicuously silent.

The Dark Mark always meant a message from the Dark Lord. Messages from Voldemort usually happened to be death. Torture and death and destruction.

“Let’s get inside,” I murmured to them both, still gripping Nate’s slackened hand, “Tonight’s been a nightmare.”

Tonight, we wouldn’t be able to talk about anything… relevant. There was far too much to think about, to process, and I had no doubt that my communications would be cut off for the stunt I pulled. So maybe it was better that we all curled up together, laughing and joking and trying to shut out everything else. Relaxing.

There’d be time, later, at Hogwarts, to deal with the repercussions and implications of that monstrosity in the sky.
Chapter 56

Chapter Notes

HAHA! I LIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIVE!

Before I do my spiel, some things for y'all:

awesome fanart!!!!
MORE awesome fanart!!!!
a very cool playlist for RPR!!!!

(If I forgot anyone's stuff or whatever, just lemme know, here or on tumblr. I appreciate every single one of you -- thanks to the artist and the playlist-maker, you know who you are! :D)

Okay, story time for y'all who are interested. For y'all who aren't, enjoy the chapter and all that.

For the rest of you: I moved like a week or whatever ago into my new apartment. My apartment has no AC (fuck me, bc it's summertime in the damn Mojave desert) and no WiFi -- which means I have little motivation, energy, or means to write and post chapters OR answer comments the way I want to. :'D

So I probably won't be able to get the next chapter up for another 3 weeks -- AT LEAST -- and comment-replies will be hella late and sporadic, depending on when I can snag internet and time and whatnot. So sorry about this, fellas... :) My update schedule is completely shot, huh? My thanks for the understanding, my readers. :) And, of course, thanks for reading and sticking with this fic! You are why this fic has continued, no joke. :D Enjoy this chapter!

..."You're taking punishment rather well, Lyssie."

My hand froze, the four little balls of light it was controlling spluttering a bit with my loss of concentration. I was flopped on my back on my still-unmade bed, legs hanging off over the side, squinting as I tried to maintain a rhythmic pattern to the little Lumos-like lights, flicking my fingers to make them swap colors — indigo and crimson and deep blue and silvery-teal — as they bobbed up in the air. Of course, they stilled as I gazed at my oldest brother.

"'Lo, Bill." I mumbled.

He was leaned against the doorframe, sleeves rolled to his elbows and arms crossed, wearing easygoing confidence around him like a cloak. I envied Bill for his utter calm and control, all the time. Even when he’d had his wand drawn, ready to fight off Death Eaters at the Cup, Bill seemed tightly in control of everything around him. It was awe-inspiring, especially since I fought so hard
to be able to control the uncontrollable, myself.

“I thought Mum and Dad said no wandless magic?” He asked, brows raised.

The lights went out in an instant. “What wandless magic?”

He snickered, coming further into the room and closing the door behind him. I sat up, and he joined me on the edge of my bed.

“You’re not really seeing this as a punishment at all, are you?” He asked, voice gentle.

Bill’s voice was always gentle. Even when he was laughing. He was *such* a big brother, honestly; I sort of wished I could’ve gone to Hogwarts with him, just to see him more awkward and fumbling as he grew into his idyllic self. Head Boy Bill probably just guilted everyone into following the rules, really. He certainly knew how to guilt the younger of us; Ginny would burst into tears if Bill said he was disappointed in her for pulling Ron’s hair or for grabbing at Percy’s glasses or for pushing me into furniture or whatever, when we were younger. I suppose that came with the whole ‘11 years older’ thing.

“Depends on what the purpose of this punishment is,” I said carefully — I was *not* immune to Bill’s big-brother-vibes, and though I didn’t burst into tears when I was little, I certainly felt awful whenever Bill lectured me. Somewhat like when Dad lectured, but somehow even worse because this was *Bill*.

“Dad is… Well, he thinks you aren’t getting the message,” said Bill.

I felt that pinch of irritation I’d been nursing all week. It grew with every passing day I was confined to my rooms, only let out to do chores. It lessened when, on the third day, my siblings had cooled down enough and gotten brave enough — in the face of Mum and Dad’s disapproval, if they ever knew — to chatter at me and sometimes help when I was out weeding or de-gnoming or whatever else. It was almost never there when I thought about how the demon twins and Ginny were starting to make messes everywhere, just so I could keep cleaning up and hanging around with them. And then it returned when Mum and Dad caught on and had everyone go play Quidditch outside.

I tried not to be irritable. Last time I was “irritable” about a punishment, I’d treated my sister like shit, had a Slytherin temper tantrum, and generally made an embarrassment of myself. And it’s not as if this was unreasonable; logically, being grounded like this after what I did at the Quidditch World Cup was only to be expected.

Not like I could help it, though.

“If the message is ‘You get to be bored out of your mind in return for disobeying instructions that were given solely to protect you’, then yes. If the message is ‘You shouldn’t ever disobey like this ever again’, then *no.*” Bill frowned a bit, probably at how scathing my tone had become at the end, there. I winced inwardly; the irritation and frustration was getting out of hand, and it was a damn shame that I couldn’t Occlude it down properly at the moment… hence why I was practicing wandless, since magic *did* blow off steam for me. “Cause and effect makes sense to me. Punishment as a deterrent is just… it won’t work. I won’t stop.”

( *You alright, Lys?* )

I nearly jumped. *Sirius!* I hissed inwardly, *Not during the full moon, remember?*
You were angry.

The ‘I was worried’ didn’t need to be said. I felt that perfectly well. But I snapped at Sirius anyways, Close the link!

There was a burst of apology-obedience-surprise-worry-self-recrimination-protectiveness-annoyance-Oh-shit-you’re-right-bye!, and then that tingle that signalled our connection shuttered. That was new, by the way; we could actually feel when we were connected and not, which meant we were much more separated, thank the cambion for that.

That only took about a second, though, and impressively enough, Bill already gathered his thoughts in that time.

“Dad almost had a heart-attack when we found Harry, Ron, and Hermione under the Dark Mark,” Bill started solemnly, “Amos Diggory almost attacked them, too — and he wasn’t the only one. But when we gathered them up and went off to find our pairs of twins… Lyssie, Perce almost threw up when he realized none of us had you. The things those bloody Death Eaters were saying about the Muggles… The things we heard that happened at the other campsites, with the other Muggle hostages, with the unlucky Muggleborns and Halfbloods who crossed a bad group…”

I winced. The riot had gone on for hours, starting up in different places at different times, wrapping up the same way. Some campsites were untouched, some of the sleepy campers coming out and saying they hadn’t realized anything was wrong at all; others looked like a hurricane swept through, skeletons of tents amidst ashes and stampeded earth. It started off as a bunch of drunks, but then the actual fanatics came out, and then the Dark Mark was cast — and only some fled at that, others just started pushing harder. There were twenty-seven arrests, but with how backed up the Ministry was already, among other things, it wasn’t likely that anything would stick.

Drunken revelry, they called it. Drunken revelry, I thought. It was a bloody riot. It was a few hours of fucking anarchy. A bit different from what I thought would happen, what I thought I saw.

(This was why I was trying to take my punishment with grace. It was dangerous. I was just lucky to have been in a safer zone, and to have run into the safest zone possible: the pureblood encampments, furthest away from the worst of the chaos.)

“It’s not like I’m an idiot,” I said, “I know I was stupid. I know I was lucky. It was positively Gryffindorish of me, to charge off into danger without knowing what on earth was going on, assuming I’d be able to- to take on the world or whatever the hell you lions think.”

Bill cracked a smile at my weak barbs. “So you won’t do it again?”

“Well, I’ll make damn sure that I cast a Disillusionment Charm next time. And I’m going to practice with my Mage Sight more — I’ve gotten lazy because I just turn it off or make it weak, just enough to see spells and and an inch off of cores, really.”

Stupid of me, really. I knew how to cast the Disillusionment Charm already — I’d trained my fucking fingers off in casting it because I knew how damn useful it’d be, just like the Summoning Charm, which I mastered to the point of being able to mess with it wandlessly — so why hadn’t I taken the time to hide myself a little? Oh, right. Because I panicked. Fucking idiot. Next time, I’d think things through a little more. And I’d have to make sure that I could stand my Mage Sight at stronger levels; being able to see wizards in the vicinity would be useful, if only I knew how to not start sobbing when the magic blinded me. Maybe I’d go back to The Magick of Man-Hunters, see if I could fiddle with the Soothsayer rituals…
Bill groaned a little, rubbing at his forehead. I knew from his next words that he was definitely sent up as a representative of the rest of the still-angry family. (So, everyone but Mum, the demon twins, Harry and Hermione — poor kids, they always got so awkward when there were tensions between our family — and Ginny. Sirius and Remus weren’t here right now, they didn’t count.)

“No, Lyssie, next time you aren’t going to go charging off into the middle of a riot at all.”

I frowned at Bill, my musing on how I’d have to be more careful next time fizzling out. “I already said I wouldn’t stop.”

“Wouldn’t stop what?” He asked sarcastically, which was how I knew I was frustrating him — his big brother face was crumbling in the face of frustration. “Running headlong into danger?”

“Protecting mine.”

That drew Bill up short.

He paused. Then he sighed. “Lyssie, we found you sitting in Lucas Vaisey’s tent with him and that other one, Wilkes, laughing and playing Exploding Snap. You were practically having tea and biscuits with Royston Vaisey.”

*And he was probably out with the rest of them, judging by how drunk he was,* I thought guiltily.

Oh, the man had sobered up as soon as he detected two strangers in his tent, and he’d sent Edward straight to bed — now that boy wouldn’t have been able to act sober if he *tried,* and having died a college student once, I knew what I was talking about — while he summoned a House Elf (“Hotch!” Lu had whispered in delight, proving that he knew the old, wizened creature.) to fetch him and us guests some tea as he listened to why the heir of Wilkes and the Weasley girl were intruding. And that’s when Percy burst into the tent, wild-eyed and with my other older brothers on his heels.

(Percy said he’d had a hunch. Just goes to show that he knew me well, even when he was furious to hell and back with me for worrying him.)

(I thought it was funny, but hearing Bill tell me that Percy had nearly vomited out of nausea for imagining what might’ve been done to me if one of the viler rioters had caught me… Well, it wasn’t very funny anymore. I resolved to apologize to Percy somehow, if he wasn’t still imperiously ignoring me.)

I looked away from Bill. “I just needed to make sure they were alright.”

“They weren’t the ones fighting to get traumatized, injured Muggles away from drunk, careless wizards in Death Eater clothes.” Bill pointed out dryly.

“I knew you’d all be fine, my Clairvoyance would’ve warned me ages ago if one of you got seriously hurt.” I said mullishly.

“But in the woods it definitely did *not* show you Vaisey or Wilkes being injured?”

“I said so, didn’t I? I’m not going to be coming out of this summer with new scars for saving someone’s life this time, you all need to stop worrying about things like that. I think you’d all be able to tell if I was about to go do something like that, I tend to pull away from everything and concentrate on lessening the damage of those sorts of decisions. Dietrich could tell you all about how distant I was last year.”
Bill rolled his eyes. “No need to get snippy with me, Lys.” He put a hand on my shoulder, drawing my gaze, which had been rather middle-distance for a bit. His tone gentled again. “Lyssie. I’m trying to understand why you’d knowingly run off, leaving the rest of us scrambling and terrified for you. Your friends were fine — Vaisey and Wilkes were the least likely candidates to get hurt, seeing as—”

Bill cut himself off, his eyes widening.

Shit. He knew.

He put it together.

Shit.

I swallowed, feeling the room was too quiet.

Bill blinked, a vague shock and horror on his face, his freckles standing out on his skin a bit more than before. His hand tightened on my shoulder, not hard enough to hurt, but enough that I wanted to squirm.

“Which one?” he asked, voice too calm and too sharp, “Or was it both? Were they both wearing masks, about to join their parents—”

I hissed, wrenching out of his grip. I was prepared for this reaction, I knew it was coming the moment he realized, but it still riled up my irritation into fullblown anger. I got up, stomping halfway across the room in trying to put distance between that fucked up thought — Lu and Nate in white masks, Lu and Nate in black robes and hoods, Lu and Nate casting curses on Muggle children, Lu and Nate trembling and pale and looking at their hands like they betrayed them — or maybe just between me and Bill, so I didn’t scratch his eyes out in righteous anger.

“Neither of them,” I snarled, “They’re not bloody Death Eaters.”

“Because you stopped them,” said Bill, his voice and face certain now.

“Because they don’t want to be!”

(Lys?!)  

Later, I promised darkly, ignoring as Bill watched me clench and unclench my hands.

“Why does everyone,” I bit out, “always — always — see last names and think they know everything about a person? Everyone was always so shocked that I could be a Slytherin, let alone take charge of it. Weasley means poverty-stricken, stupid bloodtraitor, and so Vaisey and Wilkes mean evil, sadistic Death Eater, obviously.” The words had tired me out a little, rash and careless as they were. I took a breath, glancing at Bill, who looked carefully neutral as he waited. He was always careful and gentle, Bill. He could be trusted. I took the plunge. “Even if I hadn’t gone, it wouldn’t have made a difference. Lu had run off to stop Nate. I found him with the robes on and a mask in his hand and yes, I told him to drop it, but Lu would’ve probably been enough to stop him. That wasn’t the point.”

“One of your friends was going to join the riots… that isn’t the point?” Bill asked coolly.

“No!” I growled. “The point was that both of my boys were terrified and alone and I wasn’t going to stay there, knowing both of them were shaking and hurting and- I wasn’t going to leave them like that.”
“Ginny was shaking and terrified.”

“Ginny had two big brothers with her. Lu and Nate have parents who think they’re useless and weak unless they put on masks and hunt helpless Muggles.”

Bill blinked at me. “It sounds like,” he said, “you want to take them away from their families and hide them under your bed.”

“They’re not pets,” I said, offended.

“No. They’re not. But you want them to be family.”

“They are family. They’re mine.” I mumbled, my anger spent now that Bill somewhat understood what was going on. “But don’t you dare tell anyone, Bill Weasley, I swear to Merlin… I’d rather everyone think I was just being stupid and contrary than anyone thinking, Oh, of course, you went to save the little Death Eaters from themselves! Ron would raise hell trying to get me to stop talking to them at school if he thought for even a moment that any of them might be considering the mask, you know he would. Percy’d send me letters daily, telling me to stay away from my closest friends.”

“And why shouldn’t he?” Bill asked calmly — the calm being his sign that he was playing Devil’s advocate more than anything — “You’re from a known bloodtraitor family, Lyssie. They’re from families who wouldn’t spit on us if we were on fire. They might end up like that, in the end.”

My heart stung at the thought. It was even worse, because this was Bill — Bill who was always there to answer questions, who always read to me, invincible and idyllic Bill — and he was saying that it might be possible. My big brother’s word had always been law to the rest of us little siblings, and if he was saying…

“Oh, and me breaking off our friendships would really stop that from happening.” I muttered, trying to hide the creeping fear that came with that image, with that possible, murky future I never wanted to imagine or See.

(I’d never thought that my boys wouldn’t be anywhere but at my side, now.)

(And it pissed me off, knowing that that was a dangerous assumption. Fuck, I needed to talk to Dietrich.)

My sarcasm must not’ve hidden it all the way, because Bill’s face flickered with sympathy. He reached across to grab my wrist gently — I hadn’t even realized I was close enough to him to touch — and guide me to sit next to him, huddled closer than I was before.

“Lys…” He hesitated. Then he sighed. “Alright. I understand why you went off on your own. I still think you shouldn’t have, and you definitely deserve the grounding. Though… Mum and Dad were probably over-harsh when they forbade you from seeing Sirius off for the full moon yesterday.”

Not that it matters, since I just said goodbye in the mindscape instead, I thought, with only a small amount of guilt for circumventing that particular petty punishment. Though I did get more antsy and irritable, without the meditation and Occluding to help sort out my thoughts and emotions — I was barred from it while the cambion gathered data via constructs on how the lycanthrope magic interacted with our link. Sirius, too. We kept fucking up, of course, but we did try our hardest not to mess with the Mind Magic.

“I’m not going to stop protecting mine,” I muttered, “Just because Mum and Dad lock me in a room and make me clean things, I’m not going to just… stop.”
“You need to be smarter than that, Lyssie.”

“I know, but I need to get practice in, in order to do that.”

Bill snorted. “Little sister, you are and have always been incorrigible.”

I smiled, feeling lighter now that Bill was less solemn and judging. For a moment, I’d been a bit nervous that he was going to lecture me on how to deal with my boys. I didn’t need the extra pressure; I was already inwardly panicking about it. Talking about my punishment was a lot easier than that — which, yes, meant that I wasn’t taking this punishment seriously, but could anyone blame me? Being grounded was almost completely pointless, especially this close to the new school year.

He got up from the bed, tugging quickly on a lock of red hair. “I’ll tell Mum and Dad you shouldn’t be grounded for the Winter Hols, too. I think Mum’d like to see you off to Hogwarts in a good mood, too, after all.” He quirked a brow. “You’re on your own for Dad and Perce, though.”

I grumbled a little. “I know. I figure they’ll be calm by Winter Hols. They hold grudges, but not that long.”

Bill chuckled. He let flicked my hair into my face, making me scowl at him after a blinked, but his face was all serious when I looked up at him. “Lyssie,” he intoned soberly, the light atmosphere darkening and making me wince, “You’re a bloodtraitor name, and even if they have no desire to go Muggle-baiting, your friends are still from purist families. That means something to that lot, you know. And you and I both know that Voldemort never died that night, no matter how good a kid Potter seems to be. Even if you hadn’t been having nightmares your whole life, we would’ve been waiting for that shoe to drop — perks of being friendly with Dumbledore, I suppose.” Bill tapped at my temple, his eyes sad. “You can’t pluck them from their families just like that, Lyssie. You can’t declare that they’re yours forever and expect that to be that. And I know you know that. So… just be careful, Lyssie.”

Lu and Nate in white masks, Lu and Nate casting Killing Curses, Lu and Nate and Jay with Dark Marks on their arms-

“How do I make sure it’s forever, then?” I asked Bill’s back as he walked to the door.

He smiled at me, the expression sad and warm and very big-brother-like. “You need to be smarter than that, Lyssie.”

My brother left, the door shutting quietly, and I wondered how much of my frustration had really been all thoughts like that, about my boys and their damning last names and my lack of a plan, building up as I tried to push it down. Leave it to Bill to coax that out, let me rage patiently, say something cryptic and cool-sounding, and then go on his way.

The first morning of September was all a downpour. It had already been rather cloudy, drizzling on and off, all week — which was nice for yardwork, and I suppose Quidditch for my siblings — but it seemed the sky couldn’t hold it in today. Made the light in the Burrow weak and pale, weaker with how early I’d woken up. Ginny was still deep asleep in her bed, and a quick scan of the house showed the same for most everyone else. Mum and Dad were downstairs already, probably starting...
breakfast and *Daily Prophet* reading and coffee, and I think Percy was up in his room, doing who-knows-what, the workaholic.

I felt achey and tired today, though not sick thankfully — the full moon was never good for me, and was even worse for Sirius (and exponentially worse for Remus). If it wasn’t the scars hitting moonlight and waking me up for a few seconds of irritable drowsiness, Sirius’ mind was bleeding into my dreams and making everything surreal and violent, and I’m pretty sure sometimes I’d switch to Sirius’ eyes — or Vána’s, as it were — and get both of us confused. The werewolf thing always managed to fuck up me and Sirius’ mental organization; it was a chaotic element, like a natural disaster that swept through our woodlands and rivers and meadows every month. Annoyed the ever-living shit out of both of us, which was why we were attempting to isolate ourselves as much as possible during the moons, and if that barred us from proper Occlumency and meditation… well, the cambion would figure something out.

(Sirius would interject here, *That’s what we’re paying the bastard for, after all.* And I’d probably tell him off for being rude and ungrateful while its fucking conduits were *inside our heads*, and he’d bluster and argue. I did miss him. Even more so when I was just grounded and bored at home, knowing he was suffering through the transformations.)

(At least he wasn’t alone, though. Remus may be bitter about the whole Sirius-being-a-werewolf thing, but one had to look at the silver linings.)

My grounding was technically over today, though I hesitated as I left my and Ginny’s room, hovering in the stairwell for a moment. There was a bit of a cold war between me and Percy and Dad; they had reacted the worst to the Cup incident, probably because they were the most protective of me, and had been more than furious at how I had apparently chosen to go frollick with Nate and Lu rather than keep their peace of mind intact during a Death Eater-themed riot. It only worsened their moods to see me sneaking about with my other siblings as I did chores, totally unaffected by their punishments and scolding.

So did I brave the kitchen — and *Dad* — or did I stay in the room I’d been trapped in for the last week?

Puberty and my Weasley genes made me decision for me; my stomach made the largest rumble I’d ever heard come from it this life, and I missed coffee all of a sudden. Used to live off of the stuff in my last life, barely touched it now — but smelling it right now, I was trudging downstairs before I was quite aware of what I was doing.

There was no sudden tension as soon as I stepped into the kitchen; none that wasn’t all me, that is. It felt oddly normal, sitting down in my usual seat, Dad turning a page of the newspaper after giving me a distracted nod in good morning, Mum beaming and kissing my cheek and then getting back to cooking. I let my magic float the coffee pot to me, making a very sweet and creamy coffee for myself quietly.

“You don’t normally drink coffee, Lyssie,” Dad noted absently.

…Was it just me, then? Was I the only one who thought he’d been pissed at me? I felt like I was waiting for a lecture that was a wrong word or two away from happening.

“It smells nice,” I mumbled, wandlessly Conjuring water to form ice cubes to cool my drink down faster.

Mum scoffed. “We have ice, Lyssie.”
“And now you don’t have to waste it,” I said, sending a grin at Mum — who was rolling her eyes goodnaturedly — and feeling a bit less like someone walking to their own execution. Then I glanced at Dad. “Diggory’s going to Floo call before breakfast, I think. Urgent business.”

Dad raised a brow.

I answered the unasked question easily, shrugging. “You being better-prepared to talk to him isn’t going to change the news he’s giving, or what you’d have to do about it. I checked, there’s nothing to be paid.”

Dad set down his paper. “Can I know what he’s going to say?”

I frowned. My Clairvoyance had been acting up with how restless and emotional I’d been all week, compounded by the full moons. I’d Seen snatches and managed to piece together some options and consequences of certain decisions. The main thing — which was completely in my realm of expectations — was that, no, I wasn’t allowed to expose the fake Moody or his plan for Harry. In fact, interfering at all with any of that… it really ripped my head a new one, and it was a good thing Vána didn’t mind howling with all of his lungs in my stead because fuck me Fate did not want me messing with Voldemort’s ressurection. And telling anyone about his ressurection beforehand — explicitly for sure, implicitly had too many variables for me to have managed — was also a no-go. Fate decreed that Voldemort was going to ressurect himself within the school year. In fact, I’m pretty sure that edged into Destiny, and there was no way in fuck I was messing with Destiny right now.

(I was already on thin ice, influencing Destiny’s favorite child, Harry Potter. It always worried me that I was going to steer that boy somewhere he shouldn’t be, and pay for it. Hence why I really didn’t mind the more distant, removed friendship I had with him; if I was as attached to Harry as I was to one of my boys, I probably would’ve ended up dead by now, trying to help him. Fate probably knew what she was doing, plopping me into 1981 rather than 1980.)

Anyways. My Clairvoyance wasn’t clear on whether I was allowed to tell Dad anything about Moody or his attack last night — his kidnapping, really, not that anyone’d know about that until much later — so, as always, I went with the safe option.

“Not sure,” I replied to Dad, sipping at my coffee, “Best you wait for Diggory’s call.”

Dad sighed. “Well, at least I might be able to get ready early.” He started to get up, intent on going back upstairs to dress up properly — if I hadn’t warned him, I’m sure he would’ve lazed the morning away and then had to rush when Amos Diggory came calling with news. “Thank you, Lys.”

I shrugged. “S’nothing.”

(And it really was. But at least I got some use out of this godforsaken ability.)

“I was expecting more… lecturing.” I announced as Dad went back upstairs and left me alone with Mum.

She turned and gave a little chuckle. “Your father’s frustrated with you. It’s the first time for him, so he’s not quite sure what to do. You’ve always been a little angel for him — he’s adjusting to the fact that you very much aren’t.”

I raised a brow. “I thought you both knew I was born a Slytherin?”

“Oh, Lyssie, I always knew you were a little trickster spirit. Your father thought you’d be more like
the grandfather who raised him, Quintus. That man was always known to be ruthless and
dangerous, but to his family, he was a puppy.” Mum shook her head. “You and your father have
always understood each other. He’s just a bit surprised that, now that you’re growing up, that’s
changing.”

I felt a pang. Drifting away from Dad?

Mum made a harrumph-sound, and I realized I’d spoken that last bit aloud.

“Drifting apart isn’t always as terrible as it sounds, Lyssie,” Mum said, wagging a finger at me, “It
might sound silly coming from me — Merlin knows I hate that your older brothers live so far away
from us all — but people grow, and sometimes they grow apart. And, really, there’s nothing wrong
with that, since there’s as much chance of them growing back together again.”

“Is that why you’re always bugging Charlie and Bill to come back to Britain?” I asked, amused and
a little in awe of the wisdom of my mother’s words — not so say that Mum was stupid or anything,
but she was usually so adamant in the family sticking together, in mothering (and maybe
smothering) us all.

Mum nodded, smiling smugly. “I want grandchildren, Lyssie,” she stated, a rare fervor in her
voice, “I want to be able to spoil them rotten, and how on earth am I supposed to do that if they
live in Romania or Egypt?”

“Sirius’ money will buy lots and lots of Floo powder,” I pointed out playfully.

She scowled. “Much as I appreciate Sirius helping out, we’re not a charity case here, Lyssie.”

I nodded sagely. “See, I got around that by getting him as a godfather. Since he’s my family at the
very least, I don’t feel too terrible using his money.”

Mum pointed a wooden cooking spoon at me. “Guinevere Lysandra, do not take advantage of your
poor godfather and spend all of his money!”

“His family’s money, they probably made it selling Muggle organs in Knockturn or something-
Ow! Mum! Not the Stinging Hexes!”

“I have it on good authority that you use my Stinging Hexes on your friends, Lyssie, and didn’t I
always tell you that what goes around comes around?” Mum said primly, tucking her wand back
into her apron pocket.

I scowled at the already-fading mark on the back of my hand. “Stupid Ginny, telling my secrets all
over the place…” I mumbled.

“You can thank your friend Tristan for that one, actually, dear.”

“Harper — that traitor.”

Mum laughed, and I snickered with her after a while. I finished up my coffee and already felt much
more awake for it, and when Amos Diggory’s voice started calling for Dad from the living room
fireplace, Mum went to go answer as I filled in for her, breakfast most of the way finished. The rest
of the house was waking up and coming down to eat — though I think Bill and Charlie were
sleeping in or something, their colors pulsed firmly upstairs in the same dreaming rhythms — and
Mum called Dad down from upstairs (“Arthur! Urgent call from the Ministry! It’s Amos!” and the
replying, “I’m here, Molly- Ah, thank you-” with Mum handing Dad a quill and some spare
parchment).
Ginny and Ron both smiled at me when they saw me in the kitchen, finally free of my punishment, with Harry paused in the living room and staring disbelievingly at Dad and Mr. Diggory Floo-calling — I suppose he’d never seen a Floo call before now, usually just using the Floo for transportation — and Hermione giving the same scene an interested glance, but nothing more. She’d probably read about Floo calls already, it sounded like something she’d do. Fred and George near-tumbled down the stairs; Percy gave them disapproving frowns for the background noise as Dad was speaking to Amos, and sent me a cool nod when I plated him some breakfast, Mum doing the same for Ginny on the other side of the table. We were all quieter than normal, speaking distracted pleasantries as we all mostly eavesdropped on the Floo conversation:

“What does Mad-Eye say happened, then?” Dad’s voice drifted from the kitchen.

“Says he heard an intruder in his yard. Says he was creeping toward the house, but was ambushed by his dustbins.”

A pause. “What did the dustbins do?”

“Made on hell of a noise and fired rubbish everywhere, as far as I can tell… Apparently one of them was still rocketing around when the please-men turned up—”

“The Muggle police,” Dad groaned, sounding pained at the imagery.

I winced at the thought, too. Things always got complicated when the Muggle authorities were involved. And with the way the Ministry was under scrutiny this summer, no small part of which was because of me…

“And what about the intruder?”

“Arthur, you know Mad-Eye. Someone creeping into his yard in the dead of night? More likely there’s a very shell-shocked cat wandering around somewhere, covered in potato peelings. But if the Improper Use of Magic lot get their hands on Mad-Eye, he’s had it — think of his record. We’ve got to get him off on a minor charge, something in your department — what are exploding dustbins worth?”

“Might be a caution,” murmured Dad. He was probably thinking fast.

Some more back and forth, ending with Dad getting ready to leave (“Molly, are you going to be alright taking the kids to King’s Cross?” “Of course I will, love — You just look after Mad-Eye, we’ll be fine. Merlin knows he needs it.”) and saying quick goodbyes to us Hogwarts-bound, and telling Percy he’d be seeing him later. Bill and Charlie had come through at the tail-end of the conversation, curious at the sound of Mad-Eye’s name. Breakfast conversation centered around the old, famous Auror, Harry and Hermione soaking in the information that Bill and Charlie gave off easily; very familiar scene for them, I reckon, though with a quieter, darker-haired audience.

“Mum, do you want me to call the Muggle taxi service instead?” I asked her as Bill and Charlie took care of the washing and the rest of my siblings — sans Percy, who unlike our older brothers decided to go to work rather than see us off (he gave me the stink-eye, the petty bastard, but I could hardly restrain my rolled eyes at that) — trailed upstairs to get their trunks.

Mum looked relieved. She was never comfortable with Muggle technology — the telephone confused her (and delighted Dad). There were ten of us going to King’s Cross, seven of us with trunks and three of us with animals — Ron’s Pigwidgeon, Hermione’s Crookshanks, and my Serated — so it was a bit of a hefty sum to ask for all those extra-large taxis, but at least we’d get there. Floo travel didn’t cover objects as large as trunks usually, and animals despised using it for
obvious reasons, and unfortunately Dad couldn’t wrangle Ministry cars this year.

One of the twins’ trunks cracked open while the Muggle drivers were loading it up, Filibuster’s Fabulous No-Heat, Wet-Start Fireworks bursting out of the seams and making the dreary, rainy day bright with neon colors and screaming, alarmed Muggles. Harry, Ron, and Hermione piled into one of the cars miserably, Crookshanks hissing and spitting as Pigwidgeon attempted to concuss himself trying to flit around his tiny cage. I was glad to ride with Ginny, my calm barn-owl — I honestly think she was the laziest owl alive, though she got the job done, so no complaints there — and Charlie. Bill was with the twins, apologizing to the drivers and helping them out, and Mum was with the Golden Trio, sitting in the passenger seat and trying not to look nervous; I think the last car she’d gotten in — before the Ministry cars last year — was the Ford Anglia, and with how batshit insane that thing (secretly) was, it was understandable she was a bit apprehensive of cars.

(Dad and I loved that thing, and I was still a little sad that Ron and Harry lost it in the Forbidden Forest. We painted it with flames and shit, it was so cool… It had a stereo…)

We were racing along the roads of Ottery St. Catchpole when Ginny poked at my shoulder. She nodded to Charlie, sitting in the passenger seat and practically knocked out, head leaning against the window. Did he stay up late? Charlie always did that, I swear, he only opened his eyes when the sun was out if it meant he could go spot a magical creature or something. The disgruntled Muggle driver was a younger man, muttering along with the lyrics of the radio and clearly in his own world, which was convenient.

“Hm?”

“You should take a nap or something,” she said sensibly, “I know the full moon makes it hard for you to sleep. ‘Cos of the pain, right?”

“Not so much painful as it is… itchy, I guess? Stinging. That, and my Clairvoyance has been mad lately,” I sighed.

She huffed. “I knew I ought to have slept in your bed.”

I smiled at her. My big sister, always so ready to help. “I would’ve woken you up. You’re a relatively light sleeper, and I wouldn’t quit tossing and turning. Not your responsibility to make sure I sleep every night, you know, Gin.”

“It’s my job to help you, since you’re my little sister, even if you don’t act like it,” Ginny said, nodding decisively. Someone had been talking to Bill and Charlie, I think. Maybe Percy if he was in the right mood, too. “Take a nap. I can hold Serateed — she’ll probably nap with you, the lazy thing.”

“Don’t insult my owl,” I said, already tucking my arm in between my head and the glass. The coffee this morning must’ve been weak or something. Or maybe I went through it fast. “Did you want to sit together on the train?”

Ginny chuckled. “I know you’ve missed your friends, Lys. And even though we just saw them last month, I miss mine, too. Go on, I’ll wake you up when we get there. Or maybe you’ll wake up on your own — it’ll be really nice to be back to Hogwarts.”

I nodded in agreement, feeling the lull of sleep already. Cars always made me sleepy. “I’m looking forward to it. It’ll be an interesting year.”
While my siblings were whining to Bill, Charlie, and Mum about keeping secrets — they were having a laugh, keeping the Triwizard Tournament on the down-low, and I saw no reason not to let them have their fun — I snapped my Mage Sight on, did my customary, nauseous wince, and searched the place for Dietrich’s colors and song. I’d already said goodbyes, quick and affectionate (since I knew I’d be seeing Charlie later for the First Task, and Bill I believed would show up for the Third), and Mum knew I couldn’t wait to seek out my friends. Serateed screeched as I hefted her cage under my arm, trying to scoot around other students and crowding families to find my quarry. The station was chaotic and colorful as always, and I avoided pureblood families if I spotted them — the Malfoys, Parkinsons, and Greengrasses were among those I turned right around at the sight of — but kept an eye out for anyone I knew.

“Guinevere!”

I jerked to a stop, spinning around with a smile and suppressing my Mage Sight for now. “Didn’t I tell you to call me Lys?”

Josephine Zabini was striding towards me, smirk on her face, wearing office attire as easily and sleekly as she did her Hogwarts uniform. A few Slytherins — and other students, really — scampred out of her path when she looked coolly at them; it was like she hadn’t ever graduated, ever the predator stalking through the students. She’d always donned the mature look, but with low heels and her hair in a professional, but pretty updo, it was really like I was facing an adult witch rather than my fellow potesta leader.

Reminiscent of the only time I’d ever seen her drunk, she pulled me into a hug as soon as she got to me; I was pleased to see that instead of my face being level with her chest, I was at her shoulders. Josie was tall and I was particularly short, after all.

“My, your scars turned out well. The papers only managed to get a glimpse of you when you were leaving the courtroom,” she said, smiling at me and pulling away, studying the aforementioned marks for only a bit before she met my eyes and her grin turned a bit feral. “I wrote you already about it, but it rather deserves saying again: well done. It was almost worth all the trouble tipping the scales in your favor to see you tear that Cox bastard apart in front of the press.”

I laughed, setting Serateed’s cage down on my trunk. The crowd left a nice bubble around us with my luggage splayed out, and Josie being her intimidating self. “Then you’ll love this: Sirius and I befriended the Bulgarian Prime Minister in front of Fudge’s face. Oh, and I introduced myself to Viktor Krum.”

Josie, who was a Minister worker and sure to know about the Triwizard Tournament, and thus the participating schools, probably knew very well how advantageous that introduction would be. She nodded approvingly. “Oh, I heard about that. Your new godfather likes gossipping with my aunt.”

Ah, so Josie was aware of my familial relationship with Sirius; it’s not like it was a secret, but it still wasn’t that well-known.

“Of course he does,” I said, rolling my eyes. Then I frowned. “He got a chance to see her after the Cup, then? The moon illness came on him earlier this month, I didn’t think he was doing anything other than whining pitifully at his sire’s place.”

“Nasty business, the Cup,” Josie said indifferently — from what I gathered, Josie was no Death
Eater supporter, but neither did she care very much for Muggles or Muggleborn — “But yes, he had to take care of some paperwork. Claiming all the withheld cuts that the Blacks have been entitled to from their various, greedy businesses is rather attention-hogging. Auntie’s got a hell of a lot to do now that she’s the Black exclusive lawyer.”

I grinned fiercely at that. “That pay my debt back? I suggested it, since Nicolosia Zabini’s skilled enough to represent the Blacks in more than just finances.”

Josie sent an part proud, part annoyed look my way. “She could start her own office three times over with how much Black’s paying her — on his part and his cousin’s, that is. Andromeda Black’s set to take the seat, by the way.” She nodded somewhere over my left shoulder, directing my attention to a woman near the train, seeing off Blaise Zabini. She looked only vaguely like Josie, beautiful in the same sleek and dark way, though her features were a bit sharper, more hawklike. “Auntie’s been trying to get me to leave the Ministry and work for her because of it.”

“But then you wouldn’t be able to rig trials for me, would you?”

Josie laughed. “Exactly. I’ve got to go see baby Blaise off, of course, but I saw you and couldn’t resist. Do send Malfoy my love when you see him, right?”

“I’ll do more than that,” I said with a grin. “Oh, but you haven’t seen my Second about, have you? I was looking for him before I bumped into you.”

“Somewhere near the front, I think. Alone as usual, that one. Pleasant year, Lys. Keep writing me, of course. Shall I see you again during the Yule Ball?”

“Will it even be open to third-years?”

“Fourth and up, but you’ll get invited,” said Josie certainly, eyes glinting, “Write me when you are. We Zabinis know a thing or two about weaponizing beauty. And you, Lys, are going to be very dangerous when you’re all grown. I’ve got good eyes.”

I blinked as Josie swept away gracefully, nose practically in the air as she approached a suddenly more nervous-looking Blaise Zabini and a coolly smiling Nicolosia Zabini. Honestly, the whole lot of them exuded confidence and poise; in a very human way, much different from a Veela’s aura. I shook my head, wondering when I’d ever not be stunned by Josie — that damn crush would never die, I swear, it was just clinging to my respect for the girl with steel fingers — and hurried to the front of the Hogwarts Express; the platform was a little emptier, filled with more families than students, so I’d have to get myself on the train and pin down Dietrich sooner rather than later.

It was nothing to cast Featherlight Charms on my things strong enough that I was practically kicking my trunk onto the train. To my delight, I found a compartment that only housed Adaline Mercer, who greeted me politely and fondly — and vice versa — and was struggling with her own things. She’d gotten taller and her dark coils of hair were left unsprung aside from a new headband, a spot of yellow in the curls. It was easy enough to cast another Featherlight Charm for her, heft both our things up, all the while chatting about summer. Her dark eyes kept flitting to my scars as she spoke about her own relaxing summer, but I had a feeling she was too intimidated and polite to ask about them or anything.

“Regina, I might go and find my friends, since I don’t know where their compartment is, so if you’d like, you can stay here…?” Mercer offered, trailing off.

“I’ve half a mind to go find my Second, actually,” I said easily, “But I have to let Serateed out so she can fly, so you go ahead. I can wait until you come back and decide if you’d like me to help
move your trunk again.”

Mercer nodded in agreement instantly. One of my favorite things about Mercer was that she was desicive and practical; she wouldn’t argue against me, citing that there was no need for her potesta superior to be doing her favors. It was refreshing. “Thank you.” Mercer said, slipping out the door quietly.

The train was whistling, now, so I quickly opened the window and had to poke Serateed out of her nap. She opened an eye irritably at me, but much rather wanted to speed towards Hogwarts, even in the bloody rain, so she could nap in the Owlery more quickly; Serateed was like a bat out of hell when she knew she’d get to relax. We only just started moving when she hopped out, nipping my fingers gently before she took off to meet me at the school. Students were poking their heads out and saying goodbye to their families, waving at them; some littler children were running alongside the train to say goodbye to their big brothers and sisters, making me smile nostalgically. I wondered when would be the next time I wove flowers together and blessed them with passive, weak luck magic; maybe for Teddy Lupin, if he was born? Or Bill’s kid.

Once the Express’ speed made the wind roar, I closed the window and wandlessly unlocked and unbuckled my old trunk, letting it crack open and Summoning some parchment. Since I hadn’t found Dietrich, I’d just summon him to me; I wrote a quick Get your arse over here. I’m up front. and then folded up a paper airplane, tapping my wand against it — copying the charms that the Ministry used for these things — and sent it on its way. Sometimes seventh-years would do that, since they had legal access to wands, so it wouldn’t be too unusual on the Express.

I didn’t wait long. A tap at the door drew me from staring mindlessly out the window, splattered with heavy rain, and I beamed at the sight of my Second and all his luggage. “Dietrich!” I called as he entered. He let me hug him, and threw his own empty owl cage next to mine, and his trunk up on the racks — the ease of which told me he’d cast his own Featherlight. I sat across from him, relieved to finally be with my friend. “Siggy flew ahead, then?”

“Siegfried is used to flying in the rain,” Dietrich said, shrugging. “Germany.”

I nodded in understanding, but grinned at him. “Your voice got deeper since I saw you. And I think you’re taller, too. Didn’t I just see you last month?”

Dietrich shot a disgusted look at his lap. “I have outgrown my clothes twice in this one summer. Mutter was not pleased… if she did not insist on replacing my entire wardrobe as befitting of her heir, as I told her, she would not have wasted so much money.” He sighed.

“S’why I wear my brother’s old things, for the most part.”

“And that is why Nathaniel shudders whenever you are in casual clothing,” replied Dietrich promptly, his eyes lit with smug amusement.

My smile faded at his mention. Something Dietrich’s sharp eyes didn’t miss.

“Lucas wrote me,” he offered quietly.

“Lucas wrote me,” he offered quietly.

I sighed. “I would’ve, if I hadn’t been grounded.”

Dietrich hummed. “We will not have long to talk alone. No doubt Harper and the others are roaming about the train, looking for us. I was only a few compartments down from you, Lys.” He shook my note in his hand, creased from the folds.
“And Mercer will probably walk in at any moment. That’s her trunk, there.”

“So it is probably not the best time to talk of this, I think. But it’s been weighing on you.”

“Oh? Do I look haggard and haunted?”

“No. I just know you. And I know it has been the full moon, so you are loathe to bother Black. *Ton parrain dégénéré*.” Dietrich looked annoyed at the thought of Sirius, brow furrowing. “Your family does not do you favors, locking you away every time they’re upset with your behavior.”

I smiled at the loyal and, to me, accurate comment. “Most of my family doesn’t know that I ran off because I couldn’t stand to let Nate fearfully put on a mask. They think I just bugged off to make sure Lu and Nate were safe, which is dumb, given their parents and whatnot. I don’t think it’s quite occurred to them that my friends with Death Eater names might, in fact, actually have to wear the mask at some point. And what better point than a riot?”

Those last words were hissed, strong and bitter, but I didn’t think Dietrich would hold that against me.

“It did not occur to me, either, until Lucas wrote,” said Dietrich. But his tone darkened. “Though it probably should have. I believe I thought that thirteen was too young to partake in activities like… Muggle-baiting. But *meine Mutter* was training me in the Bastion Occlumency since I could read fluently, so I suppose…”

There was a pause. I took some deep breaths, remembering Bill’s gentle, waiting expression for some reason.

“…I’m afraid.” I admitted, voice small.

Dietrich looked at me quickly, but he wasn’t surprised. “You have every right to be. You have been dreaming of the second magical British civil war since you were an infant, Lys. What did you say to me, that time? That everyone you love is a hostage against you.”

“And this war is the wand to their throats. *Your* throat.” I spat.

My Second squared his shoulders. “I have fought your Dark Lord, Lys. I lost then, but not this time.”

“You fought a shade of the Dark Lord.” I countered, memories of black stone and pale hands awash with blood and ink and a crumbling bust of a boy flitting through my head; it didn’t hurt as much as it used to, to think of that.

“We will not be eleven-years-old this time, Lys. And, if no one else, you will have Harper and I with you. All the way.”

“That’s the point, Dietrich,” I muttered, “I want *all of you* with me, and I don’t know how to make sure of that. He had the bloody *robes* on. *I don’t want him to have the mask next time.* Lu and Jay, too.”

“We’ll make sure of it, Lys,” Dietrich said, voice strong and sure and reassuring as hell, “But not right now. I think Mercer is here.”

Sure enough, Mercer was walking up, looking very composed and patient as a chatterbox Harper trailed behind her cheerfully, his trunk in tow, though his owl or its cage was nowhere in sight, oddly enough. He noticed when we both looked at him, blue eyes widening with excitement, and
he started waving frantically. I was pleasantly surprised when I saw Lu following with his own things, yawning and then beaming when he saw me and Dietrich. I laughed when Mercer opened the door and quickly stood to the side as Harper barged in, yelling both our names — if Nate, and Jay didn’t know where we were, they would now, I think — and hugging both of us for dear life. Lu was putting his things up sans Featherlight, his and Harper’s both, but he gave me a hug when I darted towards him and grinned at Dietrich’s more elegant nod.

I cast a strong Featherlight on Mercer’s things, as she’d found her own group of friends — mostly Slytherins and Ravenclaws, as was usual (younger ‘Claws, I had little problems with, since my *potestas* was wise enough to warn them away from antagonizing me or picking on Luna, same thing with the bronze-blue-birdies) — and we welcomed Harper and Lu to sit with us. Thank Merlin for Harper, who after pouting at me and Lu for having gone to the Cup for a bit, went on to talk about the questionable magical creatures his mum had in one of her warehouses that he managed to play with, making the rest of us shake our heads.

Wasn’t long until Nate slunk his way over, Jay following behind, both of them suffering through hugs from me and Harper and greeting Lu and Dietrich and sitting down with us. Nate looked… better. Normal, I think — already wearing his uniform and Slytherin tie, taking up too much room and irritating the hell out of Dietrich and Lu on either side of him; the smirk on his face told me he knew it, too. He was the tallest of us, of course, though I believe Dietrich had him beat in the depth of his voice right now, and probably would forever. Jay had grown, less lanky than Nate but not nearly as bulky as Lu, his shoulders still rather narrow and face still girlish. Mum would call him peaky, too, and he stated that he was reluctant to eat American food because it was so damned greasy. We all laughed at him for it, and I sat next to him to run my fingers through his hair — it was to his waist now, longer than Ginny’s! — and braiding it up as usual. Reminded me of a cat, the way he was all stiff and unsure and then started to relax as I went about it.

The six of us clustered in the compartment made a dreadful amount of noise — Lu and Harper and Nate, for the most part, since I was concentrated on Jay’s hair — and I’m sure wherever the prefect cabins were, they were irritated. I kept eyes on my boys with Death Eater names, relieved to see Nate relaxed as ever, pissing Lu off because he could, and Lu loud and enthusiastic as he went on about wandless magic and demonstrated for a curious Harper (my note was once again folded into an airplane, and it may or may not have shot straight at Nate’s eyes, crumpling against his glasses and making him seethe) and Jay opening a drawing notebook I’d gotten for him, halfway used already, and roughly sketching Dietrich’s still, watching countenance, humming to himself and interjecting some sort of mediating comment every now and then if he could.

(“I’d like to see *you* try to wandlessly throw something at *my* face, Nate — but that’s right! You *can’t*! I’m better at wandless than you are!”

“Good thing I don’t need magic, then, I suppose.”

“OW! Nate, that’s cheating, you can’t throw a whole-arse *book* at me because I hit you with a paper airplane, you prat!”

“What the- Nate, did you just throw my copy of *Sollertia Augurium* at Lu?! Nate, you bastard! What if Lu gets his face grease on it, ew-!”

“Lys, what the hell! Nate threw a book at my head!”

“You are all *children*. The prefects are going to take points away from us before we even arrive. Lucas, give me the book- Harper. *Give me the book.*”

“Lys, Lucas wandlessly pushed my glasses onto my face, and now they’re all smudged. Do you
have *any idea* how annoying it is to clean the lenses?"

“USE A SCOURGIFY, IDIOT!”

“No, Lu, he’s right, smudged glasses are the worst-”

“How would you know? You don’t even wear glasses, Lyssie!”

“There *is* face grease on this, now.”

“Well, that’s disgusting.”

“Shut up, Harper! We’re all bloody teenagers, it happens!”

It was enough to make me forget that I would need to secret Harper and Dietrich away, put our heads together on how I was going to keep the other three with us. Which was just a nicer way of saying that we had to figure out how to manipulate them into betraying their families. And, beyond that, I think I would have to tell them explicitly that the Dark Lord would rise before the year was out; we’d have to start getting ready for that, too.

And there was something I’d been putting off for years that I *swore* I would take care of as soon as I could: I was *beyond* late to my meeting with the Sorting Hat.
Chapter 57

Chapter Notes

Haha... so... yeah, sorry this is late. Some news/explanations below, but otherwise: thank you for your patience, and enjoy the new chapter! :D

— news and explanations —

So my update schedule? Gone. Shot. Obliterated. ‘D I will update once a month at the very least on a Tuesday, but that's all I can promise. Any more or less than that, and I'll put something up on the tumblr page. The plot and direction of the story has just gotten too complicated for me to be able to write a quality chapter consistently within two weeks, especially with all my real life stuff. :'(

Sorry about that, my friends. I will perfectly understand and accept if you wish to drop out of RPR bc of slow updates or whatever have you — y'all have been always free to leave, this is fanfiction after all. :'D But that's what's up. I'll have some notes at the end of the chapter on other stuff, btw, so don't worry about that. :)

Here's a chapter of interaction with the boys and politics, my dudes. Enjoy! :D

See the end of the chapter for more notes

... 

Tempting as it was to just curl into my bed for the rest of the night, the hyperactivity of my boys and the chaos of the Welcome Feast — of the other Houses, since most Slytherins had the instinct to become very quiet when an Auror as famous as Mad-Eye Moody showed up (and some of the older students became hostile, which was concerning), and after, hadn't been very surprised when Alby announced the Triwizard Tournament in that dramatic way of his — didn’t mean there wasn’t work to be done. Thankfully potesta business could be put off for tonight (I’d have to begin some tomorrow), so all I really had to do was unpack and sneak out of the dungeons.

I bet Snape would get very irritated when he sensed me leaving the wards of the Slytherin dungeons; he’d let me go, but I imagined that he’d give me the stink-eye at breakfast. But it had to be done. If I didn’t go tonight, I’d forget again.

The Sorting Hat had asked me to meet with it two years ago. Granted, I had a lot on my plate in these years: settling into Hogwarts and Tom Riddle’s diary as a firstie, and then conquering Slytherin and befriend/taking care of Sirius when I was a second-year. I probably should’ve been more alarmed, with the Sorting Hat knowing pretty much all of my secrets — including the reincarnation bit — but… I just… forgot? Had more important things to think about?

Well.

Whoops, I guess.
(I mean, not to sound extremely cavalier about a potential source of mysterious information being wasted, but… yeah.)

I unpacked quickly — my trunk didn’t have an Undetectable Extension — and then drew my normal wards. Serateed was snoozing in her cage on the desk. Room set up for the most part, I started off.

Normally there’d be Slytherins milling about the common room at this time of night — studying, chatting, plotting, practicing magic, all that — but it was the first night back, so the common room was empty; it made the already-large room seem even larger, and I realized with a start that the cistern-like design of the place was similar to the Ministry. As if… the Ministry was modeled after this place. Which was more than likely, come to think of it, with how many Slytherins went into politics.

Anyways. My plan was thus: Get to Alby’s office. He’ll be sleeping, but he’ll feel his wards trigger and he’ll eventually come to see me. Speak to the Hat in the meantime. Tell Alby I was bored waiting for him, so I was chatting with the Hat. Chew Alby out. Done-

Ah. Wait.

The common room was empty save for one.

“Are you even supposed to be lounging around out here at this time of night?” I asked, slowing my pace and diverting away from the exit hall.

Dietrich raised a brow. “You seem to be in a hurry to go somewhere as well, Lys,”

He was settled in our potesta spot, looking comfortable in dark pajamas and his Hogwarts robes thrown over, likely a haphazard addition. There was a Lumos on his wand, letting him read a book better — it looked like our new Potions textbook, what a bloody nerd — since without the common room’s chandeliers and lights on, the green lake light of the windows was too dim.

Unlike the rest of my boys, Dietrich never took the opportunity to steal Jay’s favorite villainous armchair — he’d already gotten out the knitted blankets and too-many-pillows, piled all around him on the couch.

I shrugged. “I’m almost three years late to a meeting.”

My Second frowned at this. “A meeting?”

“Ah… it sort of slips my mind all the time, but after my Sorting, the Hat asked to see me at the end of our first year for some reason.” I admitted sheepishly. “It didn’t say anything specific, so I keep putting it off, but it’s such an unusual request that I’ve always told myself I’ve got to go do it, y’know?”

Dietrich hummed. “An old artifact, the Hogwarts Sorting Hat. I am glad it was polite, however. It did not wish to intrude on my Occlumency barriers until I permitted it.” He paused. “It hesitated to send me to our House.”

I perked up at this. Inwardly, I knew I was — yet again — putting off the Hat, but my Second was here for some reason and, really, that took precedence. I took the black armchair, folding my legs under me and hugging one of the soft, velvety pillows to my chest.

“What House would you have been, then?” I asked interestedly.

Dietrich’s eyes glinted; his blank-faced smile. “Hufflepuff.”
I barked out a surprised laugh. “We almost lost you to the likes of Alexander Collins and Bethany Quinn? Better not tell Nate, he’ll torment them worse than usual — he’d hate the fact that Collins and Quinn might’ve stolen something from him.”

“I do not understand his enimity with those two,” sighed Dietrich.

“They follow Gordon around, and you know how _that_ Gryffie feels about Slytherins. Not even Ginny’s Bat-Bogey will get that idiot to shut up.” I said, leaning back on the seat comfortably. Dietrich set aside his book, angling towards me, and I realized why he was here. “Oh. You wanted to discuss the… thing. Here? _Now_?”

“We were all distracted at dinner, with the Tournament and Lucas’ whining and the new Defense professor, so I was going to send a _Nuntiam_ to you.” He hesitated. “I… thought you might like to. You would have trouble sleeping tonight with the moon, anyways, and… you have not had the opportunity to talk about it, I know. The few minutes we had on the train were not enough.”

I sighed. “Well, you’re right on that. But I really do need to go talk to the Sorting Hat…”

Dietrich huffed, rolling his eyes. “Lys. It is the full moon. That is the _least_ of your troubles. The Sorting Hat is a Legilimencic artifact.”

Ah, _fuck_.

I _knew_ I was forgetting something.

My head thunked against the cushions ineffectively, and I groaned. “Nooooo… I have to go make sure with Sirius and the cambion that it’d be safe… Oh god, what if I met the Hat and I shredded it? I would’ve ruined Sorting _forever_… Bloody hell…”

Dietrich snorted. “Fortunately, you have me to keep you from accidentally vandalizing priceless relics of Hogwarts.”

“What _would_ I do without you, honestly.”

He shook his head. “I think there is something more important you would want to talk about.”

Nate and Jay and Lu. My boys with the Death Eater names.

Of course they were more important.

“I dunno if right here, right now is the best time to be plotting. And we’re going to be plotting, with that particular subject.”

Dietrich frowned a little deeper. “Did I not say? We do not need to plan for… that. Not right now. I hardly think you are in the right mindset. I… I just know that you become more stressed when you do not… I know that when you bottle everything inside you, it makes for reckless decisions, among other things.”

Was…

Was Dietrich…

AWWWW. He just wanted to sit there and let me vent! This was his clumsy way of asking me if I wanted to talk, not a Slytherin plotting session! He snuck out of his room to come see if I was alright! (And probably also to get away from Lu’s ranting about the Quidditch Cup cancellation) I
was honestly touched — this seemed like more of a Harper or Jay thing to do, but here he was, my Second, making sure I wasn’t absolutely stressed and pissed after my grounding.

Although… I felt a bit bad. Grateful and happy and surprised, of course, but also a little guilty.

“But… aren’t you going to sleep?” I asked.

“Tilly will bring me coffee,” he said, shrugging. “The others won’t be too surprised with my absence — last year, while you were nursing a convict to sanity, I would go to our classroom.”

The others being his roommates, of course: Nate, Jay, and Lu. The very people we needed to talk about.

And another reminder of the fact that Dietrich had been busy while I’d been taking care of Sirius. Dueling practice was the main bit, from what he’d told me, but I also knew that he liked wandering to the library to see if there were any novels or new Potions journals out, and that he made sure to keep an eye on the potesta and our friends. Lots of writing home, too, which took longer than you’d think.

“Are you sure?”

“I would not offer if I wasn’t sure.” Dietrich said firmly. His eyes softened. “You said on the train… that you were afraid. And I said that your family does you no favors, locking you up. You’re not going to sleep much tonight, and I know this means you will just think in circles. At least, this way, you can think in circles aloud and I will be here to accompany you.”

And the guilt was beaten back by a rush of affection.

I couldn’t help but spring up from my chair, throw my arms around Dietrich’s shoulders and sit squished against him on the couch. He bore my impromptu hug patiently, but nudged me away from his personal space eventually. Dietrich was never the cuddly type. At least, not where he might be seen.

“Most teenage boys would run at the first sight of someone wanting to talk about their feelings,” I said jokingly.

Dietrich rolled his eyes again. “Most teenage boys seem to be idiots. You need a friend, and I am certainly one of yours.”

“My best friend.”

“Ah, this is where they run,” said Dietrich dryly, making me snort. I was a sap, when it came to my boys, and we all knew it. “Though it is for the best I was here, I think. To keep you from traumatizing the Sorting Hat with a werewolf and a demon in your mind.”

I sighed. Putting off the Sorting Hat again. “Remind me that I have to make time to see the bloody Hat, Dietrich.” I muttered.

“Why don’t you? You and Julius kept writing of about these ‘bullet journals’ over the summer, no? That is why I bought you a journal for your birthday — Harper was upset with me for doing so before he could do the same. You should just write your little meeting into your new book.” Dietrich said, reminding me that he did, in fact, peek at the letters I passed to Lu, Jay, and Nate through him.

(Harper did as well, over the summer. Nosy bastards. But, well, if I said they couldn’t do it, then
why wouldn’t they? Slytherins.)

Bullet journaling had been a thing back in my last life; I wasn’t meticulous or dedicated enough to keep one, but I had lots of artist friends who did. It seemed like the kind of thing Jay would like, with his art and doodling — it’d put those unique stamps I’d gotten for his birthday (he was younger than me) to use. And, really, I felt that when I was around Jay I relaxed the most — god knew I’d need every moment of relaxation this year, what with the Tournament and the potesta situation — so arranging time to spend with calm, introspective Jay was like a great idea.

“Well, I’ll do that, too, but I trust you more than a book.” I answered.

Dietrich froze.

I blinked at him, confused for a moment before a memory rose up, sharp and cutting:

You could have died before we became friends? You could have died, and we first-years would’ve been pawns for the Malfoy boy; Harper would be failing all his classes; Rookwood would never speak; and I would have gone back to Germany the first month, because of this book?

I smiled softly. I think that conversation was when I truly realized just how important the boys were to me. Oh, they were certainly my friends and I would’ve protected them viciously if Malfoy or Tom Riddle turned their eyes on them… But as I told Dietrich, my friends were intended to be tools, first and foremost. But when a little firstie with a face like stone and a heart that cared way too much got locked in a room with me, dressed me down, told me how utterly important I was to him and the others and that I basically wasn’t allowed to go off and get killed by a book… Well. I had to make them all mine. No other reaction would’ve done.

He’d shed the baby fat, grown half a foot taller, grown into a longer face and a square-er jaw, lost a bit more of the French accent, settled into his skin a lot easier than he’d had as an 11-year-old… but it was Dietrich. Scolding me soundly for putting myself at risk one year, offering me a chance to process my thoughts another year. An old partner in crime, sitting there, remembering the same thing as me, gaze just as faraway as mine.

“Definitely more than a book.” I said, nodding.

He seemed to come back to himself. “Yes?”

“Yes.”

Tom Riddle hadn’t, after all, known a thing about the Clairvoyance. (And he’d never seriously yelled at me for getting into life-threatening trouble without him, and Dietrich had done that twice.)

I sighed, rising. “C’mon, we’re off to my room.”

Dietrich went rigid. “The female side of the dormitory.”

“My warded, private room where we can discuss sensitive topics.” I reminded him.

“Snape,” was his comeback.

I sighed, scratching my ear. “Fine, fine. I’m casting a Muffliato, though.”

“I’m not familiar with the spell.”

“Oh? Well, it’s been a while since I’ve tutored you in a spell.” I laughed, then. “Going to get all
moon-eyed for me this time? I think Lu still has that picture he paid Creevey for, back when you had a crush…”

“Je voudrais dire que je regrette tout, mais miraculeusement je ne…” Dietrich murmured, looking disgruntled at such the reminder of such an old crush (the boys brought it up from time to time, to make fun of him, naturally). “Lys, just… be quiet while I ask for coffee.”

…

I’m sure me and Dietrich’s night-long conversation couldn’t have gone better even if we’d gotten nail polish and magazines, or whatever the hell pop culture thinks girls do at sleepovers. But he did talk to me about how irritating I found it, being managed by my family, punished for doing what I had to do.

Of course, not even I could bitch for a whole night, so eventually we talked about Clairvoyance and how we thought it worked — the mechanics of it, which I believed were somewhere in *Sollertia Augurium*, which Dietrich agreed with for lack of any other source of information on such an esoteric magic — and how it had shaped me. And that led to the visions I had as a kid; we skirted around the violent ones, since Dietrich already knew (vaguely) about those, and I told him about how I used to See duels and other feats of magic, and I’d learn the spells that way — which worried my parents, since some of it was advanced shit, and if my core hadn’t been boosted by my Seer abilities, it could’ve been dangerous.

(“Do you still do that?” asked Dietrich, sipping at his coffee — the second cup.)

I paused in drinking my own chocolate milk — I didn’t need coffee. “What? Learn through the visions? Not as much.”

He thought for a moment. “It sounds like you should, my friend. It is how you learned such obscure, random spells, isn’t it? And how you began your interest in rituals.”

I hummed. “Maybe. I don’t meditate as much as I should, anyways, which I think is also why my and Sirius’ mental link is so tangled. Mental link is really a shallow description, you know — it started in the mind, but our cores were starting to merge. S’why he’s a Soothsayer now, a weak one. My Clairvoyance has probably been piggybacking on his older, adult core, ‘specially once his mind stabilized.”

Dietrich bristled like an angry street cat. He had one hell of a grudge. “Then I will ensure you regularly meditate once again. Write *that* in your bullet book.”

(“Bullet journal, for Merlin’s sake, Dietrich-”)"

And I had also gotten Dietrich to talk more about his own childhood, though what I heard seemed to have a permanent note of loneliness hanging on it. Two busy parents and a small staff of kind-but-also-busy House Elves did not a happily socialized child make. Other children were either just as rigorously trained as Dietrich, therefore were polite but not friendly, or didn’t understand why Dietrich spoke the way he did, expressed the way he did — he had acquaintances, but no one he’d plot with or tease or motherhen or any of the things he did with us.

(“It is why I read a lot. Or, if I am not reading, tinkering with Potions. Or… Well. Do not tell Nathaniel, but I used to… what is the word? Daydream. I used to daydream a lot. Think about what
I would do if I had real… Yes. I used to daydream a lot.”)

(It was the saddest thing I’ve ever heard, and not even Dietrich’s uptight views on touch stopped me from clinging to his arm and tucking my head on his shoulder after I heard that one. I shouldn’t have been so surprised — Dietrich had come all the way to Britain to find friends, even when there was a magical academy in Hamburg that was not as celebrated as Hogwarts, but still ranked highly. Dietrich deserved all the hugs after that.)

Anyway. The point was, Dietrich and I stayed up way too bloody late, sneaking back to our rooms just before the earliest risers in Slytherins started poking around, and it made us both look like corpses when we went down to breakfast. Dietrich only really woke up when Lu and Harper started shouting in outrage after yanking our schedules out of our hands — given to us by a scathing Snape, who no doubt was aware of us being up all night and would be completely unforgiving about it when we saw him later today — and seeing that our electives were all over the place. I only really woke up when Nate leaned over and quietly pointed out the fact that Draco Malfoy, the new magnus potesta reigning (Josie’s chosen successor didn’t stand a chance, and Dinah Kirkwood knew it and had handed it over silently already), was staring rather intensely at me.

“I know the full moon had you up all night, my dear Lys, but it’s time for business. Malfoy seems to want to talk to you,” were Nate’s words.

I instantly felt more awake, and glanced over to Malfoy, our eyes meeting. He tilted his chin up, then to the side after flicking his eyes at Snape, still walking down the Slytherin table and levitating schedules out. A little talk after Snape was finished with the schedules then, right before we were dismissed for classes, then.

My eyes narrowed a bit, and I found both Dietrich and Nate’s intent gazes. They were the most politically aware of us. Dietrich looked more alert as well, huffing through his nose in annoyance, but he gave a jerky nod. Nate just smiled his usual sharp, dead-eyed smirks. Two yes’s. I would’ve asked Harper, too, as my Third, but he wouldn’t have caught the subtle conversation, so I sighed and nodded to Malfoy, who gave a long blink — message received — and then turned to his own breakfast. Dietrich seemed to be trying to drown himself in coffee, but Nate and I had both seen Malfoy’s just-as-silent communication with Blaise Zabini and, surprisingly, Tracy Davis — Crabbe, Goyle, and Parkinson seemed blissfully unaware, though they had been Malfoy’s closest for years.

Interesting.

“Dynamic’s shifting, then.” I muttered to Nate, biting into my toast to disguise the words.

Nate’s smile widened as he flicked a blueberry at Lu, who instantly blamed Harper for it. Also a disguise. “It looks like Malfoy’s upping his game. I daresay he’s trying to match you, lieutenant for lieutenant. By next week, he’ll have Cornfoot, Rowle, and Lily, I guarantee it.”

I raised a brow. “Lily? As in, Lily Moon?”

The smile shifted a bit, into something… meaner. Something more like what I remembered seeing when we were firsties. “Oh? Didn’t you know? She’s my betrothed.”

I nearly spat out my orange juice. “The fuck?”

“Language, dear Lyssie.”
“Betrothed. You?”

Nate rolled his eyes, waving his hand. “Everyone’s betrothed by our age, Lys. Bloodtraitors excluded. Except… well, you’re not quite a bloodtraitor anymore, are you? Hence you and Lu.” I tried to protest that Dad hadn’t accepted that, but Nate went on, “Besides the point. Lily is intelligent and she won’t waste this chance to get in Malfoy’s good graces. Neither will Davis. Understand?”

I found that I did. Me and Josie had been outliers — exceptional outliers, at that — but the fact of the matter was that women were not usually looked to as leaders, in politics or otherwise. As one of the exceptions, I knew a lot of women who definitely were (Josie, Amelia Bones, the ex-Minister Bagnold, Lady Augusta Longbottom, etc.) but for the most part, girls were wives and gossips and homemakers, baby-machines — especially pureblood girls. Of course, no woman with any brains would be content to be called a walking uterus, so the fact that one of the big political players — or the son of one, anyways — was willing to go out on a limb and take two girls into his confidence… well, that was a chance no girl would waste. Davis and Moon would fight hard and vicious to give Malfoy all the power he wanted, because one day, he might return the favor. Such was the power of the Malfoy name.

And with Zabini… and bloody Cornfoot, who was Moon’s good friend and who I’d put under the wing of the very talented Elena Chambers last year… and with Rowle, who was very, frighteningly good at blending into the background — and taking advantage when he wanted, proving himself a good Slytherin — this was going to be a pain. The only saving grace was that Malfoy and I weren’t competing for one throne this time; but give him a year to grow his circle of friends, and I’d have a hard time next year. Even if I left the bastard alone, he’d probably come after me because I was a threat — I proved that I was willing to clash with him, and no solitary leader could have that skulking around.

I sighed into my empty plate. “I’m tired already.”

Nate, who was just as averse to cuddles as Dietrich, gave me a pat on the shoulder; light and fleeting, because he was just as touch-stupid as my Second. “Not to worry, Lys. See what Malfoy wants. I’ll start the portrait network up again. And weren’t you friends with the Bloody Baron or something? Maybe we could recruit the ghosts.”

“Not likely,” I murmured. The Bloody Baron had helped me more than enough. I’d have to find some time to think him soon, update him on the situation — he did all of this for entertainment, really. Except for that single question. “But you’re right. I’ll go talk to the Git Lord. Then off to History of Magic, where you can terrorize Collins and Quinn all you like.”

It probably said something about me — and all of us — that Nate’s normal, suspicious, very smug expression was relaxing. “Ooh, you know I won’t complain about that. Though… why have I got your blessing this time?”

I smiled serenely. Now that this wasn’t potesta business, we didn’t have to lean so close to each other to half-whisper. And, really, I know it wasn’t Collins or Quinn’s fault that Dietrich had more loyalty than the both of them put together, only trumped by his unflinching desire to get what he wanted, but it still irritated me to think that he was almost a Hufflepuff and not my Second. That, and Collins and Quinn were annoying little arseholes who stole Nate’s History essay once — for which he’d never, ever forgiven them, though he wasn’t inclined to with how hilarious their reactions to his pranks were — and their friend Gordon once pulled on Jay’s hair hard enough that he instinctively teared up, way back in first year, so I felt no shame.

“I was told that our Dietrich was almost a Hufflepuff.”
Nate chuckled, low and evil. “Oho. They almost stole our Second, is that it?”

Dietrich, on my other side, grimaced and interjected, “They did not, if you recall.”

“It’s the principle of the thing, Dietrich,” replied Nate, who was gazing beyond Jay — who was opening a new journal (from Dietrich) and trying to figure out how to pen his schedule in nicely — and towards the ‘Puff table.

If I were Collins and Quinn, I’d be shivering.

Lu and Harper, as it was, did it in the oblivious ‘Puffs’ places, looking wary and curious as Nate muttered and laughed to himself.

... 

Malfoy looked grim as we walked together, a respectable distance between us — we’d both like it wider, of course, but needs must — and his own circle passing to go to whatever class they had first, as my boys had done already since Snape had dismissed us all. Parkinson gave me a murderous glare as she passed, and Zabini a gracious nod; I smirked lazily at Parkinson, making her even more pissed, only to be dragged away by a soothing Bulstrode and Davis, and I returned Zabini’s nod.

“You’re on good terms with Zabini?” Malfoy asked, not missing the exchange.

The flow of dark-robed bodies, most of which were quite a bit taller than me, started up; we walked slowly through the Great Hall, though, since most Slytherins had become aware of the meeting of the potesta leaders the moment we’d stood up. Once we got to the hallways, with the other Houses, we’d have a bit less room but a bit more noise to work with.


“...Zabinis make good friends.” Malfoy said, awkward pauses sandwiching his words.

Why was he making small talk?

My question was obvious on my face, and Malfoy grimaced for it. “Stupid Blaise, I knew this wasn’t going to work. Be friendly my arse,” muttered the boy under his breath, though I did catch it even in the cacophony of a school trying to get to their first classes. Then he addressed me.

“Listen, Weasley, as much as it’s grating that you of all people are a bloody potesta leader, even the Gryffindors know that you’re going to lead the lesser half of Slytherin.”

The tension shot up, and it was like the students walking all around us could feel it, because the bubble of space we took up grew wider.

I smiled pleasantly, which was to say, not at all — the smugness and the scars really took all the pleasantness of that expression out. “If I didn’t know you were trying to make nice, Malfoy, I’d almost applaud you for how many insults you fit into that sentence. As it is, I think you need to work on your diplomacy skills. I think the only way you could’ve made that worse was call me scarface instead of Weasley or something.”

Half of his insult was in the tone of his words, the way he said them. Same with mine, of course.
Malfoy looked on the verge of drawing his wand. Pureblood heirs never did like when girls younger and from less affluent families condescended to them. But, really, I had seniority here — I was a better, far more effective potestā leader than he was, and I’d been learning from the former magnus, who had kept a potestā seat since she was a first year.

“Contrary to what you think, Weasley, I’m not here to make nice with you. You don’t make nice with whores. You pay them.” Sneered Malfoy.

I twitched. I wasn’t sure whether Malfoy actually believed that shit that the Ministry came up with about Sirius and me, but it was an effective insult. He might’ve believed it — his father was Fudge’s favorite friend, after all. Seemed that men would forever be slut-shaming women who proved themselves superior to them.

(And I bet my savings that Malfoy was nursing a grudge the size of Hogwarts for me, after I’d taken his potestā seat last year. Whatever awkward respect he might’ve held for me after the Chamber was undone, with that. Not quite a Life Debt, after all.)

“Oh, are we name-calling? Well, then. Why don’t you get to the point, Death Eater?” I said silkily.

Malfoy didn’t even flinch, which was annoying. But he did get to the point. “Stay out of my way, Weasley. You and Josephine Zabini made Slytherin weak. There’s no point to focusing on intrapersonal relations — did either of you listen to Snape at all in your first years? Slytherin will stand united in front of the other Houses no matter what. We should be trying to bring the other Houses to heel, instead of just defending ourselves. Typical that two women would be more focused on themselves and babying our House. Anyone who falls behind isn’t worth the name.”

I seethed inwardly; Malfoy was going to destroy all of my work, was he? He didn’t say as much, but he didn’t need to.

End the magnus-parvus interactions, the tutoring, the escort groups. This stupid boy was going to give precedence to his favored magnus students, leaving everyone else on their own — the other Houses would find younger, lone Slytherins easy prey, and for every instance of bullying, Malfoy would lash out “to teach them a lesson” about touching Slytherins, but it’d do nothing to solve the problem. It’d just make everyone more pissed off and stressed. And pissed off, stressed Slytherins tended to take that out on other Houses, making them hate us more, making them attack more, making us need to ramp up our own attacks… a never-ending cycle, all because Slytherin split up, hostile and arrogant.

It was times like these that I truly understood and commiserated with those who hated Slytherins, purebloods, the Dark Arts. Times like these I hated being associated with such, if this was all they saw.

(I didn’t like that. I was proud to be a Slytherin.)

“You’re an idiot if you think a divided House will function.”

“Salazar Slytherin divided it himself, Weasley — I’m sure he was infinitely more wise than you or Josephine Zabini are,” shot back Malfoy.

“You’re going to ruin our House if you go against what Josie and I were trying to build. The other Houses left us alone, for the most part, last year. When I was a first year, when you were parvus, the inter-House bullying was at ridiculous levels.”
“None of which affected you, Weasley, since the rest of your litter rules Gryffindor,” Malfoy dismissed, “Why should you care?”

I wasn’t going to tell him that I didn’t, initially. I was, of course, disappointed in humanity overall with the rampant bullying, but the only interest I had at the time was not being at the bottom of the ladder — standing on my own feet, repelling stupid bullies and idiots by my own merits rather than those of my siblings. Then, of course, I befriended my boys and wondered how I would be able to carve a place in Slytherin for the whole lot of us, rather than just myself. And the merits of that, of making a name that others could follow instead of Malfoy’s or Voldemort’s, seemed too good to pass up, especially once I was made parvus potesta and all eyes were on me.

“If you institute ‘the weak are meat, the strong do eat’ rule in the magnus, I won’t follow. The younger years are not going to go through school trailing behind you and yours like puppies, hoping for scraps to eat at your amusement or whim. And if you turn against us… For every one in my power that suffers because of your weak, ineffective rule, or whoever succeeds you… I’ll push against you all, Snape be damned.” I said stonily, staring ahead.

We were nearing the junction where I’d have to turn back to the moving staircases, get to History. Going by where he was walking, Malfoy was headed to Charms. There was still twenty minutes until the bell signalled classes to start, so we walked leisurely. Only, both of us were glaring at each other, the air so thick with dislike and tension that students were avoiding being near us.

“Succeeds me?” Malfoy snorted, “Don’t even think you’ll be fighting me next year, then, Weaslette?”

I laughed harshly. “You’re so sure in your superiority to everyone else in the magnus, aren’t you? You’re a fucking moron, Malfoy.” I stopped, making him do the same, facing him and staring him in the eyes so he could see the truth in every word I spoke. Students streamed around us.

“Whatsoever you’re owed as the heir of the Noble House of Malfoy isn’t going to be given to you, not here. This is a training ground for students, first and foremost. That donation your father gave to the school two years back? You were skirting the line, and everyone knew it, no matter how much you lorded it over my brother.”

“Why don’t you follow your own advice and get to the point, Weasley?”

“The point is that without your father’s influence, you have very little to you, Malfoy. If any of the other magnus had a mind to take control from you, it would be very easy for them to do so — they’ve built connections with each other, they’ve found the areas of study where they excel, they have talents they can trade to others for favors and deals and whatever else. And with how many bloody Slytherins you’ve got in the magnus? Not even Lucius Malfoy will be willing to bribe all their parents into making their children support you, let alone into never mentioning it anyone, with how pathetic it’d be to need daddy dearest to help you control a bunch of Hogwarts children.”

Malfoy’s fists balled at his sides. It was extremely insulting to Slytherins, to be told that they needed their House’s influence to keep them on top. It was akin to playing tag with your little friends, and then asking your parents to carry you so you could run away from whoever was It. Because, really, Slytherin’s divides? The potestas?

It was a game.

A game children remembered when they grew, knowing that so-and-so was very good at playing it, therefore those skills probably translated into real life, oh, we should ring them up and see if they don’t want to help me out in the Ministry…? But it was still a game. Hogwarts Slytherins were expected to keep it to themselves; talk about it, sure, if they wanted, but play it themselves.
How else was a child to learn how to navigate the rules of power and society? Some Slytherins stayed out of it, of course, following their leader and living as they liked, and they went into non-political careers and were none the worse for it. But most… well, we were an ambitious lot.

Malfoy dreamed of ruling above his pureblood peers like a king. The power behind the throne, at least, just as Lucius Malfoy was the shadow of stupid, bumbling Cornelius Fudge. He didn’t much like that I implied he needed help in playing tag.

(There’d been rumors floating around when I was a firstie that he’d used Malfoy Sr.’s money to buy off the fourths into following him rather than Josie, but… well. Those were rumors Josie started because she’d been pissed. Truthfully, Lucian Bole and Peregrine Derrick had been fed up with Josie and decided “following” Malfoy was better. Really, first-year Malfoy didn’t do much in potesta politics.)

“You’re a Weasley. A little nothing come up from poverty, thinking she knows how the pureblood world works just because her family miraculously isn’t tainted by the filth of Muggle blood. You don’t know anything about the way we purebloods live. You’re in over your head, Weasley, and the proof is in how you were forced to publically split from your bloodtraitor family — which is all you, sadly, had — in order to keep yourself from getting married off to a half-mad, middle-aged blowout.”

That, I knew, was a Slytherin temper tantrum. It didn’t annoy me, but I had to show that I wasn’t going to take that. After all… Malfoy practically was declaring war on me.

I snarled, an expression I knew was even fiercer with the scars, and flared my magic sharply, making the students around us jump a bit as they passed. It made Malfoy swallow, though he kept his composure besides that.

“Someone’s going to look at your classist rule and wonder if they aren’t a bit more elite than you are. And someone’s going think yes, because you will have no allies that you haven’t bullied your way into getting. When you don’t institute structure and bureaucracy and organization, that’s what you call the stone age. I hope you have fun playing king of the hill, Malfoy, because someone’s going to rip the throne out from under you, and it will be no one’s fault but your own.” I said coolly.

Then I turned on my heel, and left for class.

…

By the time I’d sunk into my seat in History of Magic, I was exhausted again. Not sleeping for more than a few hours every night for three days + Malfoy being a dick really did that to you. My boys were waiting for me in the classroom, taking places in the back, five minutes until class was supposed to start.

“Not good news, I take it?” Nate asked, in the desk beside me.

“Unclench your jaw, Lyssie, I can hear your teeth grinding.” Jay reminded me lightly, behind me.

I was surprised by how nice it felt not to be gritting your teeth. Then I scowled. “He’s binning all the infrastructure.” I said flatly.
“Filis de pute!” went Dietrich’s strangled whisper. He was sitting on my other side.

“You are incredibly vulgar, you know that, Dietrich?” Harper said conversationally.

“Shut up, Harper,” added Lu before Dietrich could say something worse.

“What of the magnus-parvus mentor contracts? The escort groups for the parvus?” Dietrich asked.

“Rubbish,” I answered.

Jay sighed. “All that paperwork we did… rubbish…”

Paperwork freak.

I rubbed my temples. “He gets all the best and brightest put around him, and everyone else gets snubbed and pushed aside. No more mentors. No more tutoring sessions. No more N.E.W.T. or O.W.L. timetables, absence coverage, Hogsmeade goods lines—”

“Speaking of, Lyssie, did you get your permission slip signed?” Lu chimed in.

I glared at him. “Yes.”

“I need mine forged.” Lu admitted.

“So do a dozen and a half of the magnus Slytherins, but oh look, Malfoy’s going to gut the forgery programs, too!”

Harper looked awed. “We had a forgery program?”

“It was normally the Head Girl’s thing,” commented Lu, sounding a bit disappointed.

“I can do it, but it'll be harder without magnus connections. I have the whole process documented,” I groused, “I had everything documented and I was so looking forward to making Malfoy have to beg me to teach him how to use any of it, but then he tells me he’s going to let his potesia run wild like the little moron he is…”

“He’s going to get booted,” Nate observed.

“That’s what I told him, but the pronce is so sure of his superiority — you’d think someone like Zabini would’ve advised him against- Ah, shit, but he did. He did advise against it, that's why Malfoy was trying to be nice!”

Jay tugged on a lock of my hair gently, and when I turned to send him an overly-hurt look, he only gave me a disappointed look in return. “And you provoked him into insulting you, didn’t you, Lys?”

“My existence provokes him into insulting me, it was completely self-defense!”

Jay sighed, shaking his head. “You did insult him, though.”

I gave him an incredulous look.

“Lyssie, if you’d just been polite and waited Malfoy out, you probably could’ve convinced him to keep with Head Girl Zabini’s old infrastructure. I’m certain her cousin was trying to convince him of the same, especially if he tried to be nice to you.” Jay explained patiently.
“I’m not going to bloody kowtow just to save the magnus potesta!”

“And now we’re going to fight more than half of Slytherin because of it.” Jay concluded, eyes harder than usual.

Nate interjected before I was subject to Jay’s gentle-but-more-painful dressing down, “Oh, no, they’ll be too busy fighting among themselves.” Nate glanced at me. “We do need to rethink his camp, though. This changes things. I was almost certain he’d call a truce this year, and then strengthen his new circle so that next year, when we came to challenge, he’d put up a bit more of a fight. Seems he’s not aiming to match our camp at all, so Rowle, Moon, and Cornfoot are out of the equation for now.”

Which was a little relieving, but more frustrating than anything. I would’ve rather had to come up with tactics for those three than have a bloody Slytherin civil war, with Josie’s work completely squandered.

“It would’ve been a pain in the arse,” I noted, “since not only would I have had to go at him with duels and showcases of magic, I’d have to bring new and better things into the infrastructure to prove I was more capable. Last time we clashed, it was pretty much a baby smear campaign, toting our grades around, verbal spars, and then a duel.”

“Head Girl Zabini did help us, though,” threw in Dietrich.

“I have no doubt of that. And while Malfoy’s no Josie, with her infrastructure, it would’ve been like we were partly battling her, too.” I sighed again. “And while his stupid version of Slytherin is easier to conquer, it’s really going to fuck up relations.”

“We’ll have to shield our potesta from it,” murmured Nate thoughtfully, “And keep the conflict quiet enough that Snape doesn’t kill us all.”

“He wouldn’t kill us all, Nate, for Merlin’s sake.” Jay said, laughing a little.

“Yeah he would,” said Lu, nodding seriously along with Harper.

Dietrich smacked them both lightly with the History textbook (which wasn’t that lightly, because of how heavy that bitch was). Then he turned to me. “The magnus will be confused for a while. They will be expecting the old infrastructure. It will take a week, perhaps two, for everything to collapse.”

I got what Dietrich was getting at in instant. “So we start poaching while they’re still waiting for the old rule.” I said.

Nate smiled deviously. “We need Chambers.”

I nodded. “Think we can swing Warrington?”

“Maybe not, but let me work on Cobb — makes it more likely for us to get him. And you should aim for Hawkings.”

I startled. “We have a Hawkings?”

Harper piped up, “She’s quiet, but she’s Chambers’ friend, same year. Her cousin’s in Ravenclaw, same year, too. Also, we’re not allowed to just… take magnus students into our power, are we? Their yearmates will turn on them, unless we get the whole year, but Bole and Derrick won’t let us.”
“Poaching, Harper, we’re poaching.” Nate reminded him with a grin.

“Bole and Derrick can fight me,” I said decisively, “They touch anyone I poach, I’ll respond just as viciously as if they were my potesta. After all… I’m poaching the ones who like tutoring. Or the ones whose parvus mentees were first years, last year. They’ll be protective of them by now, since Josie and I went through a lot of trouble to make sure everyone’d like each other. Didn’t work for some, but for others…”

“Oh. So they’ll want to make sure their little ones are okay, but because Malfoy’s a git who thinks that’s stupid, they’ll be punished if they do… but you’ll make it so they can keep tutoring and stuff, since you’ll attack Malfoy for… kinda harming our potesta?”

Bravo, Harper.

By Lu’s face, he got it, too.

I smiled at them. “Exactly. I just need to make sure that all tutoring goes as planned, while Malfoy’s still setting up. Give a chance to the magnus mentors to remember how much they like their little counterpart.”

Jay sighed. “You’re plucking magnus students out of Malfoy’s power by using their connections.”

“You’re damn right I am,” I snickered.

“I think we would’ve had an easier time if we got Head Girl Zabini’s infrastructure to hold,” said my quiet friend, “and we’d waste a lot less, too. Our potesta is missing out on a lot of the contracts put into place. The Hogsmeade forgeries, for one. Not every parvus will keep their mentor, either.”

Oh, Jay.

He really hated the fact that we’d be losing so much, didn’t he?

“It’s not like I wanted this either, Jay,” I muttered. Professor Binns finally drifted through the chalkboard, startling the finnicky Hufflepuffs up front, and the morning bell started to chime through the castle. Nate had straightened, starting to read the textbook because he liked History of Magic. “But I’m going to hold on to everything I can, and if it embarrasses Malfoy in the process, that’s good enough.”

After all, my goals in Slytherin were still accomplished. My boys were safe, the people under my power were generally going to be okay, and I remained a powerhouse that neutrals could turn to instead of the Dark Lord. If the magnus was ruined for it, that really wasn’t my problem right now, and neither were the students within it. Only the ones I handpicked.

What’s best for me and mine, right? And what’s fair to everyone else.

They’d have had to weather Malfoy’s idiocy with or without me, wouldn’t they? The magnus students would survive.

Fair enough.
Henlo.

So, fellas, I've said on tumblr that my summary is shit. I know. I'm very amused by it. :'D

That said, I got someone who was like 'change the summary pls it annoys me' and I was like, eh, sure. So tentative new summary? What do y'all think? tbh this summary change would be more for you guys bc, like I said, I don't really care, but the readers have spoken and I don't mind changing it.

Lemme know, guys. :D Thanks for reading!
Chapter 58

Chapter Notes

:'D I'm like half an hour late, but HERE IT IS! The long-awaited chapter. It's a good
damn thing I've slowed the update schedule, fellas, bc school is kicking. my. ass. :'D
I'm fervently hoping the next chapter will be as easy to write as this one was, but my
muse likes kicking me in the face and running away, so.

More politics, some getting used to new Hogwarts schedule, and... some shit I
should've gotten up to chapters and chapters ago. :'D Enjoy!

...

The day directly before and after the full moon were usually days where werewolves still felt the
immense ache of their transformation; it stressed the body, after all, with bones snapping and
healing and growing extra bits, muscles and skin doing the same, to transition from a human into a
beast two to three times their normal size and with much more terrifying physical abilities, to boot.
With time, a werewolf learned how to function semi-normally on those days, like Remus. A new
whelp would not only be in pain basically the whole week, but remain unconscious for more or less
the entirety of those two days, maybe more.

(Sirius usually took a bit longer to recover after the moons, since he let Vána run wild much more
than Remus allowed Moony. Remus and Moony were almost interchangeable in name, but they
were so much more separated than Sirius and Vána.)

So that ix-nayed my immediate plans to ask about the Sorting Hat. He’d be out of it for a while,
and I knew he liked putting off his cambion visits as much as possible — especially given that we
were basically safe from fusing our minds and magical cores together — so I’d focus on other
things for a moment, leave the Sorting Hat for a bit.

And! And I didn’t have to worry about forgetting, because not only would Dietrich remind me —
that kid didn’t ever not do something he said he would, the boy was so dutiful, and if he weren’t a
cunning son of a bitch I’d almost call him straight-laced, too — but Jay had used our Monday
History of Magic class and later our Arithmancy class to start our agendas and journals, and now I
had frankly beautiful calendars ready and waiting for me, which really only encouraged me to
write more and keep better personal records.

With Dietrich’s promise to also get on me to meditate, and to share more visions with him if only
to study them and glean what we could from them, I had a feeling I’d be more productive on that
front. More random tidbits of magic that would make our magic repertoires a lot more varied and
unpredictable. Hell on our completionist and perfectionist tendencies, but eh. Needs must and all.
There was no completely mastering magic at our ages, no matter how brilliant we were; there was
just too much.
(Seriously. Not even Alby was a master of any one branch of magic; maybe few subcategories of Transfiguration, but all of Transfiguration? He wished.)

So.

With Sirius knocked out after the full moon… I had little else to do but, well… meditate. The old kind, where I’d just empty my head and let my Sight take me where it wanted, rather than trying to nudge it and earning a headache and an upset magical core for my trouble.

“Ever heard of a spell that goes ‘Liliaraneus’?” I asked suddenly.

Dietrich was sitting in front of Jay and I, partnered with Esau Hayes, from Hufflepuff, who we shared our block of Ancient Runes with. Us three and Flint and Rosier made up the Slytherin population of the room, with the other two further on Jay’s other side; keeping near the other snakes, of course, (though really, it’s not like I had beef with the outlier two yearmates of ours — just no interest in them, and vice versa). Professor Babbling was having us draw out the first set of runes we were to learn — Norse, because they were simple — so the room was rife with chatting and questions for the professor, mostly from the Hufflepuffs further up front.

At my question, Jay’s quill stopped. He looked at me incredulously. “The Blood Lily Curse? It’s illegal.”

Would you look at that? The Defense and dueling prodigy was right here. Of course he’d know about things like this. I’d be coming to Jay a lot this year, I think, if I was going to be made to give a lot more time to my Clairvoyance and Occlumency.

I’d Seen a man surrounded by enemies casting all sorts of insane spells, carving through his opponents with a somewhat stressed smile on his face. He’d performed a quick-cast ward — which I was very jealous of, and had written down — and a lot of area-of-effect spells that kept him isolated and safe for precious seconds in the fight, which I had also written down, but my vision had changed when he cast that last one. Who he was, or who his opponents were, I didn’t know, but I Saw some useful spellfire, which is exactly what I wanted.

“What does it do?” I asked Jay curiously.

He grimaced. “Makes a spider-lily out of your blood. It… It comes out of the opposite side of wherever the spell hit, cuts you… The blood crystalizes, and… erm. There was a mad serial killer in Japan in the sixteenth century, and he… it was his signature. It’s not a nice spell, Lyssie.” He turned pleading eyes on me. “I can’t cast it, so don’t make me teach you.”

“What? I’d never make you teach me a spell you didn’t want to, Jay.”

He eyed me. “But you want to learn it for some reason?”

I shrugged, nonchalant in the face of being caught. “Just in case.”

“In case you want to pursue a rewarding career path of serial murder?” Jay stressed, rare sarcasm bleeding into his tone.

I snorted. “The way Malfoy’s going, I might.” Then I sighed. Jay’s brow was furrowed, and he was starting to pull strands of hair out of his braid — a sure sign of stress from him. “There’s a counter to it, right?”

Jay seemed to relax, face smoothing. “It has to be applied quick enough, but yes. It’s how the killer was defeated, in the end.” Then his face lit with a bit of humor. “That, and a sword.”
I laughed a little, and we went back to our rune-writing. Then I stopped, another thought coming to poke at my attention. “Wait. Spells usually change a little when they’re transposed between spell traditions. Do you know the original spell? The Japanese?”

Jay blinked. “Er… I don’t, actually. Er- I don’t know how to cast the original spell, but I do know that… that the Latin-based version only makes one large ‘bloom’, which means the victim… erm, exsanguinates faster. The original… it was a tad more beautiful. There’d be dozens, blooming all over your skin.”

Trust Japan to make poetic murder-curses like that.

I chuckled, a little more nervously. “Yep, I think I’d like to learn the counter.”

Jay raised a brow. “Any particular reason why?”

“Because Sirius regularly frequents Knockturn Alley and his best friend’s flat is there, too, which means I semi-regularly frequent Knockturn Alley.” I said without batting an eye, returning to my runes. Then I flashed Jay a grin. “Heard about the spell there, too, and got a little curious.”

Jay grew grim. “It’s good to keep watch out in that place. I… wouldn’t be surprised if those sorts of curses are flung around there.” He frowned thoughtfully. “Should you really be visiting Professor Lupin and Sirius Black, after… er… this summer?”

“He’s my godfather.”

“I know that, and the others do too, as does your family, but… you did renounce bloodtraitorism, Lyssie, which means you have to be careful. Pureblood society is not as… freeing… for girls as Muggle-favored society is. As you know.”

Couldn’t help the bitterness that took root in my voice, then.

“One day, they’ll wonder if I wasn’t actually some desperate little pureblood girl trying to entrap a half-mad Lord. Even the Ministry wasn’t sure if I was conniving because I’m a Slytherin pureblood girl, or a victim because I’m a Weasley. For now I’m the ‘last scion of an reviving Ancient House’ and all that rubbish.”

Jay smiled comfortingly. It was an expression that was still a little faded. We were all still working on trying to get him to talk to us about his American betrothed, whose existence stressed him out enough to put bags under his eyes (I wondered if Jay was… well… not into girls… but I didn’t know how to broach that particular subject without making him supremely uncomfortable and likely to clam up). Still. When summers and breaks got him down — he only said quiet, neutral words about his mother, ever, and the rest of us knew not to ask further, just as we knew not to press Lu on his family even after he offered the information himself, or to even mention Nate’s since he made a point of changing the subject every time it glanced by him.

“And the Ministry is either a laughingstock, a cesspool of corruption, a paragon of gross negligence, or a flurry of crazed activity and overcompensation for all of the above.” Said Jay with a nod, eloquently enough that I think he was parroting someone else, “Which means it was overwhelmingly your victory.”

I scrunched my nose a little. “Are you trying to flatter me or comfort me?”

“Ohohoho~ Lots of witty Jay today.
“One’s got an agenda behind it, obviously,” I answered, “and the other one could possibly have an agenda behind it.”

“A summer with the Gryffs hasn’t gotten rid of your snake instincts, has it, Weasley?” called Flint, over Jay.

I flashed a sharp, but friendly, smile his way. “What, reading the papers didn’t tell you that?”

“It did, then we saw the scars and thought you were leaning more Gryff these days,” said Rosier, not even looking up from his runes. “No one but a mad Gryffie would fight a werewolf.”

I smirked. “And no one without Slytherin instincts would’ve survived it.”

“Hear, hear,” Flint chuckled.

When I leaned back in my seat, I saw Jay looking at me with a smile, and Dietrich sending me a quick nod. Both were signs of obvious approval. I blinked at them, but went back to my work. We had to copy down the runes perfectly twenty times and be able to answer the most important meanings of five random runes before Babbling approved of our class time and let us off — she was the type to make you stay behind if she didn’t approve, especially our block, since all three of our blocks were right before a break or a meal. Once we were leaving the classroom, the three of us reigning parvus grouping up, I asked Dietrich and Jay about it.

“I always felt a bit bad that those two were always isolated from us,” Jay admitted, “With so few of us… there’s only eight of us in Slytherin in our year, and six of them are us. They’ve had to hang around Malfoy.”

“Malfoy, my political enemy, Malfoy?”

Dietrich shrugged. “It has always been odd, that our small yeargroup has not been united politically. It is not so damaging that our reputation has suffered… but it could be. It would be smart, to attempt to sway Flint and Rosier to us. They might be useful.”

Jay shot him a look.

Dietrich didn’t look fazed at his cold assessment or Jay’s disapproval at it. “You all forget that I have been with Lys since the beginning, when the rest of you were mere assets. When I myself was only a tool. If we should befriend them and they become as dear to us as Harper… it will be different, then.”

“I noticed you didn’t use Nate as an example, despite him being more similar to those two,” I noted dryly.

“I do not like Nathaniel.”

“Oh, of course not.”

Token protests. But I did reflect on Dietrich’s words, which were an allusion to my own, last year. Everyone’s a tool at first. When they prove themselves more than that, your behavior towards them adjusts accordingly — that’s the simplest way of going about things. The clinical look. Dietrich was, after all, a cunning son of a bitch; he just wasn’t a heartless one. Harder than I was, I think, but he genuinely cared about the people who cared for him.

I didn’t expect Sebastian Flint or Edwin Rosier to fit themselves into my inner circle, my boys. But I wasn’t exactly opposed. If they got the okay from the others, I’d take the chance. Getting all the
support I could was probably a good move, in terms of both Slytherin politics and the shitstorm called Voldemort that was about to drop in.

“Dietrich, you know the Blood Lily Curse?”

“The what?”

“I’ll tell you about it later. We’ve got lunch… let’s see how Nate and Lu did with information on the firsties, shall we?”

...

Our mindscape would always be shared. That was just the way of it; Sirius and I could only achieve a certain degree of separation, and two different mindscape was just too much at this point. We’d resigned ourselves to that, and were comforted by the fact that our Occlumency shields could be separate — though at the moment, they weren’t — and we could claim different areas of the ‘scape, make shallow borders in our mind. One day, we’d be able to pretend that there was no connection, but it’d always be there, in some form. Our mindscape would always be shared.

So it was a good damn thing that it was so fucking cool.

“Y’know, a part of me will miss the quetzalcoatl.” I said musingly, dipping my hand into one of my canals — and they were mine — and scooping out a generous portion of water.

As soon as it separated from the river, the illusion of gravity failed to work on what I’d taken out, and the water bobbed in the air, pushed and pulled by my hands. I guided the water in front of me, leaving trails of droplets wobbling in the air, and started to shape it like it was molten glass. Not that I had any talent in glass-shaping, but the water was mine and so was this mind — partly — so I started smoothing out the body of a fish. It was large, the length of my forearm, proportioned like a koi fish, but with its gossamer fins longer and trailing out, catching the moonlight.

Once it was mostly finished, I stepped back, and watched as the smooth glass texture hardened and grew ridges like scales, the plethora of colors sinking into translucent skin as pulsing colors, bleeding out into the delicate fins. The fish gaped, newborn, never losing that glossy, water-like quality, imbued with miniatures of my own colors. It swam in the air, and when I gently touched its belly — not the texture of a fish, because my fingers could press in like dipping into water — and guided it to its brethren, waiting in the air behind me.

It joined its school, and since twenty-one was the target number, I sent them off.

They would feed on the white fungus that symbolized my mind’s attempt to kill Sirius’, and his to absorb mine. The spores would consume a tree and then harden, turning the entire thing into a pearl-white stone, taking away its ability to grow but making it so that the tree would never fall. There were stone groves dotting the woods, now, but the new constructs would prevent any more. All it took was crystalizing my and Sirius’ desire to keep the other alive.

(Well. That was putting it simple. They had to be made of the right kind of memories, a perfect balance between our minds, mimicking cambion magic clumsily. But after that, yeah, it was simple, and I was pissed that the cambion didn’t just straight-up tell us how to do this ourselves.)

“They’re doing well.”
I did *not* jump at the cambion, I did *not*...

But the cambion was an *intruder* in our heads, and no matter how logical is was for the half-demon to be here, my mind did *not* like someone rooting around. It was just... wrong. I felt almost sick, or maybe itchy, or maybe light-headed — a combination of all, but not really. And it showed how the cambion was silent despite the carpet of leaves and tall shrubs and tangled undergrowth, in how its parody of colors followed it even into a place where the only colors present should be mine and Sirius’, imbued in our constructs by my design or dusted on the stars.

It approached where I was standing on the grassy banks, molding fish out of my water, subconscious protectors and monitors out of my mind.

“The constructs,” the cambion clarified without need, stopping just shy of arm-length distance from me, its magic creeping around it, a shadow with its own will. “Smelling out the fungal growth, eating the silk away. Nothing to be done for those trees already hardened into stone, but the forest is replenishing itself.”

I nodded. *Thank you for letting me know.* “Where is Sirius?”

The cambion chuckled, the sound too distant and echoey. The sound quality of its voice always changed. *Wrangling his wolf. The creature is rather wild, even after the moon is no longer full. He connects to it oh-so-closely...*  

Couldn’t help the wince at the foreign feeling of someone who wasn’t Sirius speaking in the mindscape.

“You really do enjoy making us uncomfortable, don’t you?”

“Hm... enjoyment... Perhaps I derive a lack of boredom from it, but nothing so strong as enjoyment, I think, o reveler,” the cambion said calmly. *I enjoy drinking your blood. I enjoy feasting on pain and terror. I enjoy a challenge.*

*Oh, fuck you, now you’re really trying to make me uncomfortable.*

The cambion laughed. I really couldn’t tell how and if it felt emotions in a way I could understand. Seriously, *what part* of it was *at all* human? The only indication was the general shape/behavior of its magic.

I kept crafting a new school. We’d need seven schools, all of twenty-one fish; three by seven, the canine number — the loyalty number — by the number of power and good fortune. In its own tiny way, that would strengthen our mindscape’s stability.

“I actually have a question for you.” I said, finally.

The cambion looked up at me from observing my fish. My newest flock darted around it nervously, luminescent; like a magical core encased in glass, only the glass moved and felt like water and was made for the express purpose of stabilizing two merging minds. They didn’t want to touch it, but the cambion kept drifting towards them, and they were waiting to be their complete twenty-one.

“Can you even trust me to answer?”

I smiled a little. *Nothing you learn in my or Sirius’ mind can be used against us, as the contract dictates.*

The cambion tilted its head to the side. “Your willingness to trust me is always remarkable.”
Another fish joined the school, all of them squirming to get away from the cambion. My subconscious didn’t feel comfortable around the thing, though it was still staying in the vicinity, which spoke volumes of me. Maybe my mind was well-aware that it was the cambion that showed me how to build the constructs, trained my subconscious into learning how to defend itself against… Sirius, basically. And the same for Sirius, though he was a lot less trusting, perhaps due to Vána.

“I trust in the contract.”

“Crafted by children and madmen and an unknowing spider.”

_Written by people who care about keeping my secrets safe, even if they’re not privy to all of them._

_How profound. A contract written by those you trust, to bind one into trust_, the cambion projected, still chasing the fish lazily. As if it didn’t care a jot about the fact that I might’ve been presenting another _challenge_ to it.

(I had a feeling the cambion’s definition of ‘enjoy’ was rather different from mine.)

“If I were to wear the Sorting Hat, what would happen?” I posed to the cambion. The cambion seemed to still. I went on, mostly to myself, “Even if our sick trees are taken care of now, you’re implementing new constructs for the development of our separate control centers. Sirius is more connected to Vána than is normal for a werewolf of his age, which makes the wolf more wild and hostile. And the Sorting Hat is a Legilimencic artifact that is supposed to read memories and learn about a person.” I gazed at the cambion intently. “Am I going to have to be worried about killing a priceless artifact if I feel like talking to it?”

_I confess, dear reveler… I have never interacted with the famous enchanted hat of Godric Gryffindor. I cannot say what will happen. Such an object would be a very different breed of Legilimens than I._

I huffed. “Am I going to have to ask you to put the new constructs on hold so I can speak with the Hat without your magic doing anything to it?” Or was I going to have to write _another_ contract…?

“I will ensure my magic doesn’t harm the thing, should you speak to it.” And we both knew that if I was asking, it wasn’t an ‘if’ thing, but whatever. “The werewolf shouldn’t bother it, either. Did it not Sort Remus Lupin?”

Oh, I’d forgotten about that. Good point.

“And what do you want in return?” I asked shrewdly.

_I’d like to study the way it intrudes into minds. Any insight into the Four Founders is quite… interesting. They came even before my time._

Good to know that the cambion wasn’t a thousand years old, at least.

I sighed. “I’ll ask the Hat. It’ll linger outside of my shields and mindscape at first, I think. It did when I was Sorted. It shouldn’t come close to you unless it knows the risks and agrees.” The cambion’s constructs, after all, didn’t go beyond the mindscape — _they_ couldn’t telepath to me, so they were safely ensconced in the shields.

And they would always be, as long as they existed. That was part of the contract, too.
I shall adjust the constructs accordingly, of course. They will wait in hope, as will I. The cambion let out a dramatic sigh. “Oh, reveler. You do enjoy dangling the most tempting of treats in front of me, don’t you?”

The new school was done, and I sensed Sirius crossing one of my rivers. He was heading over, and Vána with him. He was aware of the conversation, of course — not the particulars, since the bank I stood on was a little clearer of forest than most, but he knew I was alone with the half-demon and he didn’t like that.

“Needs must,” I told the cambion, going for a bit of whimsicality.

Of course, the cambion was probably aware of my rising excitement and relief. I was finally going to make my appointment, after all. And the fact that Sirius and I had graduated from ‘dangerously clashing minds attempting to kinda destroy each other’, with the creation of our own mental constructs to oversee the balance of the woods.

Let’s work out the details, shall we?

I was rather hoping you might leave it at that.

Oh, I’m not that foolish.

The cambion laughed gently, leaning forward. “O young and foolish reveler. Once you’re grown, you’ll be nothing but the reveler, wizened and old and no doubt all the more ripe for beings such as myself to pluck and feast upon.”

I waited until I was safely away from the cambion and alone in my head to let my thoughts go where they wanted, prompted by that particular interaction.

Creepy bastard.

Harper flopped down on the cushions and rugs, kicking his shoes off and throwing them in a pile with mine. He grinned up at me.

“You know, it’s sort of adorable how Warrington looks after his old firstie. Wilhelm’s just this little thing, all nervous and shy and Jaylike, and Warrington’s built like a Beater half-Transfigured into a bear.”

I snorted at the imagery. Warrington, unfortunately, was the latest from a line of first cousins marrying each other; he was not only gorilla-like in stature, but he had a sort of cross-eyed gaze and it was rumored that he was deaf in one ear. Was rather bright, though, in spite of his looks, had a knack for Defense Against the Dark Arts. (Probably just the Dark Arts themselves, though…) Pushed around other Houses, but when we’d assigned him little Jacqueline Wilhelm to mentor — which everyone had been nervous about, including myself and Josie, when we arranged it — he proved himself ridiculously devoted to protecting her, and by extension, a lot of her friends (like Nicolette Beaumont and Magdalena Avery).

Harper was right in that it was adorable to see Warrington being all mama-bear towards Wilhelm. If there were even a little more of a size difference, I bet she could ride on his shoulder; and he’d
let her. *That* would certainly make the other Houses think twice about bullying the littler Slytherins.

“So Warrington’s on board, then?” I asked, finishing my Arithmancy homework.

(Unfortunately, introductory Arithmancy was mainly just making sure everyone could do math at an acceptable level for Professor Vector. Since early education was up to families or Muggle schools, Vector liked everyone to be able to at least do basic algebra before she could really get into the magical aspect of mathematics. Thank *fuck* I could scrounge up enough memories to, for the most part, breeze through this; got a little iffy when I first would see a math problem, but I’d get into the rhythm soon enough.)

“Warrington’s on board!” confirmed Harper cheerfully.

“So is Chambers,” announced Nate, sweeping into the room with a smirk that died as he looked at my work. “Merlin above, Lyssie, that packet isn’t due until Monday classes. All we have to do for tomorrow is today’s review.”

I smiled smugly at Nate, who took to Arithmancy the way a cat takes to water. “Not enjoying our Arithmancy class, Nate?”

“Piss off.”

Jay was behind him, and he also toed off his shoes to join me and Harper on the soft carpets and pillows. We’d even leaned a bunch against the stacked desks, stuck together with charms, so an entire side of our lazy area was couch-like. He shooed Harper away from the letters that spilled out of his bag with his own Arithmancy homework; letters that were written in unfamiliar hand, from an American address…

Dammit, I really needed to talk to Jay about that, see if he was alright. I’d have a lot of opportunity to, this year, I hoped — I shared both my electives with Jay, since he also was taking Ancient Runes and Arithmancy.

“So Chambers is with us? What about Hawkings?” I asked Nate, soothing his injured pride; boy hated to be seen as anything but *perfectly competent* in all areas, including Arithmancy. I still didn’t know why he was taking it.

“On the fence, after you spoke with her. She isn’t extremely attached to Davis, which is probably for the best, but she sure as bloody hell doesn’t want to antagonize Bole and Derrick. Chambers is a bit braver on that front, what with how her meeting her new would-be firsties went.”

I grinned, sharklike, at that. We’d all pulled overtime in between classes, during classes, throughout breaks and meals, all these last two days in order to match up *magnus* and *parvus*. We had to do *everyone* since we wanted to present the image that we were trying to help *all* of Slytherin and Malfy’s the one screwing it — *we* were the wronged ones, here — and though it was rushed and Nate had practically had to stalk the first-years to get information on them, the *magnus* aside from those most firmly on Malfy’s side seemed mostly convinced and willing to introduce themselves to their potential mentees early. We’d said that we wanted to do it quickly so that Malfy would be less liable to throw out the mentor sessions and buddy-system we had going… only a few of the *magnus* were privy to the fact that he wasn’t keeping anything of the old system at all, so it worked.

“So Warrington still adores Wilhelm,” I muttered, “And Chambers seems to like Ezra Falconer and Izola Reinhardt. Anyone else we snag?”
Just then, Dietrich and Lu came in; who knows where they’d been since Charms.

“Cornfoot is ours!” Lu crowed, throwing his shit everywhere carelessly.


“His cousin just told us! Me and Dietrich, that is, that’s where we’ve been.”

“And why would Lavina Cornfoot talk to you?”

“Well, she’s Lovegood’s friend, isn’t she, sorta, and Lyssie’s practically torn Ravenclaw to shreds trying to keep the worst of them off her, right, and it turns out the Cornfoot cousins are a bit closer than everyone thinks because they talk House business with each other—”

“And Lavina Cornfoot is of the opinion that if Lys is willing to terrorize an entire House just for one person, then keeping Malfoy from retaliating against her own Housemate will be child’s play,” Dietrich interrupted with an eye-roll.

Nate chuckled. “That, and Rowle will turn on Malfoy in an instant.”

I raised a brow. Rowle and Cornfoot were best mates, as far as I could tell. “Oh?”

“He doesn’t have permission for Hogsmeade this year,” explained Nate with a smile, “and his mentor, who was the only reason he was passing half of his classes, graduated with Head Girl Zabini. The boy’s going to be relegated to the bottom of the barrel unless he comes to us.”

“Because Lyssie’s got the signature forgeries,” Harper said excitedly.

(You’ve got WHAT?)

For fuck’s sake, Sirius, this is Slytherin.

(No, I mean — where were you when I was a Hogwarts student?! Unfair!)"}

Yet to be conceived, I imagine, I thought dryly. Dry enough to make Sirius apologize quickly and stop eavesdropping — it wasn’t accidental overhearing anymore, we had to try to get into each other’s thoughts now.

“That I do,” I confirmed to Harper and Lu, though I did inwardly wince at how much of a pain it was going to be now that a lot of the students with the connections I wanted were going to be set against us. Forging signatures was annoying. “Anyone else? I suppose the Carwright and Bates thing failed.”

Jay nodded. “Against us, but they won’t say a word. I suppose they don’t care enough, since they’re both alright with whatever happens. But Arrington and Cobb will support us.”

“At least we’ve got one prefect,” mumbled Lu, “Too bad Lyssie doesn’t conveniently know both Head Boy and Girl this year.”

I grimaced. Last year would’ve been perfect for this sort of thing. But then again, last year Josie was the Head Girl and still here so the point was moot. This year, though… “The Head Boy’s the nephew of that fuckwit who cross-examined me this summer.”

The room went quiet.
Then Dietrich let out a stream of French expletives and other words I didn’t know that shocked Harper into laughing, Jay blushing, and Nate sniggering under his breath. Lu and I gave each other dead-eyed looks that were a mixture of resignation, annoyance, lack of understanding, and a sort of ‘do we even want to know?’

“You mean to tell me that the- the son of a bitch who accused you of-”

“Yes, yes, Auror Ethan Cox is Head Boy Benjamin Cox’s uncle. Sooo… I’m not sure I really want to reach out.” Since even if he’s cut from a different cloth from his uncle, family solidarity and all that rot.

Dietrich grumbled French to himself, and when Nate looked uniquely, gleefully interested, I decided I didn’t really want to know.

“Lyra Huff might be doable,” pointed out Jay, also ignoring the rather impressive, dark plotting going on between the two boys who literally could not stop bitching at each other, “I think she’s friends with the girls from the Gryffindor Quidditch team.”

“Which I’ve got an in with,” I said, nodding, “I’ll try.” Which would give me more things to do than I had time for. I groaned. “No. Lu, you do it. You get along with Harry, don’t you, a little? Go see if we can’t arrange something with Lyra Huff through the Gryffie Quidditch nuts.”

“Screw Potter.”

“Harper, you do it.”

“Sure, Lyssie!”

“Harper you idiot! Potter’s my rival, I’m going to kick his arse in wandless magic!”

“Well, until then, I like playing Quidditch with the bloke, so.”

I rolled my eyes. “Lu, you arrange inter-House Quidditch.” He perked up, mouth click shut at those words. “Just because the Cup’s canceled doesn’t mean we can’t play, and if it lets us interact more with the other Houses, that’s just a plus. S’not like Beauxbatons and Durmstrang are coming right this second.”

“Thank bloody Merlin for that,” Lu said, “What do we need the other Houses for, again, Lyssie?”

I blinked at the question.

Then I looked around the room, observing how all my boys looked rather nonchalant, but they were listening for my answer. Did… Oh fuck me. Did none of them have friends outside of the six of us here? No other friends in all of Hogwarts, among the Houses? I knew they had some good relationships with the Slytherin upper-years, but… those might just be work-relationships, and… Dear god. I thought I remembered them having friends outside of Slytherin!

Though. Honestly. I wondered if it really mattered that much. I’d never seen a tighter group of friends than mine, all of us here. And they did interact with others and other Houses just fine. Plus… I’d be sad if I didn’t see them as often as I did, if they were off with other people. Maybe this was codependence thinking, though? Ah, well.

(Probably a good thing Sirius was off doing his own thing… fixing Grimmauld Place, I think, he just got into a screaming match with the awful portrait of his mother, I could sense his very convoluted emotions from here — emotions were still rather free between us, though it was just
sensing and not much empathy anymore. Anyways. He’d be a little worried that I wasn’t trying to befriend more Gryffindors and Hufflepuffs or something.)

“Connections.” I answered bluntly.

Lu nodded in understanding. “Gotcha. More connections means we can get more shit.”

“More shit is always good!”

“For god’s sake, Harper, can you not at least swear in French?”

“Why swear in French, Dietrich?”

“It’s more elegant.”

“BAHAHA! Only you would say something like that with a straight bloody face, Dietrich!”

“…Sometimes I feel like you were put on this earth for nothing more than to test my patience, Wilkes.”

Jay sighed quietly beside me. “You’ve made everyone start swearing like Americans, Lyssie.”

Well. That was one of the things I just couldn’t kick from my last life. I was a lot better about it than back then, but I still swore in my head a lot, and it just… Yeah. Jay would know, wouldn’t he? He spent a ton of the summer in America.

“Alright, alright, come on, we’ve got to get this finished before we make a showing in the common rooms,” I chided them all lazily. I flicked my wand to one of the rolling blackboards, relegated to one side of the room — there were dozens of them, all of them covered in our old, indecipherable scribbles — and Summoning it forward. “Let’s clear it now, who’s with us, who’s neutral, and who’s on Malfoy’s side? Oh, and if there’s anyone going to making bids.”

Harper laughed, diving towards one of the desks and reaching under the blankets draped over it for the chalk we’d all hoarded. “S’like we never left Hogwarts!”

The boys were all catching the chalk that Harper was throwing about.

“Trying to get this done before the Tournament, then?” Nate asked.

“Before the foreign schools show up. Let’s solidify our base, then we can work on what they might be able to offer us.” I said, nodding as Jay Summoned another chalkboard and got up to start dividing and labeling.

“Ambitious,” noted Dietrich.

“Didn’t expect any less, did you?” I shrugged. “We’re in a rush. We can rest when we’re dead.”

“Rate we’re going, that’ll be soon,” Lu sighed.

“But not yet for Lu, unfortunately, so I still have to read his handwriting,” Nate whispered to a stoic Dietrich.

“SHUDDUP NATE, YOU ARSE!”

I edged over to Dietrich while the boys squabbled but dutifully wrote names down, painting a full picture of Slytherin for us all. I’d have to ward the abandoned classroom hard if we kept this up;
which I wouldn’t mind, I suppose, wards were very much like puzzles, and just as satisfying to solve and create. But these were some Slytherin secrets, here. It’d be bad if anyone came across this.

“Tomorrow’s free period after Transfiguration, I’m going to talk to the Sorting Hat,” I told him quietly.

Sirius. Hear that?

(-BLOODY MADWOMAN- Oh, hello, Lyssie. Hm?)

*Tomorrow at four until six or so, I’m going to need the mindscape for a bit to talk to the Sorting Hat. Just in case, don’t be there unless I call, please?*

( Maybe it’d be best if I was. *Keep the cambion off of the thing… How on earth is the Hat going to manifest in our mindscape, anyways?*)

*Hell if I know.*

He looked at me in surprise. But then he nodded, and stared ahead, calling out a few corrections to alliances. The board was starting to look like we were trying to puzzle out a conspiracy theory or two. Thankfully, Nate and Jay at the mind to force the other two to color code.

“Stop by the Kitchens before you go,” said Dietrich, “If you skip dinner, I’ll tell the others something.”

( *So from four until further notice, then.* )

*Yes, please and thanks.*

“Good idea. Thanks. I’ll tell you how it goes.”

*I’ll let you know, Sirius.*

(I’ll be ready if you need me to destroy the constructs. I’ll take great pleasure from it, in fact. )

*Of course you will.*

“And don’t worry,” I told Dietrich with a grin, “You’ve got my back here at Hogwarts, but Sirius’ll watch out for me this time.”

“Only you would need so many people babysitting you, Lys.”

“Oi!”

…

When I was little, Alby’s office was sort of like that secret wonderland, and Alby the eccentric old master who let me paint everywhere to fulfill my childish, messy glee. It was two-leveled, like in the old movies — I think? I didn’t remember specific details anymore, and I was sorta surprised I still remembered so much — with his balcony rife with locked bookshelves and the more delicate
curiosities, and the bottom level his desk, the Hogwarts files and records, and other odds and ends — the silver instruments engraved with Ancient Runes, some humming, some whistling, some spinning, some sparking, all of them rather mesmerizing to watch especially if you were a curious child — that were a bit more replacable or resistant to whatever might happen. It was also a lot larger and more active than you’d think, taking up residence in one of the towers, with high windows that let in plenty of sun, the portraits lining the walls — some were covered with curtains — the instruments whirring, owls flitting through the portholes in the arched roof and dropping letters, which gracefully piled themselves onto different tables or Alby’s desk, I didn’t know how they organized themselves.

Alby wasn’t there when I came in after guessing at the password. Which I’d known would happen beforehand. I’d asked a House Elf yesterday in preparation for this; the Elf, Thimbley, had replied that Alby was busy at all hours of the day lately.

Not surprising, since he was frequenting the Ministry for trials and meetings with the school board and other annoyances and it was early in the year so he wasn’t too necessary for Hogwarts at the moment. Most of the portraits recognized me, though while some sniffed and closed their curtains — they remembered my paint-flinging days, I think — others were friendly. Brutus Scrimgeour certainly was.

“Oho! Young Wesley, isn’t it!” he called, jovially twirling his rather impressive mustache.

“Weasley, sir,” I corrected once again — and I always would — as I smiled and gave a customary pureblood curtsey (Hogwarts uniform meant skirt meant I could do that), “I guess Alby isn’t here, then?”

“I had hoped that you would have behavior more fitting of a pureblood heir,” sniffed the portrait of Phineas Nigellus Black, “what with the happenings of the summer. He is Headmaster Dumbledore, you rude girl.”

“I can call him what I like after the happenings of the summer,” I shot back. “I’ll be waiting here for him so we can talk about exactly that, thanks.”

Phineas Nigellus snorted contemptuously and disappeared behind his curtain. Typical. He had always been one to sneer and insult when I used to pop in.

Alby’d had to swear them all into secrecy regarding my Mage Sight lessons; most had taken this as a sign to only watch for a bit at the beginning of lessons, then disappear into their own worlds after a while. It wasn’t really that interesting, Mage Sight tutoring, when one wasn’t a Soothsayer and there was a small child running around. A small child whose bratty acts were calculated and as damaging as she could make it, when she was annoyed enough; Phineas Nigellus had to deal with a lot of paint, which was impressive with how high up he was and how tiny I’d been.

The portraits disappeared with cheerful waves again, the habit keeping. Thankfully.

I climbed the stairs, and paused a bit in front of Fawke’s intricate perch. There was this wooden nest-thing filled with ashes for burning days, and a large perch for a grown Fawkes to preen on as he wanted.

“Just had your burning day, then, you flaming chicken?” I said, not without fondness, at the ashy nest on Fawkes’ perch.

He wasn’t quite newborn, but his feathers were very fluffy, huge eyes blinking sleepily at me and
his normal trilling song a pathetic little “Peep!” at the sight of me.

Normally he’d get all snooty and hit me with his feathers or something, and I’d hiss ridiculous insults at him — our relationship never quite righted itself after that first time I’d fallen into the childish urge to pull on his long crest-feathers, and Alby always said it was like all my sibling-bickering manifested in our relationship rather than with my actual siblings — but he was a baby, and quite sleepy, and I had a mission.

“I’m here to yell at Alby, by the way. Even you can’t say he doesn’t deserve it this time, so go to sleep.” I told Fawkes.

A feeble chirp which probably meant weak agreement, because Fawkes did settle back down into his nest to sleep. I could read him better if I turned my Mage Sight on, but I was wary of my eyeballs being stabbed by Alby — his fucking rainbow core could blind me worse than the World Cup stadium, which was saying something.

The Hat was raggedy and patchwork and nostalgic as always, and I carefully levitated it down from its high-shelved place, ducking under it in an instant; it fit my ears a bit more easily this time around, though it was still big on me, and I felt something stirring against my weak Occlumency shields…

_Hm? You seem familiar…_

Ah, the Hat couldn’t get through my shields. Or, rather, chose not to. I remembered it doing much the same when I was actually Sorted.

I projected my thoughts outside of the shields, letting them rise to the surface — an easy feat when our shields were this weak, among other reasons:

*I suppose I should. You Sorted me two years ago, you see. I meant to come by a lot sooner. Sorry I’m late.*

_Oho? Ah, I see… you’re Guinevere Weasley, aren’t you? Slytherin._

I felt a rush of gratefulness. The Hat was the reason I was in Slytherin. Then I smiled sheepishly. *Sorry I’m late.*

*I admit that I expected you earlier- Hm. Your shields have become weaker._

_Oh, all the fun stuff is inside the shields. My mindscape is certainly… an interesting place._

The Hat paused. _It’s been a long time since I last sat on the head of a wizard or witch with a mindscape. A long time, indeed. Though… with your shields at this level, and even remembering their strength when you were a first-year, I would not have thought that you possessed a mindscape, Miss Weasley._

Ooh, ouch. But also true. Little baby me had thought I’d mastered Occlumency. I’d mastered what my Dad taught me about Occlumency. Which was, of course, to shut all my visions tight, so no one would ever get a clue as to what I could do without alerting me, giving me time to run the fuck away (and get Dad, probably, was his thinking back then). Along with a bit of calming myself down, and helping to control the flow of the Clairvoyant magic so that it didn’t drive me to magical exhaustion, or think that somehow I was forcing the issue, and thus start to take out its irritation over being controlled out on my internal organs. Thank god that didn’t happen anymore.
There are… certain special circumstances, I thought weakly.

Well, it does make this simpler. Time passes much more slowly in a mindscape. I told you, years ago, Miss Weasley, that I had answers for you. They are less answers and more… stories and theories. Much more time-consuming. May I have access to your mindscape?

I laughed a little nervously. Well, here’s the thing. I have to warn you that, erm… well… I may or may not have a Leglimencic cambion and a werewolf who isn’t quite mine in my head.

The Hat was silent, likely as flabbergasted as such a unique magical artifact could be.

I winced a little.

Now I am very interested in what you’ve been up to these two years since we first met, Miss Weasley.

You could look through it, if you were willing. The cambion offered a deal…

As they tend to do.

It just wants to study how you get into minds. None of its magic, by itself or through anything else, will touch you. It will study me afterwards, glean what information it likes through that.

A very careful deal you’ve made for my protection. Was the cost worth it, Miss Weasley?

I grinned — the sort of grin you showed to opponents. A predator’s smile. Well, that really depends on you. Stories and theories, you say?
Chapter Notes

WAHAHAHA I LIVE! Coming at you with a chapter I should’ve finished a week ago but didn’t bc ya girl bought the newest Fire Emblem and I’ve been obsessed. :D Here's the chapter, finally — it’s just hella dialogue, basically, so have fun with that. :’()

Y’all have been hyping this convo up, but henlo, I am an author that doesn't know how to fucking close subplots, so I think tbh this convo just leaves everyone with more questions. Whoops. I do have a plan, though, so please don’t rip me apart too hard for it. :’D

Anyways. Thank you as always to my readers and commenters for the support! Enjoy! :’D

See the end of the chapter for more notes

...!

I sat at the edge of the water, up to the knees in it, leaning back on the heels of my palms. Three of the schools were circling around. The other four were off in the woods, doing their jobs — it was Sirius, with his cobbled-together memories of Occlumency lessons long past and his very attack-oriented way of thinking, who managed to tweak the designs to not only keep the balance of the forest but also be set to attack intruders as I wished — but I stole 63 of the total number to protect me and the Hat. The cambion promised not to interfere or sample any magic directly, but the contract was rushed, so I decided to err on the side of caution.

Not that the Hat took a mental representation. It must’ve been part of its Legilimencic abilities, but it wasn’t tangible in the mindscape — all but invisible, really. I could tell the Hat was here, near me; I just couldn’t see it. Made sense, with how skilled a Legilimens it was enchanted to be, and had probably grown over the years.

**You’ve had an interesting two years since I Sorted you, Miss Weasley,** came the Hat’s voice eventually.

I still felt a sense of wrongness that someone other than myself or Sirius was speaking in the mindscape, but it was much less intense than if I were talking to the cambion. Figures the demonic bastard upped his ante to scare the hell out of us. With the Hat, it was less wrongness and more… focused alarm, I guess?

One of the fish swam by my head, and I stroked its smooth, glassy scales. Where my fingers glided along its body, the cloud of colors swirling in its translucent skin bloomed: deep, dark crimson to shimmery ingido to silvery blues to cyan to gentle teal. My magical sensitivity and I suppose just plain old experience taught me to know those colors and think of the people associated with them. Tom Riddle and myself and my father and my boys.
“I figured that if you saw all you needed to see, it’d be easier for you to give me whatever information you want to give me.” I told the Hat truthfully.

It’s a lot more efficient for someone to lay out all their cards, let the other decide what holes there are and what needs to be filled in. I don’t like doing that, normally. But I trusted the Sorting Hat. It had no grand ambitions that clashed with mine. It was very, very good at keeping secrets; maybe even forced to keep secrets. I’d rather believe that — and I did — because otherwise, there were some children of Hogwarts saturated trauma and fear of their homes that deserved to light a bonfire, starting with soaking a certain piece of cloth in oil…

(Don’t think about Nate right now, don’t think about Lu’s shrinking before his father, don’t think about Harper’s tired sighs of, “Mum doesn’t let me out of the manor, much, see-” It won’t help anyone to think about Harry being locked in a cupboard or Tom Riddle curled around a snake as boys kick at his ribs or-)

*I am not, you know.*

I looked up from my lap. I’d been staring at the Hogwarts skirt plaid for so long my eyes were crossing.

The Hat’s sigh rushed through the mindscape, a breeze. *I am not allowed to reveal anything I’ve found in a child’s mind to anyone other than the child themselves, if they ever wear me again. My purpose is to help Hogwart’s children in only one specific way. Sometimes I wish I could do more.*

I frowned at that.

Not because I felt the Hat *should* do more — the thing was an enchanted item, the magic in its fibers once ran through the cores of the Four Founders themselves, I didn’t blame it for being unable to *do more* — but because… I did suspect, but the confirmation brought up another question. It wasn’t allowed to reveal the contents of others’ minds.

What stories would it be able to tell me, then?

*Children’s minds, Miss Weasley,* the Hat clarified wryly.

Knowingly.

Knowing I would catch it.

“You can reveal anything you’ve seen from an adult,” I realized.

*Yes. And you… You, Miss Weasley, are in a way, an adult, are you not? You and all the others.*

I swallowed. “The other reincarnations.”

Mixtures of adult and child. I didn’t know how it went for the others — and wasn’t that *still* mindblowing, even after the Hat had *told me* that there were others (maybe I’d just forgotten until now?) — but my adult self was almost *frighteningly* intact, and my old experiences blended rather beautifully with the childlike, almost animalistic instincts I had noted as an infant and toddler; the same that I’d been overjoyed about because they helped me *so much* in blending in as a child and not freaking Mum and Dad out. I had been saved from the adult humiliation of needing to soil myself or breastfeed because I possessed an odd ability to let my subconscious direct my body while the rest of me zoned out, or, more often, slipped into what I realized afterwards were
Clairvoyant visions. Those instincts faded as I grew older and more in control of my body, but…

But they were there, the child in me. Just as the adult I used to be made so much of my personality. The past-life memories were hazy unless I tried very hard to recall them — and I preferred not to, didn’t have time to, was willfully ignoring the notion of thinking too hard about a life that was over in the face of one that I was living now, that was being threatened as I spoke — but there was no struggle for me to go from who I was to Lys Weasley. Integrating the childish instincts and the memories I made every day and the Seer intuition and the magic of the world into myself? It had never been difficult. And I still considered myself somewhat an adult, even if I sometimes wondered just how much.

Being a realized reincarnation was messy, I thought. It definitely required a lot more thought than I was willing to put into it. I was a busy person, after all.

The Hat laughed.

*You’re one of the few who so whole-heartedly threw themselves into their new life,* the Hat revealed, a sort of fond or maybe warm tinge to its voice, *Not even the Founders would blame you for it, Miss Weasley. You were born into a time of strife. The theoretical may fascinate you, but at the end of the day, the needs of you and yours are met through practicality.*

I smiled wryly. “And I’m nothing if I don’t protect mine. Which I know isn’t the healthiest mindset, believe me, but I don’t rightly care right now. I’ll think about that shite after Voldemort’s six feet under, for good.”

Sirius had been concerned about it, once. The utter devotion to my family used to alarm him, back before the mind link was permanently established. I wasn’t sure if he’d just forgotten — being turned into a werewolf did push aside a lot of concerns — or if he integrated enough of that same devotion into himself that it wasn’t concerning anymore. We were ever wary of what happened to our minds — what almost happened — but at the same time, we were utterly accepting of it; I suppose we both understood there were more pressing concerns to address. That, and there was really only so much we could do, sometimes.

The Sorting Hat remained amused. *I have seen the minds of thousands and thousands of children. Part-goblins and feyhounds and giants, full werewolves and Veela and Metamorphmagi. Purebloods, Halfbloods, Muggleborn. Incarcerates, natural Legilimens, Assessors and Seer-blooded. I have known the minds of more than a hundred thousand magical sentients, Miss Weasley.*

Which was no less mindblowing than seeing Hogwarts for the first time as an eleven-year-old. Than *exploring* Hogwarts for the first time, which I still hadn’t fully done and probably never would, rate I was going. Realizing how long a thousand years was, how old the stones and wards were, how Godric Gryffindor and Salazar Slytherin had walked the same paths I had… it was awe-inspiring. Humbling.

And largely unimportant at the moment.

I couldn’t have told the Hat to get the point more rudely and obviously than if I had told it straight-out, and part of me cursed the fact that it could peel the thoughts from my head easily, especially given access to the mindscape.

The Hat was gently tolerant, though. *In all my long years, Miss Weasley, I have only met seven reincarnations. You are the latest.*
Seven reincarnations.

“That’s a very auspicious number.” I murmured. It was the number of power, after all. The so-called strongest number, the most magical.

**You are also the seventh and latest Clairvoyant.**

My heart skipped a beat in shock.

Seven Clairvoyants, too.

**And, before you, there has only been one who was both.**

There was a sinking feeling in my gut. Seven reincarnations. Seven Clairvoyants. Guinevere Lysandra Weasley, who shouldn’t have existed, who was — amazingly, impossibly enough — both; a Clairvoyant and reincarnation and born Soothsayer all in one. I knew the answer before the Hat even spoke.

**Her name was Helvynya Prevett.**

... 

Before I knew all the shit I’d be thrown into — all the shit I willingly hurdles into — I’d given passing curiosity to my existence in this world that was once fiction in another life. There was no Guinevere Lysandra Weasley in the Harry Potter books, no Lys Weasley in the movies. Harry Potter didn’t have a scar on his arm that looked like a black sun, a ring of dark erupting into black, veiny branches. The war did not last as long or become as bloody as my visions indicated. Ron wasn’t supposed to almost drown in the river, Bill and George and Ron were supposed to be largely untouched (physically) during the second war, and the Boy-Who-Lived was destined to win after seven books of peril and adventure. This was how I knew it, and this is not how this life was at all.

I’d always wondered if it was me that fucked it all up somehow.

Because no matter how many tragedies there were in the story of Harry Potter, in the end, he won. In the end, Voldemort was dead and the Boy-Who-Lived grew up to be old and happy along with most of his friends. It was a happy ending, and then suddenly it wasn’t, and the only glaring difference seemed to be me.

Clairvoyant and reincarnation, born where she shouldn’t have been.

It was Clairvoyance that taught me that the odd darkness and grittiness of this world — so different from the children’s story I knew — branched out far beyond my birth, rooted further from my presence. So it made sense to me at the time, that the oldest-recorded and strongest-recorded Clairvoyant, my own ancestor, might have a clue. I zeroed in on Helvynya Prevett and bargained for her book, but the clues stopped there and Sollertia Augurium was suddenly important for more than just making me want to die from translating fucking Middle English; it gave me a way to save Sirius, who was just another advantage in this war my side seemed to already be losing.

I zeroed in on Helvynya Prevett for no other reason than she was related to me and had been a powerful Clairvoyant in the past. Everything I learned about her since only added to my certainty
that she was key, somehow. It was almost like…

Fate.

“Stories and theories,” I reminded myself.

The fish were swarming around me, circling around, agitated for my sake, though I myself was drawing on Occlumency calm. My shock was deep, but meditation and repairing a fragmented, cluttered mind did wonders for my ability to process information efficiently and calm myself down quickly.

Though, none of that stopped Vána from sensing that something was wrong with me. Vána wasn’t my werewolf, certainly not, and in reality most mental manifestations of werewolves were tied deeply enough to their wizards/witches that they were very vicious protectors of their minds — natural Occlumenses, werewolves — but I wasn’t an intruder. Vána had never known Sirius’ mind without mine there, in some way; we had almost become one mind, after all, and now we were separated by a few degrees, but not completely so.

So, Vána’s appearance through the trees and shadows wasn’t surprising.

Neither was his confused hostility towards the presence with me. The Hat didn’t take a shape in our mind, only a voice, but I didn’t doubt that all three of us denizens of this mindscape could tell there was something here.

“Oh, hush, Vána. It’s a friend, here to help me.” I murmured, twisting around and beckoning the werewolf over.

The huge lump — he was twice my height and could probably fit my entire body in his ribcage, Merlin — slunk forward, pressing his warm, furry side to mine as he splayed out on his belly, claws skimming my river. Werewolves were different from wolves in their their shoulder and hip joints were more flexible, more human, so Vána was practically crouched on the grassy bank with me, stubby tail bristled out with caution and discomfort. I tapped at Vána’s snarling muzzle, which his glowy eyes blinked at, then scratched at his pointed ear — it calmed him down enough that he relaxed. It was sorta flattering, really; how many humans could say that they had the trust of the most bestial side of a werewolf?

Remarkable, commented the Sorting Hat. It made Vána growl deep in his throat until I flicked him reprovingly.

“Interesting year, as I said,” I told the Hat calmly.

(I was grateful for Vána popping up to check on me, actually. Learning about Hevlynya Prevett being a reincarnation was… well, I can’t say I didn’t expect it, but it still was a loaded bit of information. There were so many implications now that this was confirmed, there were so many more questions I had now that I knew… Overwhelmed, is what I’d call it.)

(Funny, that Sirius — even not being here — was returning the favor. Keeping me grounded.)

The fish flocking around me and Vána pressing his bulk on my side gently, along with breathing deep and calm and letting my nervous, knee-jerk reaction be soothed by Occlumency, picked apart into bite-sized pieces for my convenience. Yeah. Alright. I could go at this logically. I didn’t have time to waste, after all; I was tired of wasting time in regards to this.

“Stories and theories,” I repeated, the words more an expectation than a reminder this time.
The Hat chuckled.

You have grown magnificently, Miss Weasley. Yes, as promised… stories and theories. The Hat seemed to take a fortifying breath. Then, Imagine, if you will, a girl grown in the very worst parts of a city. Neglected, beaten, molested — her future was torn into pieces before her eyes. Imagine that girl died, regretting her pitiful life, and then woke in another’s skin. Another, who was beautiful and unblemished, who was apart of a very old and powerful family, who had that power running in her own veins…

“Magic.” I said.

Magic, confirmed the Hat, Imagine this girl, who lived a horrible and brief life, suddenly finding herself in the body of another who chose to drown herself rather than live. Imagine this girl, who never had a choice, waking up with the ability to see the strands of Fate — to change the strands of Fate. What would she do?

I felt my face settle into grimness. Stories and theories. A person who lived a terrible shithole of a life, dead too young, never given a choice… suddenly having all the choices in the world. And those choices have prices, but… Well. Drive the knife further in, too, because apparently she wasn’t like me — she wasn’t born into the world. She woke up in the body of someone who killed herself. A rich, powerful someone who killed herself, when the body-snatcher had died struggling for every breath.

What a slap in the face. What would she do?

Yeah.

I could guess.

“Fuck the consequences.”

The Hat laughed a little. It was a sort of disbelieving, tired sound — not really a laugh at all. And so Helyvynya Prevett did exactly that. Or she planned to, and from what I’ve learned over the years, she succeeded in doing so. Much to her detriment, and the world’s.

Fuck.

Seriously, fuck. I wanted to run my hands through my hair in frustration, even with Vána’s reassuring presence — an echo of Sirius’ own — and the peacefulness of the mindscape. My fish were a bit more frantic and the rivers were rushing a little more strongly than they usually did, but I was trying to keep a lid on it all. I’d been right. I’d been right. Helyvynya Prevett was the root of everything, even the bloody Sorting Hat thought so.

She was the first reincarnation and Clairvoyant I had ever met, the Hat told me quietly, as if it was sinking into its own vast memories, It was almost 500 years since I’d first begun Sorting that I met either, and she was both. You might imagine my surprise.

“And then there were five more reincarnations and five more Clairvoyants after her, all in the span of 500 years,” I said.

Yes. And every single one of them was drawn to the first. Their predecessor, in a way. The Sorting Hat chuckled a little. I could tell that it had fond memories of the others by the fondness in its tone. I call you the Aberrations. You are the eleventh.

The Hat seemed to poke me with some sort of scolding feel. Like a jolt of disapproval. **Ten Aberrations I’ve met before you, but I hold true to the idea that none of you are mistakes. I believe, in fact, that you are all the opposite.**

“Corrections,” I filled in.

(I hadn’t really been self-deprecating when I was trying to pick out all the meanings of ‘aberration’, really. But it made sense; I’d always wondered if I was some sort of mistake in Fate. If I wasn’t supposed to be there. And, really, was I? No, not really.)

**Counter-balances.**

“To Helvynya Prevett.”

(But neither was she, so here I was. Here all eleven of us were and had been.)

**Just so.**

The waters of my rivers and canals were churning. Vána’s warmth beside me was starting to rumble; he could sense my unease building. I really was glad for him — he reminded me to calm down. Now wasn’t the time to panic and have existential crises. This wasn’t unlimited time, after all. Mindscape time was grossly extended time, but not unlimited. I did still remember that my physical body was standing around in Alby’s office right now.

“Please. Tell me what she did. What I have to fix.” **My purpose.**

**You know your purpose already, Miss Weasley,** the Hat countered, sounding surprised.

“My purpose according to Fate, then,” I amended, “I’ve chosen to give my everything to the ones I call mine, and I won’t bloody budge on that no matter what Fate decrees, but… I want to know why. Call it curiosity.”

*If you weren’t born into such a period of strife, I might have Sorted you into Ravenclaw, you know. Many of your reincarnation predecessors went there. Always, they are Muggles, and always, they know this world as you did — through books and films. They’re always enchanted by having magic of their own.*

I smiled a little. There were no colors in my mindscape, not the way I Saw in the waking world, but if I wasn’t being blinded, I was always a little amazed by the magic, too. It’s probably why I adored working with Harper so much, even if the others did everything in their power to keep us from pairing off in class (to avoid explosions and experiments, so I didn’t really blame them…) — Harper, no matter his pureblood upbringing, was eternally fascinated by magic.

(He’d be a horrid Muggle. He’d be so bored without a wand. Or he’d discover technology and figure out how to invent smartphones and virtual reality too early. It was a tossup with Tristan Harper, really.)

The Hat did answer, though. My original question. (In a roundabout way.) **Did you know that Helvynya Prevett wasn’t meant to marry Estmaro Weasle I?**

The smile went flat. “But she did anyways. And Estmaro II and Ambrose Wealse were born.”
And so was her sister’s son, who — if Hevlynya Prevett never interfered — would have been the Wealse heir. Seraphina was promised to Estmaro I. Instead, her son’s name was Fiorentio Veneziano and he was the second reincarnation I ever met. The first Aberration.

“What? Seraphina Prevett had a son? And he was a reincarnation?”

Indeed. He was a great driving force behind the defeat of the Twin Dark Lords, though there are few who remember that he was their cousin. A bastard cousin, but the bloodline was his nonetheless.

“I- No. No, just- Just tell me what she did. What I have to fix!” I insisted.

I am, the Hat replied patiently, Three men who would never have existed, did. Two Houses that should’ve prospered, reduced to bastard blood, traumatized by the Dark. Hevlynya Prevett did all of this, and more. She reshaped politics. She revolutionized the Mind Arts. And she had a particular affinity for creature and creature-inspired magic — much of the lore you’ll find on Dark creatures was helped by her interest in it, all those years ago.

“But- But it’s been so long since then. Five hundred years… People forget a whole bunch of shit in just a decade, never mind fifty times that,” I protested. Token protests, though; I wasn’t an idiot who’d blind herself to the butterfly effect, but I was a poor fucker in over her head who would very much like to deny everything and go curl up with my boys and my siblings, isolated from the scary, scary world, and blissfully so.

Heh.

Fat chance.

And do we not still study the Renaissance? Do you not know the names Michelangelo and da Vinci? So few will admit it, especially with how geared towards the Light the public tries to be, but Hevlynya Prevett was a cornerstone of magical history.

“Yeah, I knew it was a long shot.” I sighed. “Alright, then. Hevlynya Prevett was a reincarnation, and so was her nephew, who shouldn’t have existed and was the first of eleven Aberrations you’ve come across. She changed a whole bunch of shit by just existing, since she refused to adhere to Fate because of her horrible past life.”

Concise.

“Thanks.” I slumped against Vána’s bulk. He was being especially attentive at the moment; with Sirius and my separating minds, he’d been a bit less affectionate, I thought. Maybe. Tch, the Mind Arts were already fucking complicated even without adding a werewolf to the mix. Maybe he could sense a packmate in trouble. “So why tell me? Have you always tried to advise us… Aberrations? Are they the ones you’ve gotten this information from?”

Every time an Aberration has tried to contact another, they are blocked. They die, the notes they left have disappeared, whatever the case — the only way they can speak to their fellows is through others. But…

“But telling others is risky. Clairvoyants will be tempting Fate — knowing the future in and of itself can change it, and that has its price. It’s why Clairvoyants just don’t tell other people what they See, not carelessly,” I filled in, nodding knowingly.
I thought of my family, who tried never to ask for anything from the future — only Ginny and Ron and the twins would sometimes ask for present things or past things, and that was rare enough. I thought of Dietrich, who knew more than anyone in the world about what I Saw, but was too loyal and dedicated to me to act before consulting me. I thought of Sirius, who… well, he’d been a go-between for me and Septimus Weasley, who… well, now that I thought of it, Septimus Weasley — my great-grandfather — must’ve been the previous Aberration. My direct predecessor.

And he’d asked me to help Sirius, the only way he could. He’d sent Sirius to me.

I breathed in deeply, held the air in enough to make my chest ache. I had do doubt that Septimus Weasley suffered for that choice, that blatant disregard of Fate. Both in changing things for Sirius ( freeing him, soothing his sanity) and for getting a message across to his fellow Aberration. He’d known of me beforehand.

And yet.

“I’ve never Seen another reincarnation or Clairvoyant after me,” I whispered.

*Perhaps you are the last.*

I let out an incredulous, almost-laugh. “That’s a lot to put on a person, reincarnation or not. Clairvoyant or not. If my ten predecessors never seemed to have managed to fix all of the chaos Hevlynya Prevett left in her wake, how… I’m just- I’m just *one person.* I can barely save my siblings, let alone- let alone whatever the bloody hell I’m supposed to do with Hevlynya Prevett and her damn choices.”

The Hat hesitated.

*I don’t mean to frighten you with this knowledge, Miss Weasley,* it said gently, *I hoped, rather, that knowing all this would give you hope. Your Aberration predecessors lived hard lives, but they had countless moments of happiness as well.*

“Is this you telling me that I don’t really need to do anything, and Fate will take care of it all?”

A chuckle. *You’ve spent your whole life fighting against it, changing its direction, choosing what lines of fate you prefer to drift on. I don’t think it would comfort you at all to trust it all to the capriciousness of Fate.*

“Yeah. It wouldn’t.” I muttered, snorting.

What a vast understatement. I didn’t trust Fate at all. Her predetermined paths were *shit.* I was making my own, cobbling together all the choices she would’ve spurned otherwise. And she made me hurt for playing god like I did, but whatever. I’d play. There was too much at stake not to.

But.

But it was sort of… nice. To think that other reincarnations lived and breathed in this world, introduced to magic they never thought existed, and though Fate was using them to fix Helvynya Prevett’s mistakes, they found their own happinesses. They carved places for themselves. And yeah, it was stupid that whatever otherworldly power (Fate, I assumed) decided that *I* needed to be yanked from my life — or rather my death, my maybe-afterworld, my own *world* — to clean up someone else’s cosmic shitstain of a mess, but that was the way the dice rolled and it’s not like it was all bad. At least I knew what was expected of me, what was wanted. Living up to that or not, that was in my hands now.
I suppose Fate did instill a certain obsessive curiosity about Hevlynya Prevett in the Aberrations to steer them, and I was going to find out all about the damn woman if only to understand what in the hell I was supposed to do about that — a particular action, or was I just supposed to live my life and wait for the next Aberration? — but whatever. There was no use cursing my life and godly beings and Fate. What was I going to do, kill myself just to give the universe the middle finger? Let my brothers die just because they were obviously being used to manipulate me? For what?

Maybe once I died, I’d meet Fate. Give her a nice punch in the face. I’d bet all the other Aberrations had done the same, happy lives or not. But until then, what mattered was the here and now.

“Thank you,” I said quietly, petting Vána’s ears gently, “It did give me hope. In an odd way.”

_I would be pleased to speak more of your predecessors, if you wished, Miss Weasley. I might not have met any of the Clairvoyants after they were grown, but there are enough stories and theories from their minds that you might be able to make sense of the past, and decide what must be done in the present to give you your most favored future._

I smiled at the thought of being able to, in a roundabout way, speak to the other reincarnations. See their memories and thoughts, hear their stories. It was… calming, to think I wasn’t alone. At the moment, yeah, but not really.

There probably wasn’t a lot of time. Alby’s office wasn’t going to just stay empty. I didn’t know how much time passed out there, but I didn’t want to push my luck. I wasn’t even quite sure why Alby wasn’t in his office, only that he wasn’t. But he’d be busy again — he always was — so I could come back and hear more stories and theories, passed down from my fellow Aberrations. I wondered which ones had fought the hardest against Fate, which ones had accepted it?

I’d find out eventually. Apparently, I had an ally in the Sorting Hat.

Come to think of it…

“You never quite answered my question. Why help us?” I asked.

The Hat hesitated to answer. Or maybe it was just thinking of all the others, the Aberrations — they must have led interesting lives. Septimus Weasley had been so loved by Sirius Black, he’d been called Uncle Sevens and his memory had been torn to shreds by the dementors. Were a lot of the others like that? Bright bits of memory to everyone who remembered them?

_There are several reasons._

“More stories?”

_In a way, the Hat said gently and fondly, But the most important is that, no matter what you were before, you and all the others were and are children of Hogwarts. Albus said, once… Help will always be given at Hogwarts, to those who ask for it._

I blinked. Those words were familiar — from a past-life familiar. When had they been said? I couldn’t rightly remember. “I didn’t ask…” I told the Hat, “when you Sorted me, I didn’t ask.”

_You didn’t let me finish, _the Hat said wryly, _Help will always be given at Hogwarts, to those who ask for it. And sometimes, even to those who don’t._

There was a quiet pause after those words; they sunk into my head, making the water ripple gently
and the wind rustle the leaves. The colors in the sky pulsed gently, the colors of my fish beating in
tune to my heart. It was nighttime, dark and cool, but the ground was warm as if the sun had just
set after a full day of shining. Vána made it almost uncomfortably hot, if not for the breeze and the
water. The words were so simple, and they’d been said before, I’d read them before, but they
brought me a peace of mind, a kind of reassurance, that they hadn’t before.

“Was Godric Gryffindor like you?” I asked, after a moment. The Sorting Hat had been his, when he
lived. And the Founders poured magic into it, gave it the barest touch of Gryffindor’s Assessor
ability to help with Sorting. My instincts told me the connection between this magical artifact and
the Lion Founder went a bit further, though.

The Hat sounded pleasantly surprised. And maybe a bit wistful. *I am a pale echo of him.*

I grinned madly, and Vána leaned over to nudge his wet nose into my face for it. “No wonder.
Slytherin I am, but being raised by Gryffindors makes me instinctively look to them for safety. It
drives my boys to despair, sometimes- Well. No. All the time.”

The Hat laughed.

I had a feeling visits to the Hat and Alby’s office were going to be a thing now.

...  

The sun was bleeding into the horizon when Alby walked in, finding me sitting against his desk
with a baby Fawkes perched on my knees. The Sorting Hat was already returned to its place on the
high shelves, silent once more, so I was just waiting around; the portraits were all shut and
touching anything might trigger some sort of magical explosion, so it was just me entertaining
myself with conversation with Fawkes. Idiot I was, I didn’t bring any of my notebooks or
homework to pass the time.

I *did*, after all, promise to speak to Alby. Since I was here already… well, it was as good a time as
ever to get this out of the way.

He didn’t seem shocked — I guess he had wards or his Mage Sight was on point or something —
but he did look a little resigned. In the dying light, his garish robes were reflecting gold and orange,
clouds of purple glinting almost brown. Always with the stupidly colored robes, Alby.

“I suppose I deserve this,” Alby said grimly, gingerly walking towards me. He chose not to sit at
his desk, instead Conjuring an armchair for himself, purple and squishy-looking.

When I stood, he Conjured another one for me, facing him. I took it without a word.

Just because I understood that he probably pulled some political, quasi-illegal shenanigans during
the trial to benefit our side didn’t mean I wasn’t pissed about how I’d been treated. And no, it
wasn’t Alby’s fault that the damn Ministry were all incompetent sleazebags that would’ve rather
shoved the public’s minds in the gutter than own up to their mistakes… but I’d had no warning.
Needed my bloody natural reaction *my arse.*

I was sort of… unsure how to approach this. I had a lot of mixed feelings. I hated the feeling of
being used and hung out to dry, but… I also understood. And I couldn’t argue against the results,
not really. The only one really screwed over was me, and since in the end, my reputation actually
improved more than anything…

Well. That was dumb. I still had the right to be mad. I was still treated shittily. Making excuses for Alby was nonsensical — the man could obviously speak for himself. I think in the process of me trying to calm Sirius down, I was brainwashing myself into absolving Alby of all guilt. Tch.

“The Ministry tried to convince the world that I was either a golddigging whore or a petrified victim.” I stated flatly, not looking at Alby — staring into the middle distance was rather calming, actually — “And they tried to kill Sirius, or shackle him into silent disgrace by marrying him off to a girl not even half his age. They used pureblood customs against a pureblood bloodtraitor girl, thinking I wouldn’t fight back.”

Alby was quiet.

I sighed. It was no fun trying to draw the blustering reaction out of someone just waiting for you. Made me seem like a child, really — which I was, and doing this was childish, but hey. If I didn’t at least try to raise a little hell, Sirius would never forgive me.

“Luckily for everyone but the Ministry, I’m much more learned in pureblood customs than anyone would expect, and I turned their weapon right back on them,” I muttered. I looked up at Alby, catching his eyes. They weren’t twinkling. “I think I deserved a bit of a head’s up, Alby, I really think I did.”

“I will admit that you did,” Alby sighed, finally, giving me a slow, solemn nod. “May I explain, however?”

I grimaced. The words weren’t said condescendingly, or even impatiently, but I didn’t like the feeling that I was in the wrong here. I gave Alby a nod for want of anything else to do, and he looked perfectly serene when he started to speak.

“You know how the game of politics goes, my dear,” he started off.

I nodded. “Slytherins learn right quick, yeah.”

He let out an amused almost-chuckle. “If Professor Snape had been interrogated under Veritaserum… if Sirius himself had been put under Veritaserum… What would the outcome of the trial have been?”

Damn.

Damn. I had a suspicion — I mean, the fact that Snape hadn’t been questioned more thoroughly and Sirius hadn’t been put under Veritaserum as the accused was very telling, in hindsight — but to have it confirmed… A dodged bullet, there. Snape and Sirius would’ve had to reveal… well, the Memory Ward ritual, yes, which was a tad illegal, but they also might’ve had to reveal my Clairvoyance. The very thing I didn’t want in the hands of the Ministry. So Alby had to approve the invasive, highly inappropriate questions in order to sweep Veritaserum off the table — and he’d probably had to maneuver around Fudge to hide the fact that we were hiding something at all, or at least misdirect the scrutiny away from me…

Which is exactly what happened. I was dismissed so thoroughly, the Ministry would’ve tossed me into a marriage (ew) just to get Sirius out of the way.

Thinking on it, this was actually quite an impressive move by Alby. It just resulted in me being slandered to my face in full view of the public and needing to cast off my bloodtraitorism to protect myself. Amazing how politics can just screw you like that.
(But let’s be honest: I loved politicking. It was like putting a 4-dimensional puzzle together, and was extremely satisfying when you did it right. Frustrated the shit out of me, but I also enjoyed it somehow.)

Gahhh, how to be mad about this but also impressed and not irrationally irritated?

I let out a half-sigh, half-groan. “And you really couldn’t have given me a head’s up?”

“You performed admirably so without one, you must admit, my dear.” Alby replied mildly, having detected the lighter, joking tone.

“And what if I hadn’t?” I smiled wryly. “I sort of thought you were going to do something that would make me cry. Play the scared-little-girl-angle for the jury.”

“If you have been any other little girl, I suppose that I would’ve done that.” Alby said, shaking his head, “But I know you, Lys, and I knew you would react with either complete, incredulous disbelief or incandescent rage.”

“That’s exactly what happened.” I noted.

Alby smiled wryly. “And then I expected to stand up in objection and use your emotions as an example of what the public should be feeling, you see. But your knowledge of pureblood customs was unexpected. I suppose I should’ve seen it coming. You are quite close to a number of purebloods and pureblood heirs.”

And that way, I wouldn’t have had to renounce my bloodtraitor status and be subjected to a hundred fucking letters expressing sympathy and congratulations, or study the shit out of pureblood customs so that if/when someone called me out this year, I’d be able to retaliate just as smoothly. I’d accidentally created a very public reputation for myself, and now I was scrambling to perfect it. What a pain. Alby would’ve taken care of it.

“Well maybe you should’ve warned me to stay quiet.” I muttered waspishly.

“Admittedly, I didn’t think things out quite thoroughly. You might imagine that I was rather disgusted myself — my, ah, understanding with Auror Cox and the Minister was only completed that morning.”

I crossed my arms, leaning back into my squishy armchair. It was unfairly comfortable, and sitting with Alby in his office filled with delicate, silvery instruments and old books and fading sunlight brought up a wildly strong sense of nostalgia. Even the annoyance and frustration was sort of familiar — I certainly got irritated enough with studying and learning weird theoretical shit when I was younger.

Honestly, I think I already forgave Alby a while ago. Not in small part to the fact that, as grudging as I was to have needed to renounce my bloodtraitorism and study, it’s not like it hurt my family or my friends to do so. I had made an embarrassment of the Ministry, and that was rather nice. The whole unplanned chaos was a bit unwanted, but eh. I’d roll with it.

I let the corners of my mouth turn up. “What was going through your mind when the Minister told you that he was going to publicly accuse one of your students of being a whore or a psychologically damaged victim?”

Alby looked at me fondly, for whatever reason. “When the Minister presented the questions he was going to have Auror Cox ask a student I had mentored from childhood, my dear, I may have let my magic lash out a bit.”
Now *that* made me grin. “Did he throw up? Please tell me he threw up.”

“Not quite, Lys. It was quite unintentional, and I have no desire to terrify others.”

“Hm. One day, Alby, I’m going to make someone throw up from sudden magical lashing out.”

He chuckled. “I have no doubt that you will. Your core must expand a bit more before you have the ability to do so, though, my dear.”

“I know,” I sighed, “Even with all the Seer boosts I have, you still outstrip me in magical capacity.”

“With a few more decades under your belt, Lys, I am sure you’ll catch up.”

“Oh, *that’s* helpful. So, somewhere in my seventies or eighties?”

“If you’re diligent, perhaps your sixties. Women do tend to have more magic than men.”

I barked a sharp laugh.

Alby smiled at me gently. “Lys. I *am* sorry. For what was said to you, and the fact that I all but ensured you were unprepared for it. And, yes, also for the fact that in the eyes of the wizarding world, you are estranged from your family.”

I nodded, acknowledging the awaited-apology. “I forgave you a while back. It’s Sirius who’s the grudge-holder, actually.”

“I’m glad that you hold me high in your opinion, still.”

“Of course I do. You’ve helped me and mine out a lot, y’know. Even if you had to throw me under the bus a little, you were ready to push me out of the way even if I hadn’t dodged it myself.” I reasoned, shrugging.

“Throw you under the bus…?”

“Oh. Sorry, Muggle slang. You, er… I dunno a non-vulgar way to put it… You almost screwed me over? But you were going to swoop in, last minute, and in the end, you didn’t need to because I managed well enough.”

Alby nodded thoughtfully. “I shall remember that phrase.” Then he shook his head. “In any case, Lys, I would not blame you to have a low opinion of me. Do try not to swear so much, though, my dear — you’re a young, pureblood lady, after all.”

I snorted. “Swearing’s become part of my everyday vocabulary, sorry to say, Headmaster. Oh, and… You won’t do this again, right? Just because I’ve forgiven you doesn’t mean I’m not going to be pissed if you throw me under the bus again.”

Alby hummed. “If ever we find ourselves in a situation where it might be necessary for you to suffer somehow, Lys, I will do my utmost to warn you beforehand, at the very least. That said, this was a very particular situation… Believe me, my dear, I take my duties to the students of Hogwarts very seriously. If the Ministry intends to harm another of my students…”

“You’ll make the Minister throw up with the density of your magic?” I offered with a grin.

“If such a thing occurred, I’m sure there would be no evidence of such.”
“You have a Pensieve.”

“That I do.”

I laughed. “Okay, Alby, I’m satisfied with that. And… Well. Can I know something?”

“Well, that rather depends on what you want to know.”

“Yeah, well… Just… How many members of the Order of the Phoenix are still alive?”

Alby wasn’t even surprised that I knew that name. Figures. “Sixteen, including Peter Pettigrew.”

I rolled my eyes. “He doesn’t count, he’s a traitor and his soul’s gone anyways.” I pressed my mouth into a thoughtful frown. “You’re going to need more members, Alby. You’re going to need a lot more members.”

“It is safe for you to tell me this, my dear?”

“It’s nothing you don’t already know. I’ll be safe enough. My Sight’s been… quiet.”

“I will keep it in mind. Now… it’s rather late. Would you care for tea?”

I smiled. “Not going to tell me to scurry off to the dungeons for curfew?”

Alby beamed. “It’s not often I get to socialize with my students. I’ll escort you down to the Slytherin dungeons myself, once we’ve tired. I seem to recall offering to allow you to come see me whenever you’d like — an offer you didn’t quite take up.”

It would be nice, to just… hang out with Alby, to have a simple conversation. After what the Hat told me… after all the preparation for Malfoy’s bullshit-to-come… it’d be nice to get away from all that for a bit. I’d think on everything in a moment. I’d meditate on what the Hat told me about Helvynya Prevett, find Nate and get Sollertia Augurium back so I could research more on the woman, and I’d also see my boys and get Slytherin in order, ready for the storms to come.

I’d gotten answers today, ticked a few items off my mental to-do list, so I considered it a win.

I laughed again. “Don’t try to guilt-trip me, Alby, I was busy last year! And yeah, I’d like some tea. Biscuits, too?”

“Of course.”

Chapter End Notes

OH AND I ALMOST FORGOT!

I got someone who offered to translate Rose Petal Red into Portuguese! Thank you to Gabyzinha007 for that! Y’all will find that HERE (as long as this damn link works)!
Here was the thing about Slytherin: We had to at least look united to the rest of the school, or we’d be eaten alive. We all knew it. Snape knew it — he always stressed the importance of appearing united, especially in his speeches for the firsties, and he’s been known to step into the potesta game when it got too rough. (What ‘too rough’ meant to Snape, I wouldn’t know.) Josie knew it, back when she was here; she always made sure that whatever bullshit Malfoy and his potesta pulled, she backed him up if the other Houses questioned him.

Hell, Malfoy and I knew it.

As much leeway as he and I got on account of the infamous Weasley-Malfoy feud, we never devolved into anymore more than name-calling and insults spat out between gritted teeth — never more than that, not out in public. Back when I was a firstie, the pranks and harassment I went through were always carefully untraceable, even if everyone who was witness to those little tricks knew it was the Slytherins giving me a hard time. (Not that many knew. My brothers would’ve pitched a bloody fit if it ever reached them.) Hissing at each other? Fine, whatever, we’re a Weasley and a Malfoy. Dueling and hammering out contracts and potesta business? We kept that private.

This Slytherin-privacy in mind, neither of us could really do much but twitch irritably if the other decided to flaunt in the Great Hall or something.

Which I was doing.

Right now.

The flaunting, that is. Malfoy was the one with the narrowed eyes, the clenched jaw, and the
impending violent outburst coming out on his face in the form of an unflattering flush and a bit of a bulging vein on his temple, there.

A good person wouldn’t smirk at such a face. A good person wouldn’t snicker inside at the fact that their House, Slytherin, was being torn apart. A good person wouldn’t proudly stride into the Great Hall with handfuls of *magnus potesta* members — Chambers and Warrington included, their little *parvus* members trailing after them like relieved ducklings — with a friendly smile and smug eyes. A good person wouldn’t be this fucking petty.

“I’m going to hell,” I said blandly.

Nate, on my right side (since Dietrich was slightly behind, talking with Cobb and Jay about scheduling) just copied my smile.

“Good,” chuckled Nate, “I’ll have company, then.”

“Mate, we’re all going,” Lu chimed in from the left, not doing very well with the whole not-looking-at-Malfoy-about-to-laugh bit of the grand entrance, “As if Dietrich or Harper wouldn’t follow us straight in.”

“You’ll be fine, Lucas, you haven’t done a single evil thing in your life.”

“I have too!”

“I don’t think bullying the ‘Claws counts, Lucas.”

“Yeah, well… I used to bully Lyssie. Every time Dietrich remembers *that* little tidbit, it’s pretty much like facing the wrath of God.”

Nate descended into snickering, which was tempting, but not as much as teasing Lu. “Your bullying was so ineffective, I don’t even really remember it. I think I got worse from the demon twins, growing up.” I laughed, poking Lu’s cheek.

He threw me a halfhearted glare. “I was eleven. And how was I supposed to know that you thought trading insults was *fun*, you bloody maniac?”

The veneer of relaxed normality that we were all wearing became just that much more effortless, which only further drove the insult in. After all, my *parvus potesta* reigning was strolling into public with poached *magnus* students following us. All of my year group was taking seats around me, the firsties grouped around me next, then the second-years (led by Mercer, who was flanked by Beaumont and Lynwood), then anyone else who was with me — the older ones, Warrington, Chambers, Hawking, Cobb, Cornfoot, Rowle, a handful of other tutors, anyone who I poached into my protection but were affluent and skilled enough to protect the younger students. Warrington was particularly looming over Jacqualine Wilhelm, not smiling, but certainly indulging her hesitant chatter and the hand tangled in his sleeve.

Dietrich had all but shoved Nate out from my right side (Nate allowed it with grace, but his smirk promised petty revenge later) and Lu’d taken Jay to sit across instead, leaving my left open for Harper. My *parvus* and my Poached were taking up the half of the Slytherin tables closest to the Great Hall doors, which gave me a clear view of not only Malfoy’s quiet, incandescent rage, but also Snape’s dour disapproval.

“I think Snape’s going to kill you.” Harper said cheerfully.

“Shut up, Harper.”
“D’you think he’ll cooperate with his godson to do it?” Nate asked.

Dietrich, bless him, didn’t even need to be told to fire a mild Stinging Hex at Nate, who let out a very satisfying yelp for it.

“I didn’t know it was common knowledge that Snape was his godfather.” I muttered, starting in on some toast.

Nate passed the butter. “It’s not.”

Lu stuck a knife into the butter and passed it on to me. “Of course it isn’t,” he muttered.

“I think we might have given Malfoy a coronary.” Harper observed interestingly.

“He’s going to want to duel tonight,” I sighed, shaking my head, “Only a week into the school year, and I’m already going to be crossing wands.”

The last week had felt like a month, honestly.

It had been exactly a week since I’d spoken to the Sorting Hat and Alby. Unfortunately, I hadn’t been able to talk to Dietrich about the absolute cosmic shitstorm I seem to have been born into — I wasn’t planning on talking about the reincarnation thing, since being the seventh Clairvoyant in a long line beginning with Helvynya fucking Prevett was already wild enough — but we both understood that there were other things to worry about.

It had taken a lot of wheedling over the weekend and paperwork drawn up in between classes and during meals to cement loyalties and convince the Poached to side against their own traditional potesta leader.

The stupidest thing about Malfoy’s new policy of fake meritocracy and laissez-faire leadership was that the effects wouldn’t be seen immediately. It would take until someone — Bole or Derrick or Pucey or the Champion cousins, probably — decided to use and abuse their newfound freedom and hoard power, for anyone to realize the danger of not regulating our internal hierarchy. My boys and I had needed to outline to every single Poached exactly how they’d be screwed if they didn’t fold in to the parvus system.

Hawkings had been one tough bitch, and I say that in the most grudgingly admiring way possible. She’d been quick enough to realize that as much power as the parvus held, it was still lesser than the magnus for good reason — there wasn’t a lot that firsties and second-years could give to O.W.L. and N.E.W.T. students. Yes, the Poached could fold to me, but the reverse would’ve worked to counter Malfoy as well: the parvus could’ve thrown their support to an anti-Malfoy magnus student, such as Felicity Hawkings, and she would probably have taken Josie’s place. Easily, in fact.

Jay actually advocated for that route. None of us wanted to follow Hawkings, but we would’ve acknowledged Kirkwood, since she’d been Josie’s first choice and we worked with her quite a bit last year. But Kirkwood wasn’t quite able to unite the magnus against Malfoy, and my admiration of Hawkings leaned closer to grudge than not.

We could avoid a fight altogether, Jay had reasoned, and Slytherin wouldn’t suffer at all.

But, I’d pointed out, that would only work as long as the parvus showed full deference to Hawkings, otherwise Malfoy would capitalize and cut her legs out from under her. And I don’t trust Hawkings.
She can’t treat us any worse than Malfoy would.

This isn’t about settling for what’s less worse, Jay. This is about fighting for what’s best.

When I’d said that to him, he’d acquiesced quickly enough. I did really hate to see Slytherin having what amounted to a civil war — and an aggressive one, not like the cold war that Josie and Malfoy had before I came along — but I wasn’t going to settle for anything less than someone who I truly respected and would be able to work with as the magnus potesta reigning. I wouldn’t let anyone walk over my potesta, not while they called me their leader.

So yes, we’d had to haggle a shit ton with Hawkings to get her to back off and fold to me, and I had Nate watching her, but we’d done it. And now everyone I ruled over walked into breakfast at the same time, in front of the entire school, and Malfoy could do nothing other than accept that I made my claim and posted my challenge — and he would have to fight to get me to back off, which I didn’t plan to.

“You can beat him. You are not a terrible duelist, Lys.” Dietrich said, reading my mind as easily as ever.

I grinned at Dietrich. “Oh, that’s flattering.”

My Second did that not-smiling expression. “You should be proud. There are many terrible duelists in Britain.”

Nate leaned around Dietrich to grab my attention. “Lyssie, are you going to duel him yourself?”

I gave Nate the look that question deserved. If I didn’t duel Malfoy when he tried to challenge me, make me look bad in front of my newly Poached, it’d be a a fucking disaster.

He smiled at my annoyance, naturally. “He’s become a much better duelist since the last Duabus ex tribus. You might have a harder time.”

This, I knew. I hadn’t dueled Malfoy since before the Chamber of Secrets. In fact, I hadn’t dueled in a long time — once Sirius started taking up my attention last year, I shunted off most duels to Dietrich or Harper or Lu, since they enjoyed it. Malfoy undoubtedly would’ve been training harder since his kidnapping (and near death, but I wasn’t going to think about that and he probably tried not to either). Plus he was older, knew more spells. And if he weren’t a bloody moron, he wouldn’t call for a three-way duel this time; it’d be just me and him, which meant I had less support.

Well, then. Fuck me, I guess.

“Dietrich, what are my chances?” I murmured.

“I said so already. You can beat him. He may have more formal training, but your spell knowledge is equal to his, and you are more level-headed and intelligent,” my Second said calmly.

“I don’t have good dueling instincts,” I sighed. “When I don’t have a plan, I panic, and then I just attack recklessly.”

“Says a lot about you, that your default is aggression,” said Nate with a grin.

“Sod off.”

“We’ll plan,” Dietrich assured me, cutting off whatever argument was about to spring up. “After Defense, and then after Transfiguration, we will practice. Perhaps Jay will duel.”
“Lyssie’s definitely going to magically exhaust herself if Jay duels her,” piped up Harper.

“I’ll duel at Malfoy’s level, don’t worry, Lys,” Jay said helpfully.

In my head, I was hoping I was grimacing, but I knew I was really just pouting. “Is this revenge? Are you all still mad that I didn’t tell you what was going on with Sirius last year, and now you’re mocking me for being one of our worst duelists?”

“Sweet, sweet revenge,” Lu cackled.

“Rude,” I huffed, standing now that my breakfast was finished. “C’mon, any longer and Malfoy’s going to pass out from sheer bloody fury.”

“I’m not done eating!” Lu complained.

“You sound like Lyssie’s brother.” Harper laughed.

I looked around and gave subtle nods to my potesta; I didn’t want anyone to be cornered by the magnus, so we were all going to leave at roughly the same time. I nodded at Elena Chambers, who’d been sitting with her new firsties, Reinhardt and Falconer, who were quiet but crowded around their mentor.

“Alright there, Chambers?”

She brushed a wave of brown curls over her shoulder, using the motion to flick her eyes at some of the other magnus Slytherins, other seventh-years. Bole, Derrick, the Champion cousins. Finch and Hines, too. All of them sitting together. So she was a bit nervous about making enemies in her year.

Felicity Hawkings, tanned and blonde and proud of her model-like stature, bumped shoulders with Chambers before she could answer, a sign of reassurance, and then turned a razor-sharp gaze on me.

“We’ll be fine,” she said decisively.

Chambers was obviously bolstered by the interaction. She nodded. “Right. We’ll see you tonight… regina.”

Well, then.

Everyone heard that title of respect from a N.E.W.T. student to a mere regina potestae parvae.

I nodded again. “Have a good day, Chambers, Hawkings. You two as well, Reinhardt and Falconer.”

My yearmates and I all swept out of the Great Hall with that, a surefire signal to the rest of the Slytherin parvus potestae to break off as well, get to their classes and stick together. With the magnus having all this time to sort themselves out, the confusion and shock of the morning had transformed into anger and offense. My potesta had all been told to be very careful until I managed to force Malfoy to acknowledge my claim; it wouldn’t be that much of a hardship for them, since Slytherins as a whole were very used to being hunted in Hogwarts’ halls. For the last two years, they just haven’t had to worry about being hunted by other snakes.

They wouldn’t have to for long, hopefully. I was going to make it clear to Malfoy that whatever stupid chaos he wanted in his potesta, if it spilled over into mine, I would make him regret it. There was no Sirius Black to distract me from my House politics this time.
My yearmates and I strode to class casually. A little too casually, for a bunch of little shits who’d not only thrown the gauntlet at Malfoy, but chucked it at his face.

... 

This was how we sat in Defense Against the Dark Arts:

The Gryffindors, fourteen of them to our eight, clustered in the front. Ginny herded them all, keeping near the back, carefully positioned with Jay and Lu paired up behind her, Harper on the desk to their left with Nate, and Dietrich on their right with Flint. And then I was behind them, sitting with Rosier. Not our usual arrangement, which is also why us Slytherins were quieter than normal.

The Gryffindors were… well, I wouldn’t exactly call any of them my friends, save Ginny, but if they weren’t neutral towards us, they were friendly — a rarity in a group of Slytherins and Gryffindors. Creevey, Ainsworth, and Labelle were the nicest to us; the Cottingham cousins and Bennett didn’t talk to us much, but they were friendly.

Those six plus Ginny, they’d made it a habit to be more boisterous and loud than usual (Which was, frankly, enough for twice their number, which definitely dwarfed us snakes) always peppering Moody with questions. And if it wasn’t them, it was me, or Dietrich, or Harper.

We had to. To protect the others, that is.

It only took Moody’s first time taking roll call to figure out how things would go here.

(It’d gone something like this:

(“Ainsworth, Barlowe — fine duelist, your father — Bastion, Bennett, Clarke — knew your parents, they went into hiding near the end of the war — Cottingham, other Cottingham, Creevey — Muggleborn, aren’t you? — and…

“Ah. Flint. Your aunt and uncle left me a few scars, didn’t they? They left a few good men and women even more than that, of course. Where was I? Gonzalez, Gordon, Harper, Labelle, Lloyd… Oho. Rookwood. Your old man’s spells left less scars and more body parts behind — creative duelist, that one. Azkaban’s too good for some scum, evidently. And then Rosier right afterwards… Now, your grandmother I remember — Grindelwald follower if I ever saw one, and she fought like it too. Hm… Rice, Vaisey — your old man’s a good friend of Lucius Malfoy, always has been, hm? — Weasley and Weasley — the second set of twins, though all the troublemaker’s gone into the Slytherin one, it seems — Whitaker, and Wilkes… I remember your father, too, Wilkes. Done in by James Potter, just before the Potters went into hiding.

“Right. That’s everyone present. Put away your books, take out your wands — faster! HARPER! Keeping your wand behind your ear like that, do you want it blown off? I’ve seen better wizards than you loose bits and pieces to malfunctioning wands! CONSTANT VIGILANCE!”)

(Or something similar. I wasn’t paying too much attention, seeing as I was fully concentrated on Lu’s downward, complicated expression, Jay’s flinches and hiking shoulders, and Nate’s pallor and his hands clenched on the sides of his chair. Dietrich had gone stiffer than usual, Harper’s eyes had been wide with disbelief, Flint and Rosier looked no better than Lu, and all of the Gryffindors… well, they were either smirking, like that fuckface Gordon, or they’d looked similar to Harper. I
think I was the only one in the room shaking with rage.)

(Seriously, why was he allowed to get away with saying this? Was he *canon*ly like this, or did my ancestor fuck up enough to accidentally blast Moody's tact into the atmosphere? He had to know that saying this shit meant repercussions... or maybe it didn't? Would no one *really* care that he casually discussing the deaths of family members to young children? Just because they'd been Dark wizards and witches who were criminals? Did he pull this with Malfoy? My-Father-Will-Hear-About-This-Malfoy?)

(Half of my inability to do anything to Moody came from sheer incredulous shock.)

I knew for a fact that fucking baby Crouch got away with his Mad-Eye Moody impersonation for an entire year, meaning it was a spot-on impersonation. So when I say that I think I sort of despised Mad-Eye Moody, regardless of the fact that he was probably imprisoned in his own storage trunk, I think I really did hate the man. All I had to do was look at any of my Slytherins during or after his fucking class.

If it was like this in *my* class, where Gryffindor-Slytherin relations were actually, mostly good, I shuddered to think about what the other classes were like. And with the political turmoil within Slytherin... well, my *parvus* would stick together, and they were all encouraged to make connections with other Houses, so they'd have situations similar to my yeargroup. But the *magnus*...

I mean, Slytherin presented a united front before outside enemies, but the pressure was just fucking horrible and this is exactly why I wanted Slytherin to be *actually* united rather than just ostensibly: our House was always going to have a shitton of enemies — case in point: Moody — so why not save our ire for *them* rather than tear each other apart?

Not that Malfoy saw it like that. He was one of those little fuckers who believed in exponential growth when faced with adversity, only that was the *only* way to grow. Like, throwing your pups into the lion pit, but taken way too far, and no, you don’t really care about your pups, but they can’t really do anything about being thrown in. And he was lacking enough self-awareness — or had that much arrogance — to believe that he was top of the food chain and always would be, and that no one would ever begrudge him when he tossed you into the pit, since that was just how Slytherin *was*.

“ROOKWOOD!”

Jay flinched in his seat, hands fiddling with his braid nervously. “Y-Yes, Professor?”

“Jumpy little thing, aren’t you? Tell me what Shielding Charm you’d use in this situation.”

“Oh, er, m-maybe-”

“Speak up! You should know, with your father being who he is-”

I don’t know what sort of expression I was making, or even what I was thinking when I started moving my hand to my wand, but I found my wrist caught firmly in Rosier’s hand, under the desk — tight enough to stop and shock me, not tight enough to hurt. He met my eyes hesitantly, though his mouth was firm in its near-grimace. It was an oddly vulnerable expression on his face, for someone who was holding me back. Rosier was normally cutting in his remarks, oddly blunt for a Slytherin, though it suited him. He was a pretty laid-back sort.

Not now, though. Not in this class, wincing at the callous, gruff remarks that were vaguely
insulting by Gryffindor standards, but cutting and threatening to the rest of us.

Don’t, Rosier’s face read.

I didn’t know Rosier very well, but I could list out the reasons why I shouldn’t make a scene well enough. I had to duel Malfoy later — I couldn’t afford a detention. Slytherin was in a state of turmoil; where normally the entire House could work together to influence Moody to back off, talking to teachers and other students and the like, the magnus was at war with me and would relish my making a target of myself. There was little I could do. I wanted to shout, attack, anything to stop Moody from targeting mine but that was the impulsive, emotional Gryffindor in me — the part of me that panicked when there was no plan.

Had to be more Slytherin than that, y’know. Had to be smarter than that.

(This would be wonderful practice, probably. Never had to deal with completely and utterly hostile teachers before, and what were we getting next year but the most hostile teacher? But that was next year.)

I nodded incrementally, watching Rosier’s shoulders relax just a bit. Ginny sent a nervous glance my way, which spoke volumes of how sensitive she was to my moods — my magic had not lashed out, thank you, I had much more control than that, but if it had she would’ve probably gone into attack mode — and some of the friendlier Gryffs would look back sympathetically or shift in their seats uncomfortably when Moody made his little, disparaging comments or loomed over Jay or Lu or Nate or the others’ desks, but class went on. And we all knew without a shred of doubt that every class would be like this.

(I just hoped that the bastard wouldn’t do the Unforgivables demonstration as he would with the fourth-years.)

After class, us snakes grouped together tightly, with me and Dietrich and Harper hovering on the fringes. Harper kept close to his roommates, their easy if distant relationship borne from familiarity and close quarters for three years, while Dietrich kept near Lu and Jay, and I tangled my fingers into Nate’s robe sleeve (since he dodged me when I tried to grab his hand). The first- through third-years had an hour break now — one of the reasons the parvus and magnus were broken up the way they were — and while normally we all split off to do our own things, especially Rosier and Flint, we all stayed together and took off straight to the Charms classroom, quietly recovering from the intense class.

Nate complained just to complain, I think. Get his equilibrium back.

“There’s no need to hold onto me, Lyssie, I’m not a child. Honestly.” He snarked at me, batting at my arm haphazardly. His voice was quiet, a murmur just like Jay’s as he spoke to Dietrich and Flint’s as he commiserated with Harper and Rosier.

“Getting high and mighty, aren’t you, just because you’re turning fourteen in December?”

Nate would feel better if he was bantering and very much not talking about how much Moody affected him. I’d oblige, even if it felt… stilted.

“I am the eldest of us, technically, you should all be following me. I have seniority.”

“Dietrich would rather curse off his wandhand than follow you.”

“Our dear Second would paint the moon orange if you asked him to, I’m sure he could find a way to follow me.”
I smiled as Nate slowly stopped trying to bat me off of him. “I would curse off my wandhand if I had to follow you.”

He gasped. And he decidedly didn’t do anything when my fingers crepted over into his hand and held his firmly — it was less for Nate’s comfort and more for mine, at this point, really. “Lyssie! What an insult, really. Am I that horrid of a leader?”

“You should be preening, Nate, you always strive to be as annoying as you possibly can.”

Another gasp, even more exaggerated than the last. “Lyssie, how could you say that to me?”

The others were getting a little louder, too, which meant everyone was recovering from Moody’s shitty class. Thank god. I grinned at Nate. “It’s my revenge for all those times in first year when you called me a twit.”

“To be fair—”

“I swear to Merlin, Nate—”

“—until someone gets to know how terrifying a strategical mind you have when you’re not being boorishly Gryffindor, you really do look like a firstie who’s wearing the things they grabbed out of their older sibling’s wardrobe blindly.”

“I’ll kill you.”

“Have to let go of my hand first, my dear Lys. Fallen for me, have you?”

I ripped my hand out of his and promptly smacked the shit out of his shoulder for that. He just laughed.

A glance around showed the rest of my snakes looking much more relaxed, half-listening to our exchange. I was glad to see it. I knew eventually we’d all get used to the high-pressure that classroom exerted, that we’d all build thick skins to his taunting comments and the damning smugness and pity from the Gryffindors, but it was shitty that we had to get used to it. And it made me remember just what the rest of the British wizarding world thought of Slytherins; sometimes, insulated within Hogwarts and cushioned by my open-minded family, I forgot that.

This was the reputation that the likes of Voldemort had left for us. Untrustworthy. Scheming. Insincere. Aggressive. Predatory. Power-hungry. Arrogant. All stereotypes you could use to justify prejudice. Why be kind to someone who thought they were above you? Why be decent to someone who was surely going to stab you in the back?

I sighed. “We really should be used to this sort of thing.” I muttered.

Thankfully, my comment didn’t drop the mood back down to where it’d been.

And oddly enough, it was Flint who replied. “It’s… different. From an Auror. Someone who knows too much about us.”

“Knowledge is power,” Nate agreed, which made Flint do a double-take.

(Nate was not one to agree. Especially not with people who weren’t… well, me and my boys.)

“He put my aunt and uncle in Azkaban,” Rosier revealed uneasily.

I suppose the shared experience of banding together like crazy in DADA classes made him more
comfortable with us. That, plus Moody already revealed it and… well, one of two possibilities: Rosier truly wasn’t attached to his aunt and uncle and/or family name, OR Rosier was trying to act like he was indifferent. Slytherins. You never knew.

His best mate followed his example, wincing. “He didn’t say it in class, but. Erm. I’m pretty sure he killed two of my uncles. My, er, my grandmother’s sons.”

For whatever reason they wanted to share, it was still horrible to hear. I grimaced. Nate wouldn’t say anything, but the fact that he’d practically rubbed Nate’s dad’s death in his face… And fuck me, I hadn’t known it was Harry’s dad who’d killed him. Christ. No wonder Nate was a bit more wary of Harry, though true to form, he’d disguised it by acting like it was just his general aversion to Gryffindors. Then the thing with Jay’s father, and Lu’s… he all but blatantly called them Death Eater scum.

“He’s a right bastard,” Lu growled, “If we didn’t have potesta business later…”

“I would’ve cursed him out, don’t worry.” I finished for him. I looked at everyone’s somewhat shocked faces, unimpressed. “What? He can’t say much to hurt me. What’s he going to do, tell me my scars look ugly? Pot and kettle.”

Nate snorted. “And now we’ve devolved into juvenile insults.”

I rolled my eyes. Bloody hell, you try to keep a conversation from going down somewhere very dark, very fast, and this is the thanks you get? Git. “Shut up, Nate.”

“Your scars aren’t ugly, Lyssie! Wicked, more like.”

“Thank you, Harper.”

Rosier laughed into his hands. “You lot are barmy.”

Nate let out a deep sigh. “I know. My complete and utter regret for joining them multiplies each day.”

I laughed. “All numbers multiplied by zero are still zero, idiot.”

Another long-suffering sigh we all knew was filled with amusement. “I can do basic arithmetic, thank you, Lyssie.”

“Oh? The first I have heard.” Dietrich remarked.

“Your Arithmancy marks say otherwise.” Jay chimed in at the same time.

Nate looked scandalized. “Am I being bullied?”

Flint coughed into his fists, covering a laugh. After what Nate did in first and part of second year, and the fact that he was still sort of a bully, he just trained it on my enemies now — and wasn’t that a little morally scummy of me, to allow that? — the irony was thick enough to choke on. That Flint and Rosier had senses of humor when they weren’t sniping at us or just generally being reluctant to interact with two wizards with foreign blood and a bloodtraitor was a rather pleasant surprise.

I shook my head, glad that my yeargroup was on friendlier terms and united and, after DADA, more or less relaxed. We’d get over it. We’d get used to the remarks, learn to ignore them or tune them out. Or Moody’d get tired of it, who knew? We’d be okay.
“Charms classroom’s up ahead. Speaking of bullying, anyone wanna vent some frustration on the ‘Puffs?’” Lu asked casually.

Most of the Slytherin boys turned their eyes my way. I blinked. Hm. To be or not to be decent? Wouldn’t be rightly fair to prank the ‘Puffs just because we were annoyed about DADA. It’d be just mean. But this would be a great bonding moment. And it’s not like I cared about many of the ‘Puffs.

“Leave MacDougal, Bates, and Falconer out of it, if you can. MacDougal’s my sister’s, Bates’ older brother is one of the Poached, and Falconer’s cousin is one of Chambers’ mentees. Feel free to wreck Cox, Quinn, and Collins, though.” I replied breezily, thoroughly ignoring the boyish grins and high-fives exchanged between Harper, Lu, Flint, and Rosier. (Jay and Dietrich shrugged, nonchalant, and Nate grinned evilly.)

“You’d think you’d be more into pranking, regina.” Rosier noted.

“With your brothers. The twin ones.” Flint clarified.

I smiled. “Pranking’s alright, but I have my fun in other ways. Dueling and reading and playing with my Mage Sight, stuff like that. I only prank when I need to thoroughly humiliate someone. Prove a point and all that, you know. Twice the fun that way, right?”

At the horror dawning on their faces, my grin turned a little wider and I trotted peacefully into the Charms classroom.

“Merlin I always knew she was terrifying.” Flint whispered behind me.

“Bloody hell. She’s so much scarier with the scars.” Rosier agreed.

“And just think!” said Harper brightly, “When the parvus is all cleaned up, we get to throw Lyssie at Moody and see what happens!”

A chorus of groans, and Jay following me close grimaced a little.

“Ergh, Harper, you explosion-obsessed freak.”

“Why’d you have to go and say that — she’s going to get ideas now!”

“Bloody hell, though, he’s right.”

“Shut up, Harper.”

...

I already knew the day was going to be a long one when I’d showed my hand during breakfast, but it was proving to be even longer.

I’d stripped off my robes and my vest, rolled my sleeves up, taken off my trainers. I wasn’t by any means a terrible duelist, but my stamina was actual trash, so I had to be very, very quick when I dueled — something was the difficult, since my instincts teetered between too aggressive and too passive. I wanted time to plan, or I wanted to overwhelm the enemy, no in-betweens, so Jay and Dietrich and Lu were pressing me hard to get me to think quicker. Harper switched off with Lu,
and whoever wasn’t dueling was always shouting on the sidelines and making observations so when I needed a break (which I did, and often) we’d be able to figure out what was wrong and how to fix it. Nate was quite helpful in this area.

Nate, however, had slipped off a half-hour ago, and was back with his usual wide grin but a sort of urgency in his eyes when he looked at me. Exactly the kind of look that told me that the day would be dragging on further than even I’d anticipated this morning.

I was already putting my shoes back on and grabbing my vest and robes. “What’s happened? The Poached? Or is Baddock having problems?”

Malcolm Baddock had been instated as the temporary leader of the firsties, which I promised them all — and good fucking lord, there were a lot of them, nearly three times as many as us third-years — was purely temporary until things settled in Slytherin. They’d have their politics to play once the situation between the potestas was resolved; yeargroup politics was rather foreign to me and my boys, since we’d all banded together pretty quickly and we’d been in a potesta with Malfoy, the little idiot who could (and did) poach like it was going out of style since he figured himself entitled to all of Slytherin, not just his yeargroup or his potesta.

I expected some difficulties, though not this soon. The firsties were still getting their feet under them, weren’t they?

More likely the Poached were being harassed by their own yeargroups…

But Nate shook his head.

“Mercer?” Dietrich asked, sounding as surprised as I felt, starting to straighten his own robes and uniform, following my example.

Because Mercer was damn good at controlling her yearmates. Her biggest rival was…

“Greengrass.” I muttered, quickly making myself presentable and not exhausted-looking. “And Trevino and Etheridge too, I suppose?”

“And Rawlings, McCune, and Rowle.” Nate listed grimly.

Lu cussed violently and he, Harper, and Jay started tidying up and making themselves look relaxed and put-together, too. We had to be united, we had to be presentable, we had to act the uncaring, iron-fisted leaders because if fucking Greengrass was going to threaten my parvus right now, I was going to lose my shit. I needed my potesta united under me, not only so the Poached felt comfortable and loyal, but so Malfoy would feel more intimidated, more willing to listen to me. But bloody Greengrass hadn’t made any waves last year, and it’s not like she was good friends with Malfoy or anything, so I’d assumed she was going to let it play out — she’d liked her magnus mentor, after all, so she should’ve been all for supporting the continuation of friendly, regulated relations between potestas.

Evidently not.

We locked up our classroom — Nate and Jay were particularly proficient at my usual wards, being rather good at the low-level blood magic — and we were striding down the dungeon corridors in no time. Dietrich took my right, Nate my left, Harper behind him, Lu and Jay flanking Dietrich; unfortunately, in politically-charged situations, me, Nate, and Dietrich had to take the front since we were the more politically-minded three. The others had to keep more or less quiet, unless we’d practiced beforehand, since they weren’t able to read situations as quickly or react to them as
efficiently the rest of us.

“What’s our situation?” I demanded.

“Greengrass is challenging Mercer.”

“Publicly?” I snapped, alarmed.

“Thankfully not,” sighed Nate, “Within their yeargroup, sequestered away in the east wing.”

The dungeons’ east wing, Mercer’s domain, just as the small corner of the north wing was ours. Most of the north wing was Snape’s territory, his labs and storerooms and office and classroom and whatnot, but most of the House was rather leery of hanging near our own Head — which I’d used ruthlessly to get us privacy, since I’d never been extremely terrified of Snape as everyone else was. Came with knowing his backstory, I guess. Mercer’d set up her little ring nearby enough that she could visit easily, though technically we Slytherins were supposed to be in our common room for socialization and political business. Snape understood the need for separate territories, though, I’m pretty sure, so he allowed it as long as none of us were disruptive — especially me and mine, what with proximity and just… Harper.

A few turns, dodging that damned suit of armor that always tried to trip you, and yelling quick hello’s to some of the nosier portraits, we got to the east wing. Mercer’d chosen a less private area; rather than a nice abandoned classroom, she’d taken an odd room that was all barrel vaults and shallow cells, stuffed with storage items and cobwebs; must’ve been a prison or a torture chamber of some sort, though it was brightly lit and Mercer made it more friendly by asking the House Elves for curtains and drapery and rugs and all that. She liked practicing dueling here, her and Beaumont and the rest.

In fact, her entire camp was facing off against Greengrass’.

Mercer, her Second, Nicolette Beaumont, and their other followers, Zacharias Kirkwood and Magdalena Avery and Theophilus Hale made up the camp that I rather liked, who I thought might make a great successor next year. Then Greengrass, a particularly pretty brunette, with Brian Trevino, Emmanuel Etheridge, Latanya McCune, Matthias Rowle, and Finley Rawlings. Lord, and there were other second-years there, too — Escobar, Bolton, Sinclair, Ward. Nearly the entire roster of them.

So. I had to mop this up before the fourth-years got out of their last class.

Excellent.

“What’s this? Did all of you skip History of Magic?” I asked, entering with my boys fanned out behind me.

“Regina.” Mercer said, startled and frazzled-looking.

“Weasley.” Greengrass acknowledged.

“I’m certain by the reactions from the second-years that my boys and I were a sight to behold: unconcerned, confident, but also sharp, looking for threats and ready to dispose of them. I didn’t have the natural poise that Josie had, but I made up for it with having a lot of deeply-trusted, highly-ranked lieutenants, to steal Luna’s favorite word for my boys. We were a unit, mismatched and much more openly childish than Josie had ever allowed herself to be, but I feel our overall danger was only accented by that. Mercer’s camp looked entirely relieved to see us. As relieved as Greengrass looked disgruntled.
“Lynwood and Wilhelm and Kozlowski are in class,” offered Beaumont.

I raised a brow. “Well, it’s not as if Binns will notice. What’s all this, then?”

Greengrass looked like she was barely refraining but baring her teeth at me. “None of your business, Weasley.”

The hell it wasn’t.

Purposefully angling myself so that the scars were showing prominently, my expression settled into cool judgement and yeah, since I was in a hurry, I flared my magic a little. Which, thank fuck, didn’t tire me out after all the dueling — my magical core, at the very least, far outstripped by physical stamina. Everyone present reacted in little ways, feeling the wave of pressure rippling out from me. A warning.

“It seems,” I said, every inch of me dripping disdain, “it really is, parvus.”

Nate stepped up, smile threatening and seemingly unaffected by my magic. “Looks to me like the second-years are sabotaging our operation, Lyssie. Causing poor Mercer trouble when we’re about to challenge Malfoy…” He tilted his head to one side consideringly. “Oh Greengrass, have you ever come up with anything original? We poached some key magnus and now you’re looking for Malfoy to do the same for you?” Nate laughed nastily. “What made you think you were important enough for him to stick his neck out for you?”

Ooh. Ouch. I wasn’t usually witness to how goddamn mean Nate could be usually, not anymore.

Greengrass flushed. “Maybe the fact the parvus leader is here, trying to save Mercer’s skin.” She hissed.

Nate’s smile turned condescending. “Poor little Greengrass. So desperate to gain Malfoy’s favor. Did you even think before you decided to challenge Mercer? Or were you just hoping she’d be caught off-guard enough that you’d get away with it?”

“You’re trying to distract me, but the fact of the matter is, if Weasley can’t keep her own potesta together, she doesn’t deserve to—”

“Brash and stupid girl,” interrupted Dietrich mercilessly, his tone screaming bored. “And your advisors are poor quality, as well. You do not even know what you are trying to do. You do not know why the parvus should not bow to Malfoy.”

Greengrass was, on the whole, doing well with how many people were attacking her now. But not good enough, not if she was trying to really verbally spar right now. “Brash and stupid? Weasley’s the Gryffindor one, with her filthy family name and those great, ugly scars. And making an enemy of a Malfoy is the height of stupid. Malfoys have been Slytherin leaders for generations, but now we’re supposed to play nice with a bloodtraitor cow?”

Dietrich’s voice was like stone. “I know what it is to follow a brash leader. But I know what it is, too, to hold her back, and to have her listen to my words, and to watch her think about what must be done versus what she wants to do. You want a cheap victory and Malfoy to follow. You do not want what is best for Slytherin. You are not fit to be a leader, and your Second is not fit to call himself such.”

Trevino drew himself up, insulted, as Greengrass turned bright red. She opened her mouth—

“Do you even know what Malfoy’s planning?” I asked.
My question stopped them short. I read in the faces of many of the present second-years that no, they didn’t. Except Mercer, who met my gaze and whose lips quirked when I gave her a small nod. She put her hands on her hips, confidence restored with the cutting tongues of the *parvus* potesta reigning’s Political Three.

“He’s getting rid of the mentor system,” announced Mercer with relish, making eyes widen and gasps taken in among her peers. “No more escort groups. No more tutoring. Inter-House relations would be discouraged. The *magnus* would be able to walk all over us. The *parvus* would be stripped of all power, and Malfoy won’t do a thing because we’re not valuable to him.”

“And you know that, Greengrass,” snarled Nicolette Beaumont, looking like a miniature Venus with the viciousness of an offended god, “Which is why you’re here, trying to discredit Addie. But Malfoy doesn’t *care* about us — he doesn’t care about *anyone* who isn’t useful to him, and the only way you’re being useful is by sabotaging yourself!”

“Ruin yourself over a man at your age, Greengrass? Though Malfoy hardly qualifies as a man…” Theophilius Hale put in, words carefully chosen and expression sly.

(Merlin, there was a mini-Nate in the making there. What a terrifying sight.)

“Don’t be a child, Hale, just because your little crush on Beaumont isn’t going well doesn’t mean you need to project.” Defended Matthias Rowle loyally, though his sour looks didn’t manage to hide his uncertainty.

Mercer smiled, smelling weakness. Greengrass’ camp wasn’t standing too firmly, though they tried, and the other second-years were realizing with horror just what would happen if they didn’t have the structure and support that I implemented.

“You want to split the *parvus* so that Malfoy can easily implement his new rules,” Mercer said coolly, “or his lack of them. But he will abandon the *parvus*, and he will abandon you. You want Weasley to look bad, so that the Poached abandon her and so that she is no longer *regina*. But you… You will be useless when the *parvus* has no power, since everyone will be scrambling to protect themselves first and foremost. You cannot protect anyone, Greengrass.”

“And it’s not going to hurt us, or Weasley. Don’t you know the stories? Weasley was a bloodtraitor in her first year, under Malfoy’s rule. She still deposed him, and she *didn’t even want to,*” Beaumont said triumphantly. “And even if she never speaks to us again, we were training as the silver six’s successors. We know enough to be able to get by.”

Damn. Relentless, that’s what this was. It felt very much like we were bullying a child. I was a terrible person for being amused by it, I really was. But I felt oddly proud as the second-years tore apart Greengrass and her camp.

Greengrass looked away.

At this point, it was overkill for me and the boys to be here. Mercer just needed me to disrupt Greengrass’ momentum and give the dark-skinned second-year leader a shove in the right direction. She’d mop up the rest herself, make sure Greengrass stayed down for a while longer. Girl was going to be a fine leader one day, though she was still a little too reticent to be truly terrifying — Beaumont and Hale were sharp enough to act as the distracting aggressors while Mercer pieced together what to do. They was a good group, there.

(I wondered if Josie felt like this, with me.)
“Well, that was a lovely waste of time. Next time you decide to get smart, Greengrass, why don’t you make sure you have the full picture?” I sighed, rolling my eyes and making to leave.

“Don’t be mean to baby parvus, Lyssie, not everyone has an informant like Nate.” Lu said gleefully, never one to pass up being able to be indescribably rude and irritating when he knew we’d back him fully.

“Hmph. Proper Slytherin packs should have an informant of my calibre.” Nate sniffed.

We were walking away already, refusing to look back at the second-years. It gave off the feeling that we’d been rather entirely unconcerned the whole time, just there out of curiosity. Much more confidence in Mercer, too, than we actually had — she really was a shy one. I caught sight of Jay’s face as I pivoted, and I knew he was very disapproving of how vicious we were being… or no. Wait. I think he’d had a crush on Astoria Greengrass once…? No, Jay wasn’t that shallow, he was likely uncomfortable with us bullying the little ones when that was exactly what we were trying to prevent.

Yeah. I wasn’t exactly stoked to be as hypocritical as I was, but at some point, I just accepted it.

Once we got out of the east wing, I drifted back to be shoulder-to-shoulder with Jay. The other four were leading us back to our classroom, bickering amongst each other (“I didn’t get to say anything, that’s so unfair!” “Shut up, Harper.” “She is much unlike her sister. Daphne Greengrass is smarter, I think…””) Jay looked reproachfully at me, twisting his braid around his hand and wrist.

“It’s not as if I’ve killed Greengrass,” I said, doing my best to be reassuring, “I may not like her personally, but she’s parvus — at least for now — so I’m trying to protect her, too. I won’t say that I didn’t like putting the arrogant little snot down, but what we’re doing will ultimately benefit her, too.”

“She won’t see it that way.” Jay said, though the protest was weak and we both knew it.

“It may hurt her now, and she may never like me because of it, and no, I’m not just doing it for her sake, but she’ll be safer under my rule than Malfoy’s,” I pointed out.

Jay sighed, nodding at my reasoning. “I suppose. I just… I remember what it was like in first year, you know, Lys. I remember… I- It’s just, even if it was silly and childish, they did isolate you. You and Dietrich. You two never complained, but… Bullying is bullying, and I don’t want to become that. I don’t want to see our friends return to… that.”

Lu and Nate and, very barely, Harper. They were once Malfoy supporters, his puppets. I didn’t much want to see that, either.

“We won’t go that far. We never go after anyone who hasn’t provoked us first, right? And if not, we’re going after someone who’s more or less equal to us — s’much as I don’t like admitting that Malfoy’s got some advantages over us.”

Jay smiled. “You really do hate to lose, Lyssie.”

I shrugged. “S’why I’m a good Slytherin, isn’t it?”

We’d reached our classroom, and had settled inside quick enough. There was still maybe twenty minutes until the last classes were out, but likely we wouldn’t make an appearance in the common rooms until after dinner; my parvus and my Poached were told to try to avoid the common room until me and mine’d showed up to challenge, since I really wasn’t looking to prolong this. I wanted to show up, duel, and then have my potesta left alone and recognized as separate from Malfoy. The
Greengrass business could’ve drawn out the secession unnecessarily — because, yes, no matter what, I was separating from Malfoy and running a hybrid of magnus and parvus on my own until Malfoy and his ilk tired themselves out and I could restore order.

So, a little more dueling. A bit more preparation. Some opportunity to let Mercer get her yeargroup in order so when we showed up, my secession was more legitimate. All that good stuff.

“Go easy on me?” I asked, stripping my robes and shoes off again, stepping onto the thick rugs.

Jay swept his braid back behind his shoulder. “Harper, Lu, I think Lys’ environmental awareness is rather lacking. Stinging Hexes or soft objects, please.” He smiled teasingly at me. “The faster you finish your duel with Malfoy, the faster he’ll fall, so we can be there to sweep up the pieces.”

Oooh, the evil bastard.

“It will serve you right if I have an asthma attack because of you.” I said grudgingly.

Jay just smiled. “En garde, Lyssie.”

Part of it was impatience, and part of it was because I really did not relish the thought of a separated Slytherin again — like the old days of Josie and Malfoy — but I didn’t waste any time. In our normal formation, the Political Three in front and the others flanking, and with the Poached following close and the little ones scattered around the common room in tight clusters, or sticking close to their mentors, we entered the Slytherin common room. It was a little backwards, dueling for the right of separation when my endgoal was unification, but this would keep my potesta safest.

And it’d be a cold day in hell when I bowed to the whims of a Malfoy.

It was rather conspicuous, all of us showing up. Malfoy was sitting in the area delegated to the magnus potesta reigning, in the very center of the chamber, collections of elegant, dark furniture and intricate, Celtic-based decorations and well-dressed students eyeing our progress like the snakes they were. He didn’t look angry anymore, and he didn’t look surprised; Malfoy was much more put together after all our years of feuding.

We were probably supposed to snarl at each other, put on a nice show. But Malfoy looked angry in a way I’d never seen from him before; he was usually one to blow up. We were similar in that way, that knee-jerk, impulsive reaction to anger. But we’d become more similar, I suppose, because we were both learning to curb that tendency to lash out — I was a bit further ahead in that department, but it was sort of fascinating to see it in Malfoy, remembering all our past altercations.

Huh. That was a weird thought. I was growing up with Malfoy.

It’s not like this was unexpected. In a way, I understood Malfoy’s point of view. He needed power. He needed legitimacy. He needed not to be under the parvus leader’s thumb. A return a more chaotic, pressurized Slytherin would hurt a lot of kids, but the ones who rose above it — those were the exceptional ones you wanted on your side. If they were strong enough to rise alone, they’d be monsters if you nurtured them; were Dietrich and Nate and I not proof of that? It was a Dark allegiance way of thought, tossing your pups into the lion pit.
I just thought we could do better. We could take care of everyone we could without making them indolent and lazy and complacent. Harper and Lu were definitely proof of that. My family was proof of that. Malfoy was just too small-minded and self-assured and willfully-ignorant to see that, to listen to me.

Which was just fine.

Slytherins were fucking weird. We communicated in layers and levels. He’d listen to magic and might.

“Let’s get this over with.” I said, standing in front of the regem maiorem potestaem, arms crossed and wand in one of my hands.

Malfoy’s eyes were burning, but he kept an impassive face. “You’re really going to isolate your control, Weasley? You’re splitting Slytherin apart. Not even Zabini did something like this — the other Houses will notice something, you little idiot.”

A last chance, I think. It was unexpected of him; he really had learned to cool his head over the years. Second-year Malfoy would’ve jumped into a duel immediately — in fact, he had.

I gave a shrug. “You’re the one splitting Slytherin apart, Malfoy. I’m trying to keep as much of it together as I can. Just agree to let my followers out of your potesta business. I’ll even be lenient to you when it all inevitably comes crashing down.”

Malfoy scowled. “Don’t condescend to me, Weasley. I don’t need it. And, come to think of it, I don’t really need you as the regina parvae potestae. Let’s bloody well get this over with, so I can shunt you and your obsessed fanboys to the corner and get to setting our House straight.”

He stood, brushing past me, as I huffed out a slightly exasperated, slightly resigned breath. Yeah. Dueling, it was. I had to prove that I could make his reign hell if he didn’t keep his magnus out of my fucking business. Something that was made harder by the fact that I’d gotten my hands on my Poached — if I hadn’t done that, he might’ve been content to let me put up a wall between our controls, but since I’d needed them to help my parvus, I’d had to step on his toes.

So basically, this duel was more reputation than anything.

But Slytherins really, really cared about that.

Turning on my heel, I followed Malfoy out, and us mass of Slytherins quietly, in shushed voices and half-excited, half-dreading tones, made our way to the Dueling Corridor.

Brick and stone and arched, ribbed ceilings with hanging lanterns, burning weakly; coupled with the low murmuring, Slytherins lining the dungeon’s widest corridor’s walls, the Dueling Corridor always seemed to be trying to make its occupants anxious. The tapestries here were so worn and faded, the place had always looked blank. Since it was the magnus potesta reigning dueling, Blaise Zabini was the one setting the wardstones down — he had a pinched look on his face, as if he really didn’t want this to be happening.

He probably didn’t. I think he’d done everything he could to try to persuaded Malfoy away from provoking me into a secession. Ironic, since the last split had been by the orders of Josie.

The wards were set up, encasing a wide, long strip of hallway. They flowed up once the last wardstone was in place, shimmering walls as thin as paper. I stood on one end, Malfoy the other, our camps crowded against the walls behind us. Dietrich was up front as my Second.
Shirtsleeves already rolled up, I shoved the robe sleeves into the folds to make sure they didn’t catch on my wand. My magic was thrumming in my chest, a little depleted, but good for another duel provided Malfoy didn’t do anything fancy; it did like to be used, my magic, so it was fluttering and making me twitchy. My trusty elder and dragon heartstring wand was warm in my fingers, seeming to sense a much harder duel approaching us.

“You and I have grown far too used to rituals, my friend,” I said to it, feeling a silly fondness for the thing, even knowing its blank colors had bonded with mine all those years ago, “I think Malfoy’s got unicorn hair… Let’s show him why dragons are considered the kings of magical beasts.”

I probably imagined it, but I felt my wand tingle, sending warm jolts up my arm. It made me grin, all the way through Zabini announcing our names and positions in Slytherin. I gripped it tightly in my hands and turned slightly to the side, letting my knees bend a little, my left hand’s nails digging into my palm sharply, ready. I was not used to having so little time to cast blood magic, especially blood-based wards as I was planning and had become something of a dueling signature of mine since the Duabus, but I’d practiced in my and my boys’ room. Lu and Jay had been very eager to try their hands at the Healing I knew, though Lu had some experience already from taking care of Quidditch-related injuries for himself and Harper.

It would have to be quick, but not immediate. I had to hit Malfoy with something to delay him, buy some time to chant the shortened phrases. So I had to open with something strong and shocking, or maybe shockingly strong.

“Begin,” Zabini drawled, stepping behind the wards.

“Reducto!” Malfoy cast immediately.

I stepped to the side before the first syllable left his lips, flicking my wand to his right, where he’d dodge if him putting all his weight on his right leg was any indication. “Flipendo,” was my milder response.

Because I was expecting Malfoy to block it with a Protego, though he’d seemed irritated that he’d had to use magic to block when he could’ve dodged the other way.

“Immobulus!”

“Stupefy, Stupefy- EXPelliARMUS!”

“Incarcerus! Shit- Protego!”

My Expelliarmus had been cast way too powerful — almost powerful enough that I felt out of control for a second there, and if I’d been any less willful it probably would’ve exploded in my face — and Malfoy rushed to regain his balance, since it’d hit his robes, making the cloth jerk him backwards. He realized his vulnerability and cast a Protego, recovering, and in that moment I twisted my wand in a newly unrusted pattern.

“Scopoccuo Incendio Tria!” I snarled, knowing before the three globs of blue fire appeared that the spell worked.

It had been such a stupidly difficult spell when I was a firstie. Such a huge margin of failure, such precision in wand movement necessary. And with dragon heartstring, it was even more finicky a spell to cast. And it was a bloody Light spell, too — designed for oculists, never mind that I’d used it to blind the fuck out of a basilisk because that’s how I saw someone use it in a vision and that’s
what I thought you were supposed to use it for.

Silly me.

The fire blasted forward, out of sync, meaning two fireballs would definitely get through after the other spent itself on Malfoy’s Protego. He realized that too, casting more Protego’s as the fire aimed for his face and eyes, aimed to blind him. Permanently was what the spell called for, but I just needed it for a moment.

I dug my nails into my palm, ignoring the twinge of pain. It had hurt much more when Moony scratched my face.

“Bha Ferut agus Wliskā mo dāimh-”

The Incendio Tria spent themselves on shields, and Malfoy’s eyes widened at the blood I was letting drip to the stone in a clenched fist, held out in front of me with my wand crossing the wrist. He rushed forward, roaring spells.

“STUPEFY! SILENCIO! INCENDIO!”

Ergh, moving would weaken the ward, but I had to dodge. Malfoy was fucking fast at casting, and he always had been, but now it was actually nerve-wracking. And he was dodgy, too, how annoyingly competent.

“Crioich-dionaidh!” I finished opening my fist and pushing magic through the blood.

Unlike the wards drawn by the Slytherin wardstones, the wards that were born from my magic and blood and invocation swirled up from my wand like the rapids of a river, tinged with a bloody, opaque glow. Malfoy’s jet of desperate fire splashed against the forming wards circling around me and distorting the lantern lights like liquid, stained glass; on contact, a small section of the ward hissed and steamed, fading away. This ward would neither hurt me nor drain me constantly, but it could be used up rather quickly — quicker, with the interrupted casting.

Bad for prolonged battles. Too weak for higher-level ones. Just perfect for little duels like this.

Malfoy’s face looked sour even as my own split into a smug grin. He hadn’t expected the Scoppocuo, that’s for sure. And I didn’t look (or feel for that matter) too tired — like I said, my magical stamina, my magic reserves, were stupidly vast for how old I was.

I was both very surprised and not at all when Malfoy’s next spell was Thrymmatizus.

It tore off a good chunk of the circling, shadowy red. “Well, that was violent.”

“You were more violent when you were a first-year, Weasley,” Malfoy sneered, which unintentionally made me chuckle. “Inferna!”

Another blast of fire, though I dodged it, dragging the whirling ward with me; only a bit got chipped, then.

“Disuplapsa!”

“Protego! Incommoruptorus!”

Shite. “Protego Maxima!” The spell bounced and veered into the boundary wards, making a first-year squeak.
“Stupefy! Expelliarmus!” Using baby spells to grind the ward down.

“Invectinhibitus Calxi!”

That last one, needles of limestone shot forward, which Malfoy destroyed with a frustrated Bombarda — much to his detriment and my luck, because they exploded into white powder, making him cough, and giving me time to cast another Scopocuo, this time paired with Incarcerus. Twisting coils of black cord obscured his vision, and I went in for the kill, pressing my advantage and firing off spells as quick as I could, mostly immobilizing spells.

The Petrificus Totalus is what got him. He turned as stiff as a board and fell over, backwards thankfully, leaving adrenaline pumping through my blood — which, incidentally, was still dripping onto the floor — and magic humming loudly in my chest and a silent corridor. It was a decisive spell, so I waved away the blood ward, not liking the way it was messing with my vision as well. I walked towards Malfoy, towards the center of the dueling space, and looked at Zabini.

“Guinevere Weasley wins by a disabling spell,” he announced formally, looking resigned but not shocked.

Well, that was a different experience from my and Malfoy’s first duel. He’d gotten much better. Would’ve crushed first-year me.

Whispering started. All I heard was that and a barely-there plipplipplip from my hand hanging at my side, running red and leaving a droplet trail as I sighed, nodded, and cast a quiet Finite to free Malfoy. I saw his expression slack, but turned away before I saw anything else. I generally tended to feel great about victories — and don’t get me wrong, I was very glad that I’d won, and exhilarated by the duel — but I did remember what this victory meant.

“The magnus has no right to obstruct the dealings of my parvus and my Poached,” I said loudly, looking from the floor to see my boys ready to welcome me, grim and proud where they stood, “We reserve the right to retaliate against any infractions, private to Slytherin House.”

I passed the wardstones, and Jay and Lu immediately gathered on my left side. It was sort of touching, that Jay — clean, prim Jay — grabbed my wrist, smearing the red all over his hands, and immediately started clearing the blood away (some sort of Evanesco or very gentle Scourgify) while Lu started a Ferula.

Dietrich murmured lowly, “Well done, regina.”

I nodded. “Civil war officially declared.”

“No,” Nate corrected, with a sly smile, “You ended it. They’ll respect us as separate, or we’ll break them until we’re all that’s left.”

I snorted. “They’re going to break anyways.”

His smile grew wider. “Then it’s a good thing we seceded before we cracked, too.”

“Honestly, Lys, the shit you do to yourself.” Lu grumbled, patting my hand gently, checking the bandages.

“It was well done,” Dietrich asserted again, “They saw you bleed. They saw what you would do to keep the parvus away from them. They, and Malfoy most, will hesitate to make you bend to magnus rule, as is tradition.”
“I think you scared the bloody hell out of them, Lyssie. All bloody and scarred and flinging around harmless Healing spells as blinding spells.” Harper said enthusiastically. “I never thought you could repurpose a Healing spell like that!”

My voice was dry. “I thought it was a dueling spell when I first saw it.”

Jay made a weird noise which I think was a choked-down laugh. Spell snob.

Shaking my head and flexing my left fingers, I looked to meet the eyes of Chambers, Warrington, Mercer, and Baddock. The ringleaders of my new, oddly mixed parvus. They followed me and mine as we returned to… Well now. I didn’t think it’d be very smooth to go back to the Slytherin common room, when that was mainly the magnus’ domain — they were the ‘greater power’ for a reason, after all. But my classroom couldn’t fit all, like, 60 of us.

Mercer’s domain might.

I eyed her for permission. Smart girl knew what I was asking and nodded in acquiescence. So that’s where we’d go, organize, figure out the specifics of how our half of Slytherin would work. Re-establish some of the old practices that I’d put in place last year but had no time to explain this year, until now. We’d push past curfew, but Snape understood — even grudgingly — what was going on. He had to; if he didn’t, I’d disown him as the Slytherin Head of House.

Lordy. And then the Triwizard was coming up.

“Goddammit, it’s only the second week of school.” I groused.

It send a round of scattered laughter out around me. The sound was all relief and thrill and new, almost hopeful excitement. Made me smile a little, too.

Chapter End Notes

SOME SICK FAN ART Y’ALL

On the fan art: Seriously, my dude, thank you for drawing the Weasley magical cores and I’m sorry your tumblr isn’t working properly. ’D tbh L... (and this shames me) hadn’t worked on ch 60 at all, but when you sent that fan art my inspiration was like ’YO TIME TO GO’ and I wrote these 11K words, so seriously, thank you. :)

I swear, I'm forgetting to link something or mention something... Hm... News... Oh, I had to delete a comment a while back bc I'm pretty sure it was a troll, but just so y'all know, I will normally not delete comments. ’D I had a tumblr post ranting about it, and I thank ye who reached out and said it was chill/gave support bc I felt very conflicted for a bit, there. Anywho. Thanks again, all of you lovely readers, and I shall be seeing you commentors in the comments section. :D See ya!
Chapter 61

MUHAHAHAHAHAHA MERRY CHRISTMAS FELLAS!

And to those who don't celebrate Christmas, happy holidays and here's my Christmas present — since I certainly celebrate it — to you. :) It's still Christmas, even if it's late, so here you all go!

DOUBLE UPDATE

Seriously, I'm about to put up chapter 62 right after this one. :D Lots of... conversations, really, but whatever. Enjoy!

Water bubbling upwards, light piercing through but falling short, murky darkness sovered in forests of kelp and Grindylows and — water droplets flicked onto bundles of flowers, dead fish at her feet that she’d give to Mum later. “Ó, urramach Draoidheachd Màthair! Ó ionmhainneach fuil caraid dhomh! Tha mi a' guidhe ort, Màthair mèinn, beannaich mise.”

Stop.

-pale-blue flowers pushed into his curls as he grinned at her childishly, but his face was longer and his throat bobbed with an Adam’s apple, a sign of his maturity. She leaned forward to mutter to him, and he laughed.

“You know, Lyssie, I always wanted one of your flower crowns. This isn’t quite it, but you know me, I’ll always laze about with you if you like. Merlin knows we deserve it, I think-” — wands brandished, heaving for breath. He smiled, reddish stains wiped from his face, then stillled. Blue eyes widened, then darkened. — ? — dark skin torn open, bandages frantically torn out and wrapped around her skeletal fame. “Hold on, okay, just hold on- OI! WHERE ON EARTH ARE THE BLOODY POTIONs?” — muttering under his breath, For you, Lyssie. Then aloud, “CRUCIO!” — “JESUS CHRIST, Harper, I didn’t know you COULD cast the Cruciatus-”

“Yeah, well, he tortured Josie, didn’t he?”

Stop.

-blinking languidly, grey eyes sleepy. Ink smeared on his cheek, too, white as paper. She frowned at him disapprovingly. “You aren’t sleeping, are you?” — red pooled into the grey, ancient stone, red so deep and dark it was black, bleeding from pale pages. She crawled on her hands and knees, ignoring the scrapes, leaning over the two boys with too-pale features, sobbing, a mess — beautiful for a boy, standing in front of her, looking at her with an odd sort of smile. “You’re... smiling. And you mean it. You’re actually smiling.” He laughed — “Because I was weak?” “No, because I was.” — reading the papers in front of him, mouth set into a frown. Behind him, blue
eyes peeked at the reports. They were both haggard, sighing. "Mothball the Emperor and the Tower II," he decided. "They're too close. Suspicious."

"Are you sure? They haven't got a lot of vacancies."

"We're not going to lose more people to a raid. The buildings can go. The Death Eaters can choke on their failure."

"I'll get Jacqualine and Cassius on it."

Stop.

He stood in front of her curtain, sweating, nervous, looking at her face half-bandaged. She was crying. "I'm sorry, Lys." — ??? — ran his hands through his hair, which she frowned at, slapping his fingers away, dabbing at the blood on his temple. "Honestly, Dietrich, I think I could've handled a little Bombarda." "When it's Lestrange casting, it's not 'little', my friend," he murmured — water lapping at their knees, standing in a lake and in the summer. Harper and Dietrich watched her as she Saw — "LYS, WATCH OUT- PROTEGO MAXIMA!"

Stop.

Crimson eyes in the dark, and a curving smile that was fanged. "I will enjoy breaking you, Guinevere Weasley." — ?? — a glass chandelier hanging — white mask like bone, ripped from her face — violet eyes in the dark, blinking languidly. She approached, skin pebbling with chills. — "Just try it, you evil bastard." "Oh? Hasn't anyone ever told you, little girl? There is no good or evil, only power — and those too weak to seek it."

Stop.

I gasped into wakefulness.

Practically tore my quilts and duvet off of my sticky skin, throwing all of my weight so that I rolled out of bed. Adrenaline made sure I landed on my hands and knees and not my face, bruises already starting on my bony legs as I threw myself towards my dresser, where there was one of those decorative silver washing basins. I thought I was going to throw up or something, but it never came; I waited, heaving in the dark.

Well, then. I hadn't had a set of nightmarish visions like that in a while.

Might've been my subconscious begging me to go finally talk to Dietrich and Harper about... things.

Important things.

"I only get two days after the secession and then I've got to do the hard things, hm?" I said shakily to myself, trying to find some amused exasperation.

(It didn't work.)

With no vomiting in sight — thank goodness, even if I'd never thrown up because of a vision before, it sure as fuck felt like I was going to when I woke up — I padded off to my bathroom, intending on a shower. Shower thoughts would be... good. Right now. Being warm and clean would be nice.

( Lys? Are you alright? )
Touch my line of sight and die, Sirius. I’m showering, I thought in rapid response, immediately
craning my neck so I was staring at the ceiling of my shower stall.

And if I felt a bit of relief and comfort from Sirius being there mentally, well. I think I could be
excused. We’d become very used to being in close proximity, accidentally stumbling into each
other’s thoughts and memories without trying. It was… not lonely in my head, because sometimes
we both rather felt overwhelmed by how much of the other we were still connected too — a few
too many people in one head did that — but, well, I hadn’t spoken to Sirius since, like, last week.
We’d felt each other moving around and sometimes random emotions brushed up against me at
odd times, but that was it.

(I know the drill, Lyssie. Er… d’you want me gone?)

Well, if you wanted to just… hang around a bit while I calm down, that’d be alright. I- Wait, are
you still cleaning out that room? I thought I got rid of the pixies yesterday.

(Nasty little buggers had a secondary nest.)

Set the drapes on fire? You never liked them anyway.

(Unfortunately, my dear goddaughter, not all problems can be solved with fire,) said Sirius
sagely, twirling his wand in his hands with much more coordination than he’d had before. Looks
like his finance meeting yesterday was productive. Not. (Oi, I was bored, alright? And Nicolosia
had it well in hand, I was there just to look pretty.)

I snorted, and instantly felt relieved and grateful for Sirius distracting me. He sent a semi-smug,
semi-pleased feeling back at me, a silent ‘You’re welcome’ to my similarly silent thanks.

Being Saturday and, apparently, six in the morning, I changed back into even baggier pajamas,
grimaced at my messed-up bed, and starting casting Freshening Charms and light cleaning charms
over the place. All to go back into bed. Just for the warmth, though, I’d lost all semblance of
sleepiness with the shower. Sirius sensed it and gleefully reveled in the lazy morning I was
indulging in, seeing as he was being all productive and cleaning his house.

I started poking at my Ancient Runes homework, and cheered for Sirius as he battled his way
through pixie-infested hell. He took another fifteen minutes to show off how many spells he’d
gotten around to re-learning and remembering — which was actually impressive, since Sirius had
lost a lot of magical knowledge in Azkaban, and no amount of my memories was really going to
help him there — and I’d already made it down a few pages of this Ancient Runes packet by the
time he was done.

There was a lull, where we both were comfortable and busy.

Then,

(Do you want to talk about it?) Sirius asked bluntly. Then he backtracked, (Er… can you even
talk about it? I get wicked headaches if I intrude on your visions now, I think we’re right and
proper separated in that regard, finally.)

That’s good news. And… well, I think I have to talk to Dietrich and Harper soon.

(About?)

The war. The upcoming war.
Ah, right. You know, for having been in your head so much, the most I know about the upcoming war is that you’re certain it’s going to be a second Blood War. And… well. Voldemort’s returning, isn’t he?

I nodded, then poked at Sirius’ head insistently. I wanted to know exactly what he thought about the upcoming war, what he thought was going to happen, what I’d told him already. Sirius snickered — the imagine of a little girl tugging insistently on his robe sleeves came to mind, which I flipped him off for, making him laugh harder — but he allowed me access. Much faster this way, if much less private; and thanks to the cambion, we had to ask permission now! Or, well, we could force our way through, but the other wouldn’t be happy and it’d hurt a fuckton.

Memories were messy, as fragmenting and random as visions sometimes, and Sirius’ were even more so. So many of his memories were foggy and veiled with dementor influence, cracked like glass, blurry and echoing, but his wartime memories were sharp. Seeing glimpses of duels from Sirius’ point of view, rifling through old spells and curses, and then trailing through old information — old safehouses, long-dead allies, spell specialties of enemies, stiff interactions at the Ministry, snippets of thoughts (Merlin, I’m knackered. When’s Harry going to be born? Bloody hell, Bella doesn’t pull her punches. Regulus is part of that DE squad, I’d better post over here. We don’t have enough Blood Replenishers.) etc. — I huffed at Sirius, asking him to point me in the right direction, which he did.

Ah, there we go…

I tapped Sirius gently when I was finished, and he closed his immediate memories and thoughts back up. That layer of separation between our heads slotted back into place.

It’d be irresponsible of me to tell you specific dates, I thought gently, But yeah. The war’s coming soon. Voldemort’s coming back to signal it. Another Blood War — a continuation of the first, really. Sirius… Harry’s going to have to fight. I’m going to have to fight, me and my boys. That’s… That’s what I had visions about.

Sirius was quiet for a bit. His grief and frustration and dread bubbled in our heads, alongside my regret that I had to tell him and my own dread for the war. He Occluded, though, taking deep breaths; I matched him, copying his Occluding. We shunted our emotions off into the Occlumency barriers in tandem.

I thought that might be the case. That you and Harry would have to fight. Fucking hell. Fucking hell.  

We Occluded a moment or two more.

Harper’s going to cast a Cruciatus on someone who tortures one of my friends. Maybe an ally, at that point, I put out there hesitantly. I… I should probably talk to him. And Dietrich. Again. I mean… both of them know as much as you do, but…

But they’re thirteen and you’re worried they don’t know what they’re choosing.  

Normal thirteen-year-olds don’t choose to die for their friends. They don’t go to war for them.

Your friends are anything but normal, Lyssie.  

I had to laugh at the flatness in that statement, feeling stupidly fond and oddly proud of my boys even when I was worrying my arse off about them and they weren’t even awake yet. “God, don’t I know it?”
Sirius, from just how I spoke of them and from what he’d seen in my memories, also quite liked my boys. He thought well of them without reservation, which was nice when so many other people I loved didn’t. I could read it in his warm affection that copied mine when I thought of them. Which was a nice change of pace from dread of the war.

( *Go talk to your friends, Lys,* ) Sirius encouraged, beaming even as he was tossing unconscious pixies in a hastily-Conjured cage. ( *Merlin knows you want to, and that I’m not exactly the best example of someone who had a normal childhood either. Dark purebloods have… different upbringings. They probably understand a lot more than you think. But thank you for confirming… the war. I knew it was coming, but if it’s soon… yeah, I’d better get going with this house, then. Safehouses were always in short supply back then.* )

* I’ll try to tell you more about it… Alby knows it’s coming, though. He’s getting ready, too. And so am I.

( *Not while you’re worrying about your boys you aren’t, Lyssie. Go on. Oh, but before I forget — did your chat with the Sorting Hat go well?* )

Ah, shit, that was another thing I had to talk to the boys about… Or at least, I had to figure out how much of that conversation I wanted them to know.

*I learned a bit about myself, which was… good. The Hat just wanted to help me. It’s met a few Clairvoyants before.*

Sirius nodded approvingly. Of the Hat. Seemed Sirius was a right bit more worried about me than he ever let on, which was telling of how much we were able to conceal from each other even working around the link. Not surprising, really. ( *Good,* ) he thought fiercely, ( *You need more people in your corner, Lys.* )

*I have a fair few.*

( *Never enough. Not for my goddaughter, and not with a war to fight. I’ll see you later, hey?* )

Yeah. You’re right, I should go see them. I’ll feel better, seeing them with my own eyes, not… Clairvoyance. And… would you be available later? I… I wanted to… Well, with what happened with Nate and Lu during the World Cup riots…

Sirius’ mood went taut and grim and determined. ( *I’ll be here, Lyssie.* )

I appreciated that more than he knew, probably. Sirius… Sirius would know more than anyone, about growing up with a DE name. He’d know more about how I could… get the others to do what he did. And it felt a little pathetic, asking for help on how to make my friends stay with me — I felt like a desperate little kid, following her favorite person around and hoping that’ll make them like me — but in all those visions of the war, I’d only Seen Dietrich and Harper. None of the others.

Yes, I had to talk to Dietrich and Harper. We had a lot of things to talk about.

And it’d be best to try to make some headway before Slytherin politics took over my life again. After this weekend, there were sure to be duels and challenges.

I was folding paper crane messengers before I’d even gotten out of bed again.
“The others?”

“The others?”

“Lucas has been putting off his potesta duties, so Julius volunteered to help him, and Nate is, of course, staying behind to watch, mock, and gloat,” Dietrich reported dutifully.

“S’no fair Lu gets to preside over the firsties…” Harper said mulishly, kicking at the gravelly beach of the Black Lake, trailing a little behind Dietrich and I. “You promise I get a few duels when they come up, Lyssie?”

I grinned. I felt much more relaxed having gotten Dietrich and Harper out of the castle and into my arm’s reach this afternoon. “Promise. And Dietrich, remind me to check up on Baddock myself sometime. I’m rooting for that one.”

“We shall see if he deserves it.”

Behind Dietrich, Harper stared at the lake for a moment, then glanced at me. Conspicuously.

I chuckled. “Harper, why do you think I brought you two out here? Yes, we’re going to say hello to Squiddy.”

“YES!”

“Ergh, devons-nous?” Dietrich complained under his breath. But he narrowed his eyes, looking around at the castle grounds; it wasn’t empty by a long shot, even the lakeside clustered with other students. But no one would be going as deep as required to say hello the Giant Squid. “I see. Fine. But just in case…”

“I’ll check with Mage Sight, don’t worry,” I muttered. “Should I check for listening spells, too?”

“I already did,” Dietrich said with a shrug, stopping on a bank of large rocks, starting to strip his robes and shoes and rocks off, as Harper was doing (albeit much more clumsily and cheerfully).

My boys were faster than I was, rolling their slacks up to nearly their knees, charming their things with safety spells and light anti-theft spells. Dietrich actually did most of those, never having forgotten what he’d had to learn back as a first-year. I sat on a flat rock, rolling my socks down from my knees to my ankles, flicking my Mage Sight to a low setting. As the boys strode off into the water, complaining about the cold and bantering with each other, I watched their clouds of color shimmer into view, only faintly there and barely coming off of their bodies.

The hazy rose-gold fog of Hogwarts’ magic made the mid-morning look like afternoon, the horizon and the sky cut with strings of white-gold, sparkling like dewy spider strings, forming the encompassing wards of the school — faint enough that I could ignore them, let them fade into the background.

Dietrich’s grey-blue clouded around him, the edges faint with how weak my Mage Sight was, the movement causing the folds of colors to darken into a rich, recognizable indigo or a darker, familiar teal, ribbons of deep reds streaking through the colors. Harper’s were brighter, like tropical waters, teal and turquoise and blue, darkening into a purple and deep crimson, forming around him like puffy clouds, electric blue strings swirling inside faintly like lightning.

When I had my fill of staring at their colors — larger, more grown than last year, the indigo more
prominent, their primacy colors stronger, their cores more matured — I weakened my Sight to the point where I could only pick out their main colors, curled on their skin, and then I spelled my own left-behind things and waded into the water to join them.

Dietrich and Harper both gave me knowing looks, Harper grinning and Dietrich’s eyes soft; the boys all told me I made a very particular face when I was looking at the core colors of my favorite people, similar to how they all put on different expressions when Harper managed to bet me to try to show them the colors I Saw. I stole a slice of buttered toast from Harper and started snacking on it as he pouted in protest, then turned to summon Squiddy. Dietrich crossed his arms, likely feeling odd without robes and with his sleeves and pant legs all rolled up, but we all were rather quiet as we got used to the shockingly cold water and were greeted by Squiddy’s inquiring, too-rough head-pats.

“Now that we are adequately alone,” Dietrich sighed, pushing one of Squiddy’s tentacles off of him in halfhearted disgust, “what was it that you needed us for, Lys? You woke us all up, and I know you were trying to fetch only Harper and I this morning, even if that did not quite work.”

I smiled sheepishly. “Yeah, I forgot Jay and Nate were early risers.”

“Nathaniel saw fit to jump on my bed. To woke me.”

“Singing at the top of his lungs that you were calling!” Harper added, much too cheerfully for him to have been anything but extremely amused when it had happened. I already knew that Dietrich probably cussed Nate out in French and then probably tried to curse him to death with first-year level spells, too.

Harper happily played with Squiddy for a bit, but when he was nearly pushed over, he kicked a bit of water onto Dietrich. Who complained. Avidly. Making Harper grin mischievously (“Harper. Je vais te tuer dans ton sommeil. Don’t. You. Dare.”) and lunge at Dietrich, splashing the hell out of him and making his cuss endlessly. I watched them be idiots with a smile on my face, accepting when Squiddy poked at my stomach, petting his curious limbs absently. These were the boys I loved seeing.

Not that them being absolutely badarse was unwelcome, but…

“I had a vision in my sleep,” I said gently, instantly gathering the boys’ attention. They both went still, faces snapping to mine. “It was both of you. You both go to war for me.”

Heh.

Slytherins, all of us. Silver-tongued in our own ways. And none of us could find any words to say.

Squiddy wrapped a few appendages around my legs and waist. Maybe he thought I was cold? I was crossing my arms tightly, looking at the dark just under the surface of the water, where the Giant Squid was floating. Not at the boys. What would they say…

“That good.” Dietrich said, vehement.

Damn. I knew it.

“Is it really?” I asked tersely, “You two… You know you can back out? It’s different, knowing you’re going to actually clash the the madman who was practically Grindelwald’s successor-”

“Oh, shut up, Lyssie. We said we’d help and that’s that,” said Harper. When I looked up at him, he was scowling, looking extremely put out.
“But–"

“Lys."

“You’re both only thirteen. You can’t decide to go to war for the sake of some friend you’ve only known for three years when you’re thirteen!”

“And why not?” Harper asked, offended.

“Because no friend’s worth that! Both your Houses will be involved, the Ministry under Voldemort is going to hunt you down, you might be tortured, I just had a bloody vision about—about raids and safeways and Harper cast the Cruciatus and forgive me if I really don’t want to drag my best friends into issues they could so easily be free of!”

Harper blinked. “I cast the Cruciatus??”

“Yes, and that’s fucked up, alright? You of all people shouldn’t be casting the Cruciatus!” I nearly-shouted, brimming with frustration. And maybe a bit of hysteria.

“What’d I do that for?”

“Apparently whoever you cast it on tortured Josie? Oh, lovely, another person I’ve probably dragged into the fight unnecessarily — and I bloody like Josie, and I have no doubt that the only reason she won’t be happily neutral is because I encouraged her to break off her marriage—”

Dietrich held up a hand. “You’re panicking, Lys.”

I took a deep breath, and it really didn’t help much. “I am panicking.”

“Is me casting the Cruciatus that bad?” Harper asked tentatively, “I’m sure whoever I cast it on deserved it. Will deserve it. This is rather confusing, isn’t it?”

“It’s an Unforgivable.” I said hollowly.

“And you would cast one in an instant if it meant protecting us or your family,” said Dietrich breezily, looking very unruffled, which was irritating, if only because I was so utterly ruffled. “Lys. This is called a double-standard. You are also thirteen. You are also going to war. If either of us were so unnerved that one day, in the future, you would exact revenge on someone who tortured your friend through the Cruciatus, you would complain.”

I sighed. Yeah, okay. I was just… not trusting these two again. But seriously, we were thirteen, I think I was allowed some reservations and panic at the idea that a group of thirteen-year-olds, fully cognizant of a war coming our way headed by fucking Voldemort, were all so calm about it. But yeah, they both said they’d stand by me and against a Dark Lord and his racist, xenophobic, violent ideals. I’m not sure either of them knew what standing against that meant, but… I mean, if both of them heard that one of our friends might be tortured and Harper was going to casually sling Unforgivables around — Harper of all fucking people — and they were still adamant about all this. Well. I could only trust.

And I did.

“Sorry. You two know it’s hard for me to accept.”

“You’re too used to being alone, Lys,” Dietrich admonished, though all the abrasiveness that had been in his voice was gone.
Harper smiled, a little more gently than usual. He waded in the water until he was next to me, carefully dislodging my crossed arms — and Squiddy’s wrapped ones, but to his dismay — and holding my hand tightly. “It’s not that it doesn’t frighten me, Lyssie,” he said, still oddly gentle, “And it’s not like I really want to go around, erm, tossing Cruciatues at people. And… Yeah, it’s scary to think that our classmates might be fighting with or against us. That Lu and Nate and Jay… It’s right terrifying, this taking sides business. The House of Harper was neutral last war, y’know. But… I’ve never really liked that. It’s like we were… perfectly fine with Halfbloods and Muggleborns being killed and with the pureblood supremacists lording over everything, ruining everything.”

He took a breath. Dietrich and I stood in the water quietly, listening — Harper’d never spoken this much, this seriously, before. His faint teal cloud was still and staid around his skin, rippling in its usual breezy pattern. He was petting one of the Giant Squid’s tentacles absent-mindedly even so, and holding my hand, that was the only reason I wasn’t crying Polyjuice.

“Mum’s a Halfblood, you know,” Harper said quietly. “I know we’re all only thirteen, but I don’t want to live in a world where people like my Mum or you are considered slaves to people like my Dad or You-Know-Who. It’s not right. I remember what it was like to just… follow a bully and know that he thought I was an idiot that wasn’t worth anything. I hated living like that, Lyssie. I thought I was worthless, too. And if You-Know-Who gets his way, that’ll be… that’ll be normal. I’m not the smartest, but I know enough about the Blood War and the politics You-Know-Who wanted to know that- that everything you and all of us have built together, all the cooperations and my ability to do everything I want to do without getting distracted or discouraged, it’d be all gone. Or claimed by a proper pureblood. That’s not a world I want to live in. I’m not going to let it just happen. I can’t say that, erm, that even without you and Dietrich I would’ve always fought against You-Know-Who in another Blood War, ‘cos I’m not sure I’d be able to alone, but… I like to think I would.”

Harper’s eyes were glinting with challenge by the end of his speech. I was stunned, staring at him. The image of his older self, taller and more slender-faced, blending with the teenager standing knee-deep in the lake. The image of that older Harper, sharp-eyed and the Cruciator on his tongue, seemed more in line with this newly-revealed steel spine.

He… He really thought about this much more than I’d thought, didn’t he?

God. Harper always lived to surprise me.

Dietrich huffed out an amused breath. “C’était bien dit.”

“Thanks, Dietrich!”

I snorted at Harper’s chipper voice, a sudden turnabout from the solemnity I’d just witnessed. Fuck, how could I baby Harper or try to turn him away from this after that? And really, I’d already told myself I had to count on these two. It was just…

It was difficult. Knowing what they’d have to do to live through a war I asked them to fight with me. But I needed them and they were willing. They knew what was at stake. And I needed my friends with me through this. I didn’t know how the hell I would go on without them, really.

Never in a million years, I thought to myself, would I ever deserve these two.

A not-too old memory of Sirius popped up in my head. The man himself was talking to someone else, Remus I think, but I remembered his voice whispering in our heads: (But we try to be worthy- )
-every day that we live, I finished with a sigh.

I breathed in deeply, closed my eyes, evened my breaths. The metaphysical scape where I could see my own colors bloomed into existence in the unnatural darkness beneath my eyelids, showing a large and growing core, half-matured. I sank into Occlumency exercises and let my mind open to the part of my magic that was twisted into the magic of the earth, the magic of time and existence itself. My Clairvoyant magic was a path into those threads, and I didn’t call for a vision, but I made it obvious that I was open to whatever my magic deigned to find for me.

Nothing.

Well. Nothing beyond normal visions, but I opened my eyes and flicked my Clairvoyant-specialized Occlumency shields up without another thought. So it’d be alright to tell my boys, then. What I’d told Sirius, and maybe more; they didn’t have his idea of what the Blood War was, after all. They’d want to know more.

And I’d tell them.

If they were going into war by my side, for my sake… Then I’d tell them whatever I could so that they’d survive.

“The Sorting Hat told me that I was the seventh Clairvoyant it ever met, you know.” I squeezed Harper’s hand back, smiling at his curious expression. “The first was Helvinya Prevett. And the Hat and I, we’re almost completely sure that she… Well, that I’m somehow cleaning up a mess she made. Given that I was born during a Blood War and it looks like I’ll be fighting another… or maybe the same one? Well, I’ll be fighting a Blood War in a year or two, so I think it’s safe to say I’m going to be at the heart of this fight somehow.”

Harper blinked at me. “I’m sure being a seventh Clairvoyant is important and all,” he said blankly, “but you’re not going to be at the heart of the war. We are, Lyssie.” And then he threw me a big, shit-eating grin.

I chuckled, and Dietrich stepped up closer to us. Nearer to my right flank. He always seemed to be more comfortable on that side of me. And truth me told, I always relaxed a little whenever he was there. Especially when his expression was like that — blank to anyone who didn’t know him, didn’t see the slight curve in his lips and the steel-grey blues dancing on his skin like circling clouds, but an expression of utmost confidence to me.

“He’s not dead, you know.” I said. I told my father these words once.

“Who?”

I looked Dietrich in the eye. “Voldemort.”

My Second’s lip curled. “Ah. Your Dark Lord, named in my own language.”

Harper shook a little when I’d said the name. He looked at me with wide, unblinking eyes. Squiddy’s slipped off into the water a long time ago, but Harper hadn’t even noticed. “How… How is he… But… Didn’t Potter…?”

I shook my head. “Nothing evil dies for long. There’s this… this nasty ritual that’ll be enacted. He’ll be resurrected by the end of the school year. When I said it’s going to be like a continuation of the last Blood War, I meant that — Dumbledore versus Voldemort, Order versus Death Eaters. The only thing different is the players and the date.”
“Players… Ah. This is why you are so supportive of Potter. Besides his friendship with your older brother,” Dietrich deduced accurately.

“Yeah. Harry’s one of those new players. And so are we. And… I’d like the other three to be, too.”

Harper actually made a quiet, pained noise at that. Dietrich stuck his hands in his pockets, looking pensive. Good. They understood the scale of the war; now they had to understand how Lu and Nate and Jay fit into it. And going by their tense faces, the heartbreak on Harper’s and the pensiveness on Dietrich’s, they did.

“We don’t have a lot of time,” muttered Dietrich. “Not today, and certainly not in a year.”

Harper nodded earnestly. “Even I know we can’t just walk up to any of them and ask them to please fight against their families and Houses wily-nily. Though… it might work with Lu.”

“He’d give an immediate yes without thinking,” I chuckled without finding much humor in it, “just like when we were first years. And only later, he’d realize that it means. But that’s not a pretty trick. And… I don’t want to trick them into this. Not them.”

Harper looked like he didn’t quite want to let go of my hand, but he was getting fidgety and he had to start fiddling with his sleeves or his wand or he’d go insane. “We only have until the end of the year, Lyssie?”

“Voldemort’s reviving at the end of the year, yeah.”

“Ministry security will be rather concentrated on the Triwizard,” Dietrich observed.

“No, he’s definitely doing it because of the Triwizard. Cocky prick. Not sure why. Rituals, maybe? I’d love to design a ritual around something like the Triwizard… But yeah, erm… Yeah… On that. Erm… Stay away from Professor Moody, both of you.”

Both of them grew ten times more wary. And in Dietrich’s case, suspicious. “Lys. Why?”

“He’s not an immediate danger, but he’s going to be involved in… that ritual stuff. Not quite willingly. He’ll live to fight in the actual war, though, so I don’t really care. What a bloody wanker, anyways.”

Harper nodded fervently in agreement.

Dietrich scowled. “He is not helping with the others. Driving them away like that.”

“We’ll deal with him,” I snarled, hackles rising just at the thought of another DADA class: sitting in formation, protecting the DE named kids, heads bowed, wands sparking, select Gryffindors smiling smugly, Slytherin eyes glinting with anger. My anger evaporated at the real task at hand, though. “So now you both know what we’ll be facing. More than you did before, at least. And I’ll be able to tell you more… and so will Sirius. Veteran of the first Blood War, you know, even if he still has a bit to go before he’s back in a condition to fight.”

“We will be ready, Lys. The more information you give us, the more ready we will be.”

“I’m with you both all the way, Lyssie. But we should be getting back by now, the others might worry and… yeah.”

I nodded. “Yeah. You’re right, Harper. We should go. Though… it seems like all we every do is plan to be ready, don’t you think, Dietrich? I’ve never actually felt ready. We always plan to plan,
but we’re always left with more to do.”

Dietrich shrugged. “One step, then the next, Lys. That is all we can do. I do not think we will feel ready even when we cross wands with the Dark Lord.”

“Voldemort.”

“Yes, the Dark Lord.”

“You can call him by his name.”

“It offends me. It is in my language.”

“Tch. You’re not even French.”

“For God’s sake.”

We three of us were already wading back to shore. Dietrich put his hand on my shoulder, and I grabbed Harper’s back. Even if we hadn’t quite gotten anything done in our hour or so of uninterrupted, un-eavesdropped speech, I was glad we’d had it. I felt oddly accomplished. If only I felt more accomplished than anxious for the future, I’d call it a perfect afternoon.

At least their colors laced together with mine, perfectly content. Steel-blue and byzantium, shining teal and green-blue waters, and a deep indigo that blackened into crimson. I twitched my fingers and let my Mage Sight fade away, ending on that sight.

…

I didn’t get a chance to speak to Dietrich and Harper about what to do with the other three, I thought, feeling a right bit sorry for myself. “But it’s not like I can just… explain the war to them. Lay out my Clairvoyance, tell them Voldemort’s coming back, and then expect them to stay with me. Their families… I mean, it’s not like any of them absolutely hate their homes. Nate’s even a little proud of his heirship, you know — he wears a chain with his Heir Ring on it, every day. I know. I asked him about it, he never takes it off.”

Vána’s ear switched, but he didn’t move from laying his head on his crossed… paws. Claws. Hands? Fucking hell, werewolf anatomy was weird. He was a big lump, resting in the rippling grass on the edge of one of my rivers. I would’ve been in the meadow, but I wasn’t allowed there anymore — it was Sirius’ centerspace, and to go there was to know all of his secrets and inner-most thoughts and what have you. Stuff we’d stopped sharing, even if it was a hard habit to break and a lot of blood and money to have paid for that ability.

(I didn’t have a center yet. My Occlumency wasn’t quite up to snuff, but I was getting there. Speeding along thanks to Sirius and the cambion wanting me to develop one to balance out the mindscape properly. That was the trouble with making an unequal mind link between unequal Occlumenses. Everything was goddamn lopsided.)

(And the werewolf didn’t help, either.)

“And Lu… You know, he wants to play Quidditch. Professionally, that is. Practices every night,” I went on, knowing Vána didn’t understand this shit — as a manifestation of lycanthropy, Vána was
all instincts, no processing whatsoever — but feeling better as I spoke to him. “Or every other night. He used to sneak out. We’d always go after him, bring him snacks and water and stuff. Harper goes up with him sometimes. But… I know that he wants to be this famous Quidditch player because he wants his parents to pay attention to him. He hates that they only care about Edward. He resents them, but you can still love someone and resent them. I fucking hate ‘em, though, how could they treat anyone like that, especially Lu? Seriously.”

Vána huffed. I stared at him. Really not wolf-proportionated at all, werewolves. Except for their heads. But otherwise, their bodies were too flat, limbs too long. Vána’s back legs were settled at his sides, displaying a very casual flexibility, his stumpy, threadbare tail not even touching the ground as he lay there. And his paws were more bear-like than anything, just longer-fingered and topped with wickedly huge claws. And yeah, his eyes glowed. Bright enough that the iris wasn’t really visible, just the shape of the eye all luminescent gold.

And Jay, I thought to him, Jay’s never wanted to fight. He’s always wanted to just… draw and read and practice magic. I laughed a little. “His best class is DADA, but that’s just because he’s trained for that. For his heirship. His best natural class is bloody Herbology. He likes taking care of things, he likes making things. He’s not going to want to fight. If he weren’t so god-awful at Healing, he might be a Healer or something. Though even that might not stop him.”

( *Take it from me, Lyssie, you can be god-awful at something and still doggedly go after it.* )

In a blink, Sirius was suddenly standing at my shoulder, hands in his pajama pockets and hair tied back with a pink scrunchie. His robes were white and blue striped, patterned with little yellow ducks. I grinned at him.

“Finally done getting ready for bed? You take as long as a girl.”

“Had to brush my pearly-whites, didn’t I?” He sat down next to me, letting his sweatpants get soaked in the river, burying his bare toes in the sand.

I folded my legs under me, turning from Vána, who had looked up when Sirius entered the mindscape — though part of him had constantly been here, too, half listening to me and half getting ready for sleep (which was a process, because he had to all but barricade his room against whatever the hell still lived in the house) — but had done nothing else, the werewolf losing interest once there was no threat to it presented. Sirius yawned, and the edges of the forest went a little dark. Fireflies blinked into existence as more shadows appeared, and I felt a whisper of wind when a liquid, color-bleeding school of fish brushed by. They were following the rivers, swimming on the breeze, clustering around trees full of web-like fungus and picking away at it until only healthy brown bark and dark leaves remained.

All was well in the mindscape, then.

*Was that a joke? Doggedly.*

Sirius beamed.

I looked at him flatly, though we both felt my minute amusement. “You’re not a dog Animagus anymore.”

He pouted, sending a halfhearted glare at Vána. ( *Blame fuzzball over there.* )

“When wouldn’t I? It is the lycanthropy’s fault you’re not an Animagus anymore. Speaking of which, you ever gonna teach me?”
Sirius grinned deviously. “Of course I will, Lyssie o’ mine.”

Gross.

( Yeah, I regret that. But! That’s not what’s important right now. )

Fireflies buzzed near my skin. I remembered running my fingers through Jay’s reddish-brown hair, braiding his bangs out of his face. Nate’s glasses slipping down for the umpteenth time, his annoyance with it. Lu buttering toast carefully, face all concentration, then handing it off to me with a smug grin at my grabby hands.

I looked up at Sirius, found his usually jovial face set sadly.

“How do I make them stay?”

I felt his wince. ( Oh, Lyssie. You really think they don’t love you enough to stay? )

My fists were tightening on tufts of grass. Pins and needles were starting up in my legs. “I love my family. How could I ask them to leave theirs for someone they’ve only known for two, three years? Not even three. Not even two, in Nate’s case.”

( But you think their families don’t treat them well. )

I don’t think their families treat them the way yours did you, though…

Sirius flinched again, and so did I, once I realized what I just thought there.

“Sorry. I didn’t mean to bring that up…”

He waved me off. “Lyssie, I was sorta expecting this. I did volunteer to talk to you about it, seeing as I probably know what they are or will go through and all. Pureblood-raised kids are… different, y’know. Dark purebloods especially.”

I nodded. Just tell me if the memories get too much. You don’t… You don’t automatically stabilize with mine anymore. I glanced at the sky, looking for more red than usual. Nothing but the normal, gentle brushes of it in the dark, behind the stars. No comets. “Even if you’re still much better than you were when we first met, I know you have nightmares. Why else were you up so early this morning, cleaning your house when you hate doing it?”

Sirius smiled sheepishly. “I thought you were too distracted to notice that.”

I didn’t. I suspected, and you just confirmed.

( Bah. Ever the Slytherin, even when you’re worried out of your head about those friends of yours. ) Sirius looked away, folding his arms. ( Aw, hell… ) “Lyssie, you’re never going to know.”

My heart jolted, threatening to plummet.

Sirius’ eyes softened, more cloudy-grey than their normal quicksilver. “Lys, unless you tell them about the upcoming war, make them understand, and then ask, you’re never going to know. All you can do is hope.”

“But…”

“They’re not like me. James and Remus and… Peter, before, they saved my life. You know, I
didn’t really care about Muggles when I was fifteen. I’d barely left my own damn house, locked up by dear old Mum. I was curious, but I wasn’t going to go to bloody war for them.” Memories of the Marauders played out in our heads, flashes of James Potter’s impish grin, Remus looking decades younger and shyer, Peter before he’d become a traitor. “But even as a kid, I knew the life I was living was shit, Lys. I knew there was a better kind of living, one that didn’t involve as many Crucio’s as mine did. James and Remus, the Marauders, they made me feel alive. And that’s what I went to war for.”

Sirius stared at me, as if he was trying to impress the knowledge into my brain himself.

( Make yourself and your way the only life they wanna live, ) he thought, words carefully chosen but decisive, ( and they’ll gladly fight the world to keep it. They’ll fight with you. But you can’t exactly force something like that, Lyssie — you might be able to trick them, but… no. Real loyalty is something that comes naturally. )

“I want them to choose not to put on those bloody masks.” I muttered. When I saw Nate in the robes, god, I thought I was going to throw up.

Mist crept in from the sides. I whipped my head around to see Sirius’ face pale, eyes even more cloudy. The shadows in the forest grew longer, and I kept seeing a younger, sallower Sirius wearing dark robes and holding a-

No. That was Regulus, wasn’t it?

I clutched Sirius hand tightly.

“Reggie… Reggie, why…?”

“Sirius!” I demanded, SNAP OUT OF IT!

The fog was banished, and Sirius shuddered. The oddly bright light of the moon and stars was shaded in red, and comets streamed across the dark, painting all the universe’s colors crimson. I let memories flow out of my head in trickles and feelings, letting Sirius stabilize with them. Once the red passed, he had his own color back and was breathing easier. He squeezed my hand back.

“Sorry. I just-”

“It’s not your fault. Dementors, y’know?”

“Yeah,” he sighed. “Yeah.”

What if they turn on me?

He squeezed my hand again. ( Then you have to choose between your brothers and sister, and Harper and Dietrich, and Hermione and Luna and all your allies… and a traitor. ) The image of a rat burned through our thoughts, and both of us hissed in anger. ( It’s a hard thing to accept. But the death of a brother is harder. )

James Potter stood in a clearing in the Forbidden Forest, throwing clumps of dirt and grass at an indignant and messy Remus. He turned, and then the image was gone. Replaced by a ruined home, still smoking, the sounds of a baby wailing, and a corpse in the entry hallway.

Sirius swallowed. “Don’t be like me, Lyssie. Don’t miss the signs.”
“Watch them, you mean?”

“Hope that they’ll choose you. Try to make them, if you can.” That quicksilver in Sirius’ eyes returned. Sharp and cool, bright like metal, dancing like liquid. (But be ready if they don’t. And cast a fast Protego.)

I’d never seen such a grave, sardonic look on his face. Like he was in pain but he welcomed it.

Thought he deserved it.

It’s not your fault James is dead, Sirius, I thought before thinking.

Sirius smiled emptily. “Maybe. But take it from me, Lyssie. The only thing worse than a traitor is a traitor you don’t expect.”

“Not very optimistic.” I said, an attempt at humor that fell flat the moment it left my mouth.

“Wartime needs must, Lyssie,” replied Sirius, just a touch more gentle than it would’ve been; he felt apologetic. “Sorry. I know you want a neat solution, Lyssie, but the only thing you can do is everything you’ve been doing. You’re making places for them. You can only push them into those spots so far, Lyssie.”

He leaned over and planted a kiss on my temple, light enough that I barely felt my hair move.

(It'll be okay, Lys. Just keep doing what you’re doing.)

I smiled at the very fatherly action. Reminded me of Dad.

“Thanks, Sirius. I’ll… I’ll keep an eye on them. I’ll try to be what they need, what they aren’t getting from their families. I’ve… always tried to do that. Guess now I’ll really make sure of it. And I’ll get Harper and Dietrich on board.”

“Good. You three are all good for each other.”

“S’that what they said about you and the Marauders?”

Sirius grinned. (You’d be surprised at the shite they’d say about us, Lyssie. It’d make you blush, the way McGonagall swore at us when she thought we couldn’t hear her.)

Animagus-hearing?

“You bet.”

“Well now you have to teach me.”

“Maybe for your next birthday.”
I smiled innocently. As did Nate.

It was more or less law that you never trusted expressions so pleasantly-crafted from a Slytherin. You especially never trusted a pleasant expression from Nate. Me and my boys always got alarmed if he wasn’t smirking or being smug and insulting somehow. Nate was honestly a really handsome gent, if you were into the more androgynous, elegant types; when he ruined his natural prettiness with sly sneers or arrogant grins or his incredibly annoying tendency to poke at weak spots casually in conversation, me and the others considered it normal and peaceful. But Nate when he was weaponizing his face meant he was very actively trying to manipulate someone somehow, and so if he looked normal, or even pleasant, someone was being targeted.

In this case, it was the Fat Lady. The portrait, yeah.

“I haven’t engaged in a lot of opera, but I do think you’re talented. And, I mean no offense, but if you’re a magical portrait, does that mean in life you were an even more skilled songstress?” Nate asked, a genuine and curious expression on his face.

God, it was so fake, and I only knew that because I knew him.

But.

It was working. The Fat Lady was… blushing.

“Why, young man, I was famous! Not to toot my own horn, but I was perfectly capable of bursting several wine glasses with my voice, no magical enhancement necessary! A favorite trick for the audience, of course, since so few people do engage in the fine arts involved in opera, like yourself, dear, but-”

I couldn’t believe no one had passed through to bear witness to this with me yet. Though… to be fair, Saturday afternoons on the seventh floor were likely peaceful. The Fat Lady’s portrait hung in a large hallway just brimming with mismatched but numerous paintings; it was one of many decorative corridors, one side all lined with latticed, gothic windows streaming afternoon sunlight into the hall, the other covered in artwork. The corridor was just off of the moving staircases, matching the chaotic aesthetic that was peppered throughout Hogwarts.
It was sort of nice, being in corridors with windows. I was always surprised by how used to the dungeons I became, only realizing whenever I managed a stroll topside. Going to and from class didn’t really count, since I was usually firing off orders for *potesta* business or explaining a concept last-minute to Lu or Harper or, very rarely, the other three. And since the secession, most of Slytherin was staying in the dungeons during free hours, trying to test the waters of the new political scene.

Honestly, unless you’re really embroiled in Slytherin politics, a week isn’t enough to really see the effects of our House being split. From the outside, I’d wager that no one really saw a difference besides some of the nastier, older Slytherins being more aggressive than usual. Inside Slytherin, everyone was scrambling to establish themselves.

“-did you need to see again, dears?” the Fat Lady was asking.

“Just my brothers, ma’am,” I threw in with a smile.

The Fat Lady watched the left side of my face very carefully, pity all over her face. An irrational annoyance rose up when I realized that, but I smothered it down; being looked down on was irritating, yeah, but pity could be used and it was understandable. The Fat Lady was always exasperated when I came to Gryffindor Tower, but she was awfully bored sometimes, so I honestly think she appreciated the change of pace I brought, always having to persuade her and argue with her and cajole her into letting me in. With the fact that I really *was* close to my siblings, had been let into the Tower plenty of times before by authority figures, and my oddly positive relationship with the woman… well. I wasn’t surprised when the Fat Lady heaved a sigh (sounded like, “Well, the girl’s practically a Gryffindor, fighting off a professor and a werewolf. And those scars, the poor dear’s feminine charms are ruined… it’s the least I can do…”), said this was the last time she’d do me a favor — something she always said — sent a wink our way, and then swung open to let us into the lions’ den.

Nate sketched a little bow. “Thank you, Fat Lady. I won’t be causing any trouble, I just wanted to see Gryffindor once. Lucky for me, Lyssie’s always thought herself half-lion.”

“Just this once, Mr. Wilkes! And you, Guinevere, you better have the password next time!” the Fat Lady called.

I snorted. “You know you like arguing with me, Fat Lady! Sure you don’t want to guard Slytherin instead? Better conversation, I reckon!”

“Oh! Don’t tempt me!”

She shut the portal after we passed her, leaving Nate and I in the Gryffindor common room. Though Nate was a hard read even for me, I enjoyed witnessing his interest. The floor-to-ceiling windows were bright, crimson drapes heavy enough that they didn’t float around with how tall the ceilings were, which were hanging with simply-styled chandeliers — much less intricate than Slytherin’s lantern-like sconces and silvery lights. Much cushier in here, too; Gryffindor Tower never failed to remind me of home, mismatched armchairs surrounding ottomans, piled with striped pillows and knitted throws, the curved wall of bookshelves and fluffy rugs and cushions, the blazing fireplaces and squashy couches. Not as flat and open as the Slytherin dungeons, everything organized neatly — the Tower was more organic, more like my abandoned classroom, only with more furniture and students milling about.

I waved a hand. “Welcome to Gryffindor Tower, Nate.”

The students around, some in Hogwarts robes, some in casual clothing, all looked up at our
entrance. Older students looked a bit peeved, but no one got up to make us leave. I was recognized. Nate garnered more suspicious looks, and a lot of the younger students saw our ties and immediately clustered into groups and started whispering, but whatever.

“Oi, Vane, any of my brothers about?” I called to a second-year.

The girl jumped at being called out suddenly, seated with some other girls in her year and some in mine — including the Cottingham cousins — but she nodded quickly, her frizzy hair bouncing around her pretty face. I think I remembered her name, at least, from canon.

“I think the twins are in their dorm room,” she said hesitantly. “I heard there were explosions and things, though. Lee Jordan warned everyone not to bother them.”

Right. The demon twins were working on inventing the shit out of things this summer especially.

“Just like the summer, then. Thanks, Vane.”

I grabbed Nate’s sleeve — he gave my hand a look of utter disgust, since he absolutely hated when any of us crumpled his clothes up — and started dragging him up to the boys’ staircase to the dormitories, searching for rooms with suspicion lights or smells or weird noises. A very fine indication of where the demon twins were — I didn’t exactly visit their actual rooms too often, contenting myself with invading the Gryffindor common room.

Sure enough, a bit of purple smoke that was oddly like a magical core color was puffing out of the gap underneath a door and Nate and I headed in after not getting an answer to our inquiring knocking.

“Lo, I dearly hope you haven’t managed to murder Ron for ingredients yet,” I called as I waltzed in.

“Too late,” Fred replied without even looking up from the weird potions set shoved precariously on his trunk.

“He put up a decent fight,” chimed in George, who did look up from the other potions set, spread out on the rugs like it was the centerpiece of the entire room. “Oho! Did you get lost on the way to your common room, baby snakes?”

“You mean this isn’t the Slytherin dungeons? I told you you should’ve stopped to ask for directions, Nate.”

“You’re my leader, Lyssie, you shouldn’t blame your shortcomings on your poor subordinates. This is why Slytherin’s a mess,” Nate drawled, pushing up his glasses and settling on the edge of a neatly-made bed. Lee Jordan’s, probably, as he was their only roommate and my brothers were messy little bastards.

The demon twins appraised Nate, hearing the sharpness of the insult as it was given, but seeing as I threw myself onto Fred’s bed, bouncing on the mattress and making an open and very obviously annotated textbook fall to the floor, they went back to… whatever they were doing. Remarkable multi-taskers, all of us Weasleys. It was nice to see proof that my brothers would’ve thrown down if they thought I was actually hurt by Nate’s words, though.

“What do you want, anyways, Lyssie?” Fred asked.

Nate, actually, looked quite interested in the answer. See, Nate didn’t actually know why I decided to wander up to the lion den. He just decided to follow me, curious and wanting to know where the
Gryffs went to sleep. For his own nefarious purposes, I’m sure. Which was why he’d had to act so charming with the Fat Lady, who’d been very suspicious of the snake I’d brought with me whom she’d never met before.

…Actually, had I ever brought another Slytherin up here? I didn’t think so.

Huh. Harper and Lu, once they heard about this, would be jealous.

“Story time, dear brothers,” I said cheerfully. “I’m not the best duelist or anything, but I’m almost completely certain that having lived with you two always setting weird traps and pranks around the Burrow as kids is what makes me rather aware of my surroundings when I know something’s about. And, really, just generally getting occasionally embarrassed is good for the character.”

“You’re welcome, Lyssie,” George said magnanimously.

Fred laughed. “Well, that solves it. Never been thanked for pranking someone before-”

“Not that we got you nearly as much as we could’ve, thanks to Mum and Percy having strong opinions about your delicate constitution and all that.”

“But there’s a first for everything!”

Ah, the twin-speech. Even now, I still got a little sad that Ginny and I never mastered it. Or even came close to mastering it. The woes of fraternal twinhood, I suppose.

The demon twins seemed to realize (probably due to how comfortable Nate and I made ourselves) that we weren’t leaving them until we got what we wanted, and they didn’t quite know what that was, so they both put a pause to their potions experiments. The wafting purple smoke started to clear once Fred cracked open the window. George swiveled in his place on the floor carefully, turning to me.

“Transitioning from story time,” I said. “Hypothetically, let’s say I’ve got a load of first-years and second-years who need to know common pranks and ways to avoid and/or return them. Wouldn’t it be rather nice if they could get the actual prank masters of Hogwarts to teach them that sort of information?”

“Oh, we’re prank masters are we?” George asked, preening.

“Hypothetically, I suppose.”

“Hypothetically, she says. Looks like we have to prove our baby sister wrong, George.”

“Easily arranged.”

“Oh? Even if you two are busy with delicate experiments?” Nate asked, voice deceptively light. Fishing for information, of course.

Fred and George grinned. “Can’t spend all our time cooped up in our room, now, can we?” said Fred.

“Hypothetically, would said prank masters be willing to tutor a few baby snakes on how to protect themselves from pranks and how to get even if/when they got hit?” I asked, calling for a return to the subject at hand.

My brothers glanced at each other again.
Fred heaved a dramatic sigh. “Not our usual modus operandi, dear Lyssie…”

George looked a little more suspicious. “S’not like you can’t teach them yourself…”

They both trailed off at the absolute shit-eating grin on my face. I only had to say three words. “Slytherin’s. Common room.”

Fred and George’s identical brown eyes widened into dinner plates. I saw Nate choke as he leaned against a bed post. The way the demon twins scrambled to sit across from me told me all I needed to know about how this deal would go. I laughed as I started very soft-approach negotiations; after all, deals with ally-entities were a little different when they were your big brothers who, as annoying as they liked to be sometimes, would really move mountains for you if you asked them and needed it enough.

It was good to have family at Hogwarts. I’d miss these two just as much as I missed Percy now, next year when they left.

... 

“Was that a good idea?”

I glanced over at Nate. It was Friday, a free period for us and Jay since we didn’t take Divination with the rest of our Slytherin yeargroup, and I’d just seen Mercer, Baddock, and Chambers — the leaders of my second-years, firsties, and Poached in that order — after first lunch period ended and second was about to begin. I’d told them that I expected anyone who followed me to be down in Mercer’s area tonight before dinner, since my Gryffindor brothers were going to hold a mass tutoring session on common pranks and how to pull and avoid them. And after dinner, Dietrich and I would be happy to teach anyone who wanted it more on how to avoid pranks and harassment, since we’d gotten a lot of practice as firsties.

It would be the first session of many, all in the hopes that my parvus would be more secure. A week following the secession, the magnus was starting to solidify. I’d had to hiss at a few of the more aggressive bastards to stay away from some students under my protection already. No duels yet, and only little annoyances unfolding in how paranoid the Poached could get sometimes, but I was ready for it to escalate and I wanted my kids to be, too.

“I’ve really grown to like Mercer’s space, and she’s rather understanding about it. Unless we want to open our wing up, it’s the best space for us to handle everyone,” I answered. I didn’t have to say, The Slytherin common room isn’t safe for parvus business, after all. Nate and Jay both heard it.

Jay, leaning against the sofa we’d smuggled into our abandoned classroom (Dietrich and I had made Tilly and Effas nearly cry with how grateful and complimentary we were when they enthusiastically levitated our new-old furniture in), was sketching in a nice, Muggle book of 9x12 drawing paper. It was almost cheating, the fact that Jay was so easy to birthday-shop for — art supplies weren’t even that expensive, either. He was quite enjoying the calligraphy pens and ink I’d picked up, too, though the high quality reference books and supplies case and all that, scattered around him, were from the rest of the boys. We’d had a little party, three days back, for Jay and I (we were exactly a month late for Jay and we never were able to throw parties for me, both of us being August babies — I was actually older than him!), which was also when we got the new, faded-red couch and assortment of chairs and the cabinet and the wooden dividers for the room.
What can I say? Seeing Mercer’s really awesome domain gave me some interior design inspiration and envy. The classroom looked more like a living space than it did before, now, thank Merlin. We’d even repurposed some desks and stuck them together for studying, instead of making due with the floor. Nate was sitting there, behind the sofa, going over his blackmail material — hundreds of moving photos were spread across the tables.

“We could always repurpose other classrooms,” pointed out Jay mildly.

I looked over his shoulder and saw his ink studies of hands, him working on one that was holding a wand with root-like veins carved into the geometric shape — beautifully-drawn as always. “That might be the best thing for us to do, honestly,” I mused.

“Or we could take over the Slytherin common room,” Nate called.

“And abandon the wings of the the dungeons that we’ve already claimed?”

“Mercer only staked her claim on the east wing to copy our stake on our piece of the north,” Jay said, “Though there really is enough empty space that Professor Snape hasn’t claimed that we can open to the first-years, since the west and the south wings are rather far and filled with other things.”

“Like the broom closet in the south,” Nate said gleefully.

The broom closet was… a rather popular space for couples, that broom closet. Nearly empty and very out of the way, but still in the realms of the classrooms and student-use laboratories and storerooms. Nate didn’t often prowl around the place, since he rather disliked the inelegance of voyeurism, and he certainly had more class than to take photos around the place, but he kept tabs on the goings on. It was useful, to know about secret meetings and possible relationships.

“Yeah, not exactly a place I’d want firsties to be clotting up. Would really render the place ineffective, too,” I muttered. “But I do prefer this classroom for relaxing and for private business, with the Slytherin common room for parvus-magnus relations and House meetings and such. If I weren’t worried about the Poached, it’d be nice for tutoring, too.”

“The library will do for now,” said Jay.

I nodded. Jay was rather against driving the magnus all the way out of the Slytherin common rooms; he preferred our quieter spaces, even if Nate and Lu were of the opinion that it made us look like we were hiding. I thought it was safer anyways, though I did want to be able to let our firsties grow comfortable in their own common room eventually. Slytherin was still home, after all — I just had to prove to the magnus that they really shouldn’t touch us. Malfoy’d be careful and he’d honor the secession as the reigning king and as the losing duelist, but I didn’t count on Bole or Pucey or Derrick or Bates or their ilk to not harass my eleven-year-olds.

“And,” Jay went on, “I think it’s a lovely idea, that we’re going to help the first-years and second-years avoid pranks and harassment. Letting your brothers into the Slytherin common room is a small price to pay, to make sure our parvus is safe.”

I beamed at Jay’s explicit approval. I’d been irritating him lately, so this was a nice change of pace. And Jay was already so stressed about his letters from home — I think his mother was ill, because Jay was constantly worried about her — and from his American betrothed, who I hadn’t met but I didn’t like for the sheer anxiety she gave my friend. Fuck, that was another conversation I had to have with Jay somehow. Not that there was ever a good way to ask, ‘Hello, my friend, do you not like girls perhaps?’ I probably should wait until Jay told me, right? Until he figured it out and felt I
“Will it make that much of a difference?” Nate asked. “Teaching our *parvus* a class on how to have common sense? They’d all grow one eventually, *without* your brothers having access to our common room. Snape’s going to be pissed at us. More that he already is.”

I winced at the reminder. Snape had been particularly unimpressed with my secession.

“No. Letting the *parvus* go off and learn through being *bullied* is exactly what Malfoy was asking me to do. It’s not like I’m giving *more* attention to the less able and neglecting the more talented, no matter what he says I’m doing.” I was a bit huffy at how Malfoy was painting me to be so… so *Light*. “We’ll give them all a foundation. Anything after that is case-by-case.”

“Wouldn’t it naturally take away from the more talented if you give any time to the idiots at all?”

“What’s best for me and mine, and what’s fair for everyone else,” I said stubbornly to Nate, who was smugly trying to poke holes in my argument *even after I split Slytherin in its name*. Jerk.

“Extrapolate that a little, and we get this: I treat everyone fairly and honorably until or unless that interferes with how I treat with the more talented and useful and loyal people.”

Turning to look at Nate, I found him with a truly evil-looking smile on his face. “And that’s why I follow you, Lyssie. You put up a lovely show of fairness for the world, but in the end, even if you struggle to do it, you’ll cast your favor on your friends and family.” He laughed, picking up one of the photographs. It was the one that Harper’d taken of Sirius and Harry, back at the Burrow, when they’d seen each other free for the first time. “Well, I don’t mind putting up a facade of fair attentiveness for a while. How are you going to convince these starry-eyed firsties later, though, that they’re going to have to piss off while we take care of the important things?”

I rolled my eyes at Nate’s dramatics. Not that I blamed him, since we Slytherins were a dramatic bunch of kids. “The firsties’ll convince themselves. What sort of self-respecting Slytherin hides behind a blood traitor’s skirts?”

“You’re not a blood traitor anymore, though. Technically.” said Jay.

“Oh, you know no one’s going to consider me a proper pureblood until I’ve got a torture chamber and a Wizengamot seat,” I laughed. Then I scooted sideways, gently pulling Jay’s braid up and, after getting no protest, started undoing it and combing the red-brown strands into waves. “But Nate’s not wrong, you know. I’ll give what I can to everyone, but you and my allies, the leaders, the most loyal… they’re given priority.”

Jay nodded. “I know. But that’s worth something, that you’re willing to give the younger students help. Even if it’s so the older students don’t have to waste their time defending them, it’s… good. To be able to protect yourself is good.”

I paused in the middle of one of the many, tiny French braids I was going to weave together. My eyes drifted to Jay’s left arm, where he preferred to keep his wand holster — a high-quality, but worn craft of leather and embroidered Runes — and I remembered just how skilled of a wizard Jay was. Not just a good duelist, but he was just damn good at spontaneous casting (which was just being able to accurately cast spells a witch or wizard’s never performed before, only heard descriptions of and learned the words and wand movements for). Jay’s magical core was average-sized, maybe a bit larger than most other wizards his age, but he was extremely precise in magic-using. It had impressed the hell out of a first-year me, peeking with Mage Sight.

But Jay also didn’t *like* dueling. Or hurting others. Or in any way setting himself apart or above
others, and proving it through violence of any sort.

“Hey, Jay.”

He tried not to move, seeing as I was braiding something stupidly complicated that I’d practiced on Ginny all summer, but I felt his head move; he was listening.

“This is going to sound odd, but… did it ever really bother you, back in the beginning, that I’m a blood traitor? ‘Cos you and Harper came waltzing up to me and Dietrich without much of a care in the world, didn’t you? And I know Harper’s- well, his mum’s a Halfblood, so he doesn’t much put stock into blood purity business and never has.”

Jay hummed, and I was thankful that he sounded un-offended. “I’m like Harper,” he said softly, “my father’s grandmother was a Muggle. But… erm. I’m not like Harper, too, in a way, Lyssie… My mother and father never accepted that part of our family.” He stopped, gathered his thoughts, then sighed. “I’ve never been like… like them.”

I tapped the finished braid with my wand, muttering a specific spell (“Defixues.”) so that it’d keep in the air, bobbing lightly as I started on another piece of hair. As I worked, I smiled to myself. That was… relieving, to hear.

“So you… don’t mind that I don’t believe in pureblood supremacy?”

“Follow the old traditions, you mean,” called Nate.

“Connotatively the same thing,” I argued back lightly, keeping my attention on Jay.

“I don’t really… Lys, you’re a witch, and you’re a good one, so no, I don’t… I never regretted coming to ask you and Dietrich for help and protection when we were first-years. That’s what mattered,” answered Jay, “And you’re… you’ve brought us, me and Nate and Lu and Harper and Dietrich, you brought us all together, and the parvus too, so… Erm. That’s what matters. And I don’t regret choosing you, blood traitor or not.”

I grinned as I braided. “I’m glad.”

And I was. Knowing that Jay wasn’t a hardcore blood supremacist was very good.

But.

Nate hadn’t spoken a word besides point out the kinder name for blood supremacy. ‘Follower of pureblood traditions’ had a different sound than ‘blood supremacist’. They preferred the more harmless name, I think; made it easier to convince people to put them in charge. I turned to Nate, not managing to be as surreptitious as I wanted, and he looked up at me with his customary smirk faded, an odd solemnity cloaking him.

“You, Nate? Do you regret working alongside a blood traitor?”

Even Jay stopped drawing, listening for the answer. Frozen in wait.

Nate’s smile was his normal one, down to the curve of his lips and the crinkle of his eyes, but I still felt it was wrong somehow.

“But you’re not a blood traitor, are you, Lys?”

After that, Nate went back to murmuring over his information and laughing to himself, sharing
some of the more embarrassing blackmail he seemed to have collected, and I turned back to
braiding Jay’s hair properly, and Jay just continued to draw. Jay and Nate, without the conversation
even becoming stilted, returned to normal as easily as slipping on an old pair of shoes. I followed,
since they seemed to want to close the subject and pushing would do nothing but make them close
up and make me grow frustrated. But as I threaded rosewood hair together, twisting them together
gently into two larger braids, my thoughts ran across my mind rapidly.

So Nate was a blood supremacist, then. And I suppose… I suppose his distaste for blood traitors
and Muggleborns and Halfbloods was easy to put away in the face of political maneuvering, and
then easy to ignore when his friends viewed Muggles and blood traitors lightly and preferred not to
speak of the blood controversy. But he wouldn’t turn his back on his views, not even to lie, not to
me, even in that subtle way of his. I could believe that, and I could feel a smidgen of relief that
Nate saw fit to tell me the truth even when he knew it clashed with my beliefs.

But most of all, I felt worry. Nate had the robes on and the mask in his hand. Nate had the belief in
his head, if not the devotion and fantastic delusion that would lead to committing murder or
genocide for the sake of ideals. But… it was a slippery slope. It was easy to fall into that way of
thinking. It was easy.

My hands were shaking, and the braids grew a little more clumsy. Jay didn’t say a thing, talking to
Nate about maybe easing up on some of the older Ravenclaws he’d been laughing about. But I
knew he noticed. He didn’t understand why my fear was so strong, I don’t think, but he felt the odd
tugging on his scalp and knew I’d been shaken by the near-straightforward admission from Nate
that his politics clashed with mine. Maybe Jay was imagining that I was afraid of the clash we’d
have in the future, after Hogwarts — god knows that every Slytherin expected me to go into the
Ministry and become some sort of politician, playing the real game after the Hogwarts practice run.

He wasn’t to know that I was thinking much more short-term. He wasn’t to know that Dietrich and
Harper and I had camped out here, in the empty classroom, or in the Hogwarts kitchens surrounded
by accommodating House Elves, two nights in the past week just trying… We were just trying to
puzzle out what it would take to turn as many Slytherins to our side, what manipulations we’d have
to cast, and how we could stand to do the same to our closest friends without feeling like villains.

As I ended the one large braid, tying it tightly with a Muggle hair tie (which Jay was astounded at
when I first brought them from home, and much preferred), Jay reached up and stopped my
movements by laying his hand lightly on mine. Quiet comfort, as he kept on chatting with Nate.
Seemed Harper wasn’t the only one who would definitely hold my hand just because he knew it
calmed me down. Luna would be rich if she patented the gesture.

I tapped Jay’s finished braid gently. It said, *I’m okay.*

Jay looked up once the braid hung on his shoulder. “Thanks, Lys,” he said. *It’s alright, Lyssie,* he
didn’t say.

“Yeah. It’s only the third week of school, everything’s in order. Braiding hair like I never left,
huh?” I said, beaming and shifting on the couch, Summoning one of my textbooks and my
homework. No point being stressed and depressed about this, after all. It would take time.

A lot of annoying things took time. Took me waiting for the choice to present itself.

“Oi, Nate, need help with Vector’s homework?” I called laughingly.

Nate made a frustrated, snarling sound. *“Math should not contain letters, Lyssie.”*
I laughed outright now. “Simple quadratics, Nate. Simple quadratics.”

“I despise you.”

“Despise me all you like, your homework’ll never be done. Come join, Jay? Nate’s going to need all the help he can get.”

“Of course, Lyssie. It’s not so hard, Nate…”

I did rather deserve the smugness. After struggling so long with mathematics in my first life, and having to retake so many bloody algebra classes, it was damn deserved that I didn’t lose my knowledge in the subject — or I at least got it back real quick. Working on math homework — math homework with magical applications — was a right more productive right now, after all. Though I did put it off as long as possible by making Jay’s braid so damn complicated.

On a Wednesday afternoon, my parvus had a free period immediately after lunch, and with me and the boys remaining in our sitting spaces, the Great Hall started filling up with magnus students and all of the fourth- through seventh-years of Hogwarts for second lunch period. They came in to a mostly empty Great Hall, only six third-years crowded around the end of the Slytherin table, looking and sniggering over photographs.

“Well,” I said, somewhat stunned, still trembling with laughter, “Fred and George certainly pulled through, didn’t they?”

I don’t know how they did it. It must’ve been a ward, and I had an inkling that they really did get inspired by me. Probably some sort of Skiving Snackbox or otherwise Weaselys’ Wizard Wheezes product that made a ward. But this morning, every single Slytherin that passed through the mirror-door came out with garishly colored hair and skin: neon-pink polkadots on Blaise Zabini’s dark skin, glowing stripes of vomit green in Adrian Pucey’s straw-colored locks, Edward Vaisey — oh, and Lu loved this picture — painted all red and gold. And yes, a few of the parvus and the Poached got hit, but luckily for us, not many; those that got hit were hidden away with their fellows taking notes for them until they could get the prank off (a combination of Finite’s and time and some other stuff Fred and George taught all of us last week).

Anyway, it ended with lots of dumb pictures of embarrassed and panicking Slytherins. Very low-grade blackmail, according to Nate, but all blackmail was useful in its own way. And honestly, with Lu red-faced and nearly crying laughing, and Harper burying his head in his arms to try to stop (because he couldn’t bloody breathe once he saw the offended look on Blaise Zabini’s face — a photo I was sending to Josie later, of course), the laughs were worth it.

When Fred and George tumbled into the Great Hall and saw us there, they both started grinning like mad, knowing exactly what we were laughing at. In fact, I had zebra-stripes of glittering indigo in my hair since they’d put one of their traps right in front of my door; evidently, they both remembered how I described core colors. It wasn’t even too terrible-looking, so I really had zero embarrassment about walking around to class with the colors decorating my hair. Same as some of the magnus and parvus who’d gotten hit with less ridiculous combinations, enough that their humiliation was far less important than keeping up in classes.
“Lyssie!” Lu gasped, “Tell your brothers I love them.”

“Me too, Lyssie!” Harper snickered.

(Same,) Sirius called in our heads, having tagged along for the lighthearted fun since he was killing himself and Remus doing paperwork for ward permits and overdue lease money from Black properties.

Dietrich, stone-faced but still appreciative of enemy humiliation going by the silvery gleam in his slate-grey eyes, nodded. “I commend them. This was more effective than the prank with the uniforms last week. More… permanent.”

Nate was like the cat that got the canary. “Oh, Lyssie. I apologize for doubting you. This was the best idea you’ve ever had. And now they’ll be too bloody busy trying to keep up and stay safe from your brothers that they’ll have less time to harass our parvus or our Poached.”

“Well, technically,” Lu pointed out, ignoring Nate entirely, “almost every single uniform was laced with those color-changing charms. They really had to dig to find spare uniforms… oh, Lys, but my favorite part was when you offered them Enlarged parvus uniforms in exchange for payment — bloody hell, Edward’s face when he asked for my school robes, I think I saw what Albion looked like.”

“I think when Derrick and Bole had to fit on badly-Enlarged firstie robes, I knew what the Mother Goddess looked like,” Harper whispered in awe, grinning at Lu, who laughed back.

“Isn’t that Egyptian mythology?” Nate asked, interested.

“All mythologies are really just religions that no one thinks anyone follows anymore,” Harper replied promptly.

We all paused for a moment at Harper’s profoundness.

(He’s right, you know. A lot of the mythologies Muggles don’t believe in at all are still worshipped by wizards. Native American wizards, for example. Remus knows a lot about them, my studious wolf-sire,) Sirius put in helpfully. I made a mental note to ask Remus about that, since it sounded interesting.

“Did your mum tell you that?” Lu asked flatly.

“Yeah, she made me write that for lines once. I shouldn’t have gotten into the Occamy cages in the basement levels.”

“Occamies are also illegal to transport,” Dietrich pointed out.

“Technically, if Harper’s mother worked with a specially-licensed breeder…” Jay trailed off.

Harper perked up. “Finally! You don’t think my mum’s a smuggler, do you, Jay?”

“Er…”

The boys squabbled back and forth, utterly relaxed. It was a good day: pranked enemies in the morning, blackmail material, no DADA class today, all that was left after our free period was
History of Magic and Charms, both with the Hufflepuffs, and the firsties were doing really well and my entire parvus was quite safe and happy. Everything seemed to be proceeding well, and none of us had pulled all-nighters for anything but personal reasons this entire time.

Gave me the opportunity to see the wary looks of the older Slytherins as they trailed in, the quietly relieved and pleasantly surprised ones of my Poached — Chambers especially, with her nervous disposition — and the bemused glances other Houses shot the little third-year Slytherins all grouped together. Of course the demon twins, yes, had those smug and highly amused laughs as they passed us, giving friendly waves (and oh how the magnus had challenged me and mine to duels when they figured out I purposefully let my brother sin, which was nothing on Snape’s icy reaction afterwards).

My smarmy contentment halted, however, when Ron and Harry and Hermione walked in for lunch and caught sight of us. I grinned and waved cheekily, and while Harry smiled as the first one to notice me, the smile stuttered a bit and he leaned in close to Ron and Hermione — who also waved, though Ron rolled his eyes too — and whispered furiously. They conferred a bit, and then Harry made a beeline for me, Hermione reluctantly continuing on to the Gryffindor tables and Ron reluctantly staying by Harry’s side. I suppose these two were the most familiar with Slytherins and with me, though why they were approaching at all was odd. The Golden Trio, any part of them, tended to avoid Slytherin if they could help it.

(Tell Harry I said hullo!)

Not happening, I thought fondly, and don’t be a bleeding pushover, the woman can cry all she wants, she already proved that she was fully aware that she was living for practically free on that Black villa estate, and she’s always had the ability to pay for it. Be a pureblood bastard!

(I might need to get Nicolosia to fend this harpy-woman off. ) Sirius complained, (As much as I enjoy the thought of a Halfblood woman tricking hundreds of Galleons out of the House of Black, I seem to be the House of Black now...)

Malfoy seemed to grow irritated and more vicious as his yeargroup rivals approached, and I suppose it was his twitchiness that got Nate and Dietrich’s attention. Both of them kept careful eyes on Ron and Harry as they made their way here, though I slight shake of the head from me made sure they continued chatting and arguing with Jay and Lu and Harper. Keep that sense of normality, the sense of ‘we belong here, piss off’ that we had to cultivate around political rivals and non-Slytherin-non-allies.

“Hullo, Harry,” I greeted, “and Ron, I suppose. Here to join the fun? Owe me a favor and I’ve got a lovely photo of Malfoy with green hair and a horrified expression for you two.”

I could sense the magnus around us growing rigid at that declaration.

Harry looked interestedly at the photo I held in front of him, wiggling my hand a bit, and Ron outright laughed and pointed and threw a nasty look at Malfoy, whose countenance looked a little pinker than usual. There wasn’t too much hostility; enough, but not enough that someone was going to duel me tonight. Embarrassing photos on this scale were, again, low-grade blackmail. Too much of it in circulation, nothing too humiliating — but such was the nature of Fred and George’s pranks, where you only got as much embarrassment from the thing as you allowed yourself, really.

Fred and George were, after all, rather harmless pranksters. For laughs, them.

“Let me think about that, Lyssie,” Ron chortled, “since owing you is sort of terrifying, for several reasons.” Then he looked at me, frowning. “Aren’t you supposed to be in class by now? It’s our
lunch period.”

I shrugged. “We’ve got a free period on Wednesdays around now. Need something, then?”

“Actually, er, yeah. D’you mind sitting with Gryffindor for a bit, since you’re here? Or if I can speak to you later about, er, things,” Harry said, trying to be quiet but definitely being overheard by most everyone around.

Huh. Not a normal request from the Golden Trio, that’s for sure.

I looked at Dietrich. “Unless the Poached need a morale boost, take the boys to the abandoned classroom? Ought to discuss the Baddock-Etheridge-Lynwood situation. And see about arranging something for those ‘Claws that decided to piss off Warrington by giving Wilhelm a hard time.”

Dietrich gave a graceful nod. “We’ll wait for you there.” He turned to the others, who’d already gathered up the photos and their things; and the Poached didn’t seem to be stopping them, so he nodded. “Let’s go.”

It was rather exciting, watching the boys’ formation without me. I suppose it was a normal sight with how absent I was last year in the political scene, but I felt proud as Dietrich took the leading position. Harper took his right flank and Jay his left, Nate on Harper’s side and Lu on Jay’s. Much more symmetrical, with five rather than six. They trailed out, and then I tucked myself between my brother and Harry, and let them lead us off to the Gryffindor tables, to the spot Hermione was saving for all of us, sequestered carefully away from others, but near some very loud seventh-years who wouldn’t care about what we were talking about. A good position, though I think it was accidental on Hermione’s part, with her desire for isolation.

( Want me to shove off? Private talk and all. )

Yeah, I’ll talk to you later if it’s something very concerning. Maybe he’s having girl trouble!

( And he hasn’t written me yet? I’m going to be very upset if that’s the case. See you, Lyssie. )

Happy paperworking, Sirius.

Hermione greeted me warmly, though I was a bit thrown when her face morphed into a scowl as lunch appeared on the tables and she bent back over some parchment, with large lettering at the top spelling out SPEW. Seeing that, I wasn’t thrown anymore. I remembered this.

Ron leaned over to whisper, “Hermione’s trying to campaign against House Elves.”

“It’s not against House Elves, Ron, it’s against their slavery!” Hermione said hotly.

“How many times do I have to go over this, Hermione? They. Aren’t. Human. They need the work! They like the work!”

“I suppose being beaten up and spit on and worked to the bone, never to ever have any thanks or breaks or- or healthcare even, is alright? That’s how you’d treat Pigwidgeon, isn’t it? That’s how you’d treat Hedwig, if she could talk back?”

Harry looked alarmed at being pulled into the argument. “Er- I wouldn’t-”

“Exactly!” Hermione said triumphantly.

“That’s not the same!” Ron hissed, “If Pig or Hedwig or Serateed were sentient, you’d call that
slavery, since we own them! Do you enslave Crookshanks, Hermione?”

“I certainly treat him better than anyone treats House Elves!”

I raised my hand uncertainly. “What is this argument about?”

Ron rolled his eyes, interrupting Hermione before she could speak, “Hermione wants to abolish House Elf slavery.”

“You weren’t even listening!” she accused. Then she turned to me, all wide brown eyes and mass of hair making her look smaller than she was. “Do you want to join S.P.E.W., Lys? Our short-term goals are to secure house-elves fair wages and working conditions. Long-term, we change the law about wand use, and get an elf into the Department for the Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures.”

Much to Ron’s horror, I hummed thoughtfully. “I think I can agree with the short-term goals, but that wand-use law is rather… alarming. And it sets a very dangerous precedent for other non-human magical sentients. Goblins, for example.”

Hermione fluffed up, like a bristling cat. “And why shouldn’t goblins be able to-”

“Professor Binns, Hermione,” Ron said with a sort of glee. “Goblin wars have usually been centered around goblin right to wield wands, but the one time they gave one over to that Ragnvald the Red-Faced, the goblins reverse-engineered it and nearly wiped out every human in Northern Ireland! And that includes the Muggles, Hermione!”

“Is that the war where the Ministry literally had to assassinate every goblin with the knowledge afterwards?” I asked, remembering an enthusiastic rant by Nate on the subject.

Harry nodded. “Only thing in History of Magic I paid attention to,” he confirmed.

I shook my head at Ron and Hermione, who were now arguing about whether some Goblin Rebellions weren’t justified or not. Those two would be busy for a bit. They couldn’t resist arguing with each other, though I knew from experience, Ron would never shut up about Hermione when she wasn’t likely to hear him. Sometimes it was complaining, but a lot of the time, he was trying to rehash old arguments, figure out how he could’ve won, and then would inevitably be amazed by how sound Hermione’s reasoning and logic was. My strategist big brother, everybody.

I turned to Harry. “Need me for something? Those two’ll be busy.”

Harry snorted at his friends. “They never stop. I swear, they enjoy it.” He grew serious, though, pushing his shoddy glasses up his nose. A nervous habit? I’d never seen him do that before. “Lys, I… This is going to sound really odd, but I had this dream over the summer-”

“I couldn’t resist, dammit. “Harry, I think this would be a much better conversation to have with Sirius than with me…””

As expected, Harry flushed bright pink. “Not that sort of dream! Bloody hell, Lyssie, why do you know about- Never mind.” I laughed at him, and Harry patiently waited for me to stop before he continued on a much more serious, urgent note. “Lys, this dream… when I woke up, my scar hurt. I thought…”

I swallowed. Right. I’d forgotten that Harry… he would’ve seen something about Voldemort over the summer. Something to do with him being small and being with Wormtail-
Wait.

Wormtail’s soul was goddamn gone, and he was rotting away in Azkaban right now.

“What did you see?”

Harry looked around quickly, then leaned closer to me. “Three days before the Quidditch World Cup, I woke up with my scar burning. The dream… I was in some sort of dark, old house — one of those really old, nice ones, you know? — where this old Muggle was looking into a room, eavesdropping on… on this thing. I think… it was Voldemort. It didn’t sound right, but he was talking to this tall shadow, I didn’t recognize him—"

Shit. “At all?” I asked.

“Er… he had one of those really nice voices? And long hair, and Death Eater robes on. Not that I knew what Death Eater robes looked like when I first woke up, but after the Quidditch World Cup… They actually talked about it, too, the World Cup and they killed someone already, and they were planning to kill more. And… Ron said I might’ve just been dreaming, but three days later, Voldemort’s Dark Mark goes up over the World Cup riots…”

So, going by pureblood traditions, whoever had taken Wormtail’s place as Voldemort’s babysitter was a damn fine duelist and might even be a high-level Death Eater. Purebloods with particularly nice voices trained themselves to be like that, to be able to grab attention and awe easily. If Harry particularly picked up on the voice, that was probably the case. A Head of House, then, perhaps? Or the leader of a branch family of a House. But he was definitely a Death Eater, with the robes and presumably the mask.

Hm. So some random Death Eater took Pettigrew’s place. Interesting.

Hell, maybe it was Lucius Malfoy? Long hair.

“If your scar hurt, it was most definitely not a normal dream,” I told Harry. “Curse scars are like that.”

He nodded slowly. “I thought so. But the bit that’s worrying… Voldemort said he had a ‘faithful servant’ at Hogwarts. If the dream was real, then…”

I smiled sardonically. “A Clairvoyant born into a family heavily involved in the war isn’t the best person to ask about whether dreams are real or not. I sort of treat all dreams, and especially nightmares, as real.”

“But with my scar, a curse scar, reacting…”

“There’s definitely something more to this, yeah,” I said, “but again: shouldn’t you actually tell Sirius? Have you already?”

Harry seemed to shrink a little. “He’s already so busy…” he muttered.

Goddamn this kid. I wanted to reach out and smack his shoulder, but I settled for flicking the edge of his glasses and making him yelp. “He’s never too busy for you, or for me. We’re his godkids. Didn’t I say before, Harry? Sirius loves you, broke out of Azkaban for you. Write him. And… have you considered telling Alby- er, Dumbledore?”

“That’s what Hermione said,” Harry said a little sourly. “But I can’t just… go up to the Headmaster and tell him I had a dream and my scar hurts, thanks. I mean… Divination’s woolly, right, and I’m
no Seer like you are — I haven’t got a talent for Divination at all. My dreams aren’t prophetic, but this has to mean something…”

I patted Harry’s shoulder. “Take it from me, Harry: when you dream of terrible things happening, there’s no use fretting over whether it’s real or not. Assume it is. And then take steps to prevent it or survive it.”

“But I don’t know what the maybe-Voldemort is planning,” said Harry, running his hands through his hair messily.

“Well, you know that there might be a Voldemort sympathizer about, maybe doing something for Voldemort. Try to find them, try to figure out what they’re aiming for, and then try to stop them from getting it. Mind you, my visions are usually a lot more concrete, but all you can do is form a plan and try to work at it while living your life.”

“But if it isn’t real…”

“Which I think you should talk to Sirius or Alby about, but if it isn’t, then what’s the harm? You learn more about the people around you, you learn some new spells, you explore the castle more? Sounds lovely, to me.”

Harry gave me an odd look. “You always make sure you get something out of anything you do, don’t you?”

“Slytherin,” I told him with a broad smile. But I sobered. “Seriously, though, Harry. Talk to someone else. You said it yourself: you’re not a Seer, so I can’t help you much. Even our curse scars are different.” I tapped my jaw, right on the longest scar.

Harry gave the scars a distant look, like he was remembering that night. “You’re sure you can’t tell me anything? Er- with your Seer abilities? Nothing’s going to happe-”

Ron threw himself forward, clapping his hands over Harry’s mouth. “You can’t ask that, Harry!” he hissed. “Especially if it’s about bloody You-Know-Who! Don’t make my baby sister go and See him, for Merlin’s sake!”

Harry slapped Ron’s hands off, then gave me a sheepish smile. “Sorry. Forgot.”

I shrugged. “I wouldn’t be able to tell you anything even if I wanted to, Harry.”

By which I meant I really would’ve loved to be able to warn Harry about the Triwizard Tournament and Voldemort’s resurrection, I really would, but I wasn’t to interfere. He had to resurrect. He needed Harry’s blood to do it. He had to step out from the shadows so the war could finish, after a fourteen year hiatus. If I tried to stop it, I had no doubt I’d be killed and the war would continue over my dead body anyways.

I’d much rather be alive to be able to do something. I already was. And Fate was allowing it, even if the results were hazy and unpredictable and subtle at the moment.

“Talk to someone who’d know more about Voldemort, Harry,” I told him softly, the name making Ron wince a little. “Keep an eye out, but don’t obsess over something that may or may not happen — at least, not to the point where you’re not looking at the here and now. I have the same problem, so take it from me.”

Harry sighed, tension leaking out of him. “Alright. Thanks, Lys. Sorry to have dragged you from your blackmail photos.”
“Can we have the Malfoy one?” Ron asked.

“Blackmail photos?” Hermione asked, looking rather aghast.

I grinned. This I could handle better. I didn’t rightly like knowing that my friend, all big green eyes and clumsily-mended glasses and earnestness, was going to have to go through a damn traumatic experience soon. He’d live, but it would suck. I would much rather talk blackmail photos.

“I’m willing to negotiate,” I said magnanimously.

“What d’you need from us that you can’t get yourself?” Ron demanded.

“Oh, I’m sure I’ll think of something.”

My big brother didn’t like the sound of that, based off his expression, but I’d go easy on him and Harry. God knows that Harry deserved a break. In about two weeks, the Goblet of Fire would spit out his name.
Chapter 63

Chapter Notes

OH LORD I almost didn't make it! Okay so notes are gonna go at the end, but here's your January chapter, sorry it's NEARLY late, enjoy! :'D

See the end of the chapter for more notes

…

“Triwizard Tournament,” Dietrich read off of a large sign in the entrance hall, “The delegations from Beauxbatons and Durmstrang will be arriving at 6 o’clock on Friday the 30th of October.” He raised his brows. “And classes will end half an hour early to do so.”

Lu pouted. “Me and Nate don’t even have a last period class on Fridays.”

“Should’ve taken Ancient Runes, then,” Harper replied with a grin, “or Muggle Studies with me.”

“Ergh, no thanks. To both. Why you’re taking three electives at all is beyond me, Harper.”

“And you didn’t even take Ancient Runes or Arithmancy,” I pointed out, verging on complaining, “which would’ve really helped with your love of twisting spells into somehow exploding.”

Flint snorted, giving Harper a wary though amused smile. Which was always funny, since Flint was built somewhere along the lines of Crabbe or Goyle, somewhat looming over us — as tall as Nate, and I think he was actually older, but with much more meat on his bones so he just really did look like a fourth-year who was held back — but he was still intimidated by slim, short, smiley Tristan Harper.

When he caught me smirking at him, his shoulders squared up. “I still remember when you and Harper paired up in Charms when we were learning Incendio,” he said defensively, dark eyes narrowed. “You almost set fire to Flitwick.”

Rosier, walking near to his best mate, laughed. He was similar to Lu in build, Rosier — a dark-haired, dark-eyed, quieter Lu, more athletic and tall rather than just loomingly large as Flint was. “And then Flitwick gave you both points, the absolute nutter.”

“And this is why we all have such a difficult time reigning them in,” Dietrich said dully. “People keep encouraging them.”

“You have to admit, it’s funny when the ‘Puffs or the ‘Claws get all frightened,” grunted Flint.

We were just passing through the corridors after lunch, headed to our Tuesday Defense class. I think the sign announcing the foreign schools had been up since yesterday, but there were a few
duels that took most of my attention — the boys got some practice in, and I even managed to delegate some to the second-years (Mercer and Beaumont were pleased), but I still had to be there and take note — along with a group session of brainstorming up a “How to Deal with Mad-Eye ‘I Mentally Torment Slytherins’ Moody” plan.

To be perfectly fair, of course, we Slytherins had thick skins. And it’s not like Snape did any better to every non-Slytherin student. And in the privacy of our House, even to us — hence the thick skins.

Did Flint, Rosier, or any of my boys enjoy the sly, thoughtless comments on how they had dead or imprisoned family members, added to the underlying threat that Moody could easily do the same to us? No. But were we getting used to the pressure in the classroom, the hostility from the other Houses, spurred on by Moody’s constant reminding the school about how Slytherins were evil, students coming out of DADA classes giving suspicious looks, stressed professors missing out on it even more than usual with the Triwizard coming up? No, really, we were. It was only a bit worse than when I was a firstie, I guess, just with little support from the Slytherins — and outright aggression from some, who either I or Malfoy (away from my eyes, though, the prickly, prideful prat) curbed quickly. It was survivable.

“Bloody annoying, but survivable,” I murmured, taking my seat next to Rosier.

The DADA Slytherin formation, again. All DE-names paired with Slytherins who were not, all of us in the back, hiding behind the Gryffindors. Like a reverse Potions classroom with more windows, less cauldrons and weird burning smells, and a teacher who embodied a different sort of batty from Snape. At least Nate looked less stiff, Harper chattering into his ear; and I think I heard Jay ask something about Quidditch, which got Lu going, got him relaxed. Flint was quiet and calm enough to be comfortable with Dietrich’s stoic silence rather than unnerved, too. I nodded to myself in approval, glad that the pairings were all justified.

Rosier, having had more exposure to me in the last two-ish months than the previous two-ish years we’d been housemates, was oddly good at reading my intentions. Not that I was trying to hide them at the moment. Along with the fact that Flint could a hard read too, when he wanted to be — must’ve taken after his cousin who graduated already (finally), who’d been mates with the similarly gruffly quiet Warrington — I wasn’t surprised that Edwin Rosier flicked an amused little smile at me.

“Always mothering the rest of you silver six, aren’t you?” he asked wryly.

“Is that what they’re calling us now?”

“Beaumont and Lynwood, those second-years, started it, way back. The ones who wanted to be just like you,” he informed me. “It used to just be their yeargroup that called you that, but since Mercer’s babysitting the firsties with Vaisey, the firsties call you that, too, and it’s gotten around.” His lips quirked upwards. “Griselda Pritchard asked me why we’re not all just called the Eight or something.”

I winced internally. That implied that the firsties hadn’t known that the central pillars surrounding their regina potestae parvae numbered only five, not seven. And that was… well, I personally didn’t really get too chuffed about it and neither did my boys — Nate implied, once upon a time, that it was a blessing in disguise that Flint and Rosier had flocked to Malfoy instead of followed him to me — but I always wondered. It’s not that we were purposefully being exclusionary, we just… were? Which was rather shitty, I guess, but I didn’t trust Flint and Rosier back then and I barely trusted them now, so I really didn’t fuss about it too much. But to someone who was on the other side of the glass, looking in, it’d be a bit different. I was aware of that.
If Rosier were even a bit closer to me, I might just come out and ask him, *Does it bother you?*

But blunt honesty like that, with Rosier… it’d sound aggressive. Insulting. Last thing I wanted, really, especially right before fucking Moody’s class.

“The firsties’ll learn. Adapt,” I replied easily. “Mercer and Lu are having the time of their lives, watching Baddock and Falconer and Cox hiss at each other and figure out how it all works. They’ll learn and adapt and as this little Slytherin schism continues and everything changes, they’ll learn and adapt to that, too.”

Rosier gave me a careful look. I had lightly alluded to the fact that even if our yeargroup wasn’t united, that could still change. A very friendly, but gentle opening. Nothing lost or gained by it.

“We’ll see,” he replied. Then he faced forward. “Though maybe dealing with Moody’s more important.”

I sighed a little at that. Wanted to slump, really, but that’d be a bit too undignified. But I could be pretty friendly/casual with Rosier. He was a pleasant seating partner. “*Now that,* I’m still working on. No wonder Malfoy bloody hates me, it’s hard to subtly threaten and fight someone who is entirely willing to drag you down into the open.”

AKA it was harder to pressure someone with so few weakpoints, whose few weakpoints could become strengths in a heartbeat. I hadn’t figured out what made Moody tick yet, how best to make him back off without drawing his ire or the attention of the Slytherin *magnus* or Snape’s wrath or my brothers’ focus or anything else. How he fit in the system of Hogwarts, and how to mess with that. Plus there was the fact that he was, y’know, a fucking Death Eater in disguise. That was something to keep in mind.

Rosier snorted. “Exposing subtlety is a good tactic sometimes.”

“Yes, it’s fantastic when you know you’ve got more cards, but it’s damn annoying when you know you don’t. A gamble,” I complained, dragging out my textbook and notebooks.

“Can’t afford one of those right now, *regina,*” Rosier pointed out unhelpfully.

There was something sharp in his words, though. It’d be teasing from any of my boys, but it came with a veil of tension from Rosier. Something accusatory. I slid narrow eyes to him, not flaring my magic, but showing Rosier I was taking this very seriously, no matter how frivolous our smalltalk was.

“I’m aware,” I said — not quite harsh, but not quite as friendly as a moment ago either.

He stared at me, movement of his eyes betraying his indecision — probably whether he should push harder or not. But he nodded eventually. He’d seen me talk circles around Malfoy and all manner of children who came up to me, trying to push me and pressure me into breaking or cowering away, trying to out-reason me into paralysis, trying to prove they weren’t going to fall in line or follow me or whatever the hell they wanted.

(Funny, wasn’t it, how pleasant conversation could so suddenly flood with tension and power plays? And this, *this* was why I didn’t trust Rosier and Flint, why we were the silver six and not the Eight — which was just a bit too Elder Scrolls V for my taste anyways. Even Nate, as much as he liked to annoy and tease and test, didn’t draw my razor-focus like this; arguably because we were used to Nate, because we knew he was loyal to my *parvus potesta* reign, but still.)

The heavy *THUNK-CLUNK-THUD* of Moody’s limping, wooden leg on the stones and him
slamming the door between the classroom and his office open had all of us — save a few Gryffindors — straighten in our seats and snap our heads to the front in almost military-precise synchronization. Chatter died just as suddenly, too. The snarl on his face made me think of a chat with Alby a couple of days ago, and how he absolutely refused Moody to have his Unforgivables lesson with third-years and below; made me think of that, and of how relieved I was to hear that. I didn’t fancy an Imperius.

The way Moody’s fake eye roved over the Slytherins, he didn’t share the sentiment.

“Put the damn books away,” he growled. “A book won’t save your life when there’s spellfire in the air and your wandarm’s crippled. We’ll simulate that. Teach you the limb-specific Numbing Charms today, battle simulation once you’ve got that down.”

Both of his eyes fixed on Lu, making my friend turn rigid.

Just because we Slytherins were getting used to the spike in hostility and aggression aimed at us didn’t mean we were completely numb. The second-years in particular were taking it a bit hard, along with Lu and Harper who’d known intellectually that it’d be a bit of a rougher go this year, but hadn’t really been able to absorb that immediately.

“You’d all best get it down quick. Hold out your arm, Vaisey,” growled Moody. “Your wandarm, boy! Watch, all of you. Naervorisomnus Artus. See that, Vaisey? Nerves are cut off. Your arm’s dead. Your hand’s dead. Wand’s rolled out of your dead fingers, and now you’re dead. CONSTANT VIGILANCE! Flint! I don’t fancy the class can spontaneously cast as well as your Aunt Cypress. You’ll demonstrate next. Arm out, boy!”

Of course Moody managed to cast on Slytherins anyways… though it was no Imperius.

At least no one was a ferret — Malfoy’d been busy that week, running damage control, and while it’d given me a good while to strengthen my potesta, the other Houses weren’t very sporting when they found out. Rather emboldened, really, though I’ll admit it did have the effect of teaching us snakes who to watch out for. The twins’ pranks were inspired afterwards, though, and I’d very happily allowed the fox ears sprouting out of my hair to stay the entire day. Harper’d liked his pointed dog ones, though the others hadn’t let me seen what the pranked goblets had given them.

But I digress. I’d have to figure out what Moody wanted, how to stop him from getting it, and how to trade it back to him in exchange for some fucking peace for my Slytherins. I’d get Nate and Jay on that soon — neither of them were jittery at the thought of Durmstrang and Beauxbatons arriving on Friday, so it’d work out.

…

We stood in a sea of black robes and hats and shiny loafers, scattered in a haphazard cluster sprawled on the stones and grass of the castle’s entrance, looking over the lake and the Forbidden Forest. The air hummed with whispering and muttering, the professors stood in the entry doorway in a neat line with expectation written all over their postures, and the sun had more or less set.

Beauxbatons and Durmstrang would arrive in five minutes.

It was odd, seeing the entire Hogwarts student body all dressed up neatly; most of Slytherin looked more or less the same, with our House’s obsession with a well-groomed appearance, though we
were required to wear the traditional hats (wide-brimmed, black, pointed) and the heavy outercloaks of the robes that no one usually bothered with. Being a bit past twilight, it’s not like the cloaks overheated us all too much, but no one really like their movement restricted and it showed especially in fidgeting and fumbling.

My firsties were a bit more restless, all of them gathered in my line of sight, the second-years slightly more disciplined — Harper was as fidgety as the worst firstie, of course.

And not in the excitable way, as some other students were — like Creevey’s little firstie brother in Gryffindor, who was trembling in anticipation. Harper fumbled with his wand and cast his gaze down more often than not, and if I were a braver soul I might ramp my Mage Sight up more and I would certainly see the odd, cowering movements of his bright blues and greens and golds. Anxiety and frustration more than excitement. My Second would be much the same.

After all, they’d both been informed by owl yesterday that their respective fiancés were a part of the Beauxbatons delegation. Neither were really looking forward to it, and if that built me up a prejudiced disdain against two strangers, then no one would really be surprised. As it was, Jay gave very compassionate and sympathetic glances every other minute, Lu was scowling hard in stubborn solidarity, and Nate seemed to be amused at their obvious discomfort.

“What were their names again?” I muttered.

“Amelie Lefèvre and Catarina Sefa,” Nate answered promptly, though quietly. He was behind me, quite able to see over my head — Nate had a good half a foot on me, after all.

I committed the names to memory this time, vaguely remembering being told them before at some point. Harper and Dietrich preferred not to talk about the girls they were promised to — my guess was that they both wanted to forget they had fiancés. Though as much as I disliked them already, I wasn’t actually really sure what to do in this situation. I mean. Bloodtraitor here — what was the tradition around betrothing and all that shit? (Would I be allowed to be bitchy at them or would that hurt my boys more than help?)

“More worried about the future Lady Bastion and a future Harper wife than the Triwizard Tournament, Lyssie?” Nate laughed softly.

“It’s not like we’re going to be allowed to compete in it,” I said mulishly.

Harper blinked at me. “How d’you know that?”

I raised a brow and lied, “Tea with Alby. There’s an age restriction.” Then, truthfully, “And before you ask, no, even if there wasn’t, I’d rather brain myself playing Quidditch than compete. As if I haven’t had enough bloody excitement.”

Lu, who’d opened his mouth to ask the already answered question, snapped it shut. Then his look turned accusatory. “You haven’t had any excitement lately! You haven’t dueled anyone in the past two weeks.”

I snorted. “I’d hardly call dueling Antonius Bates exciting.”

The Slytherins grouped up near us tittered at that. It was a frankly embarrassing duel, that one, and it’s what made me very sure in my decision to delegate those challenges and annoyances and flaunty spectacles to someone else while I dealt with other things.

But before anything else could be said — and I did want to talk to Dietrich and Harper about the girls they were promised to, if only to ask what they wanted to do about that (avoid or not, be
“Aha! Unless I am very much mistaken, the delegation from Beauxbatons approaches!”

Immediately students started shuffling around, searching for how and where. I started scanning the sky silently, not really remembering anything beyond the fact that Beauxbatons came in a huge carriage or something. Dietrich followed my lead and hummed when he spotted it before I did.

Shit. It was still pretty damn far away, I think, which meant it was huge.

“There!” someone cried, making most everyone snap their eyes to the skyline above the Forbidden Forest.

“It’s a dragon!”

“Don’t be stupid, it’s a flying horse!”


Oooh, shit, I regretted not trying to find Luna in the crowd. She was probably pleased at the thought of befriending new, dangerous-ish magical creatures. That, or she was straight-up not here. I could definitely see Luna skipping the welcoming ceremony and somehow getting away with it — accidentally, in both cases.

“Hey Dietrich,” I murmured as the carriage and horses landed, much to the delight and awe of the crowd, “how much d’you wanna bet Durmstrang arrives in a ship?”

Dietrich gave me a flat look. You’re a Clairvoyant, I’m not betting shit against you, basically. It made me grin, while he rolled his eyes.

It was unfortunate I wasn’t near enough to anyone gullible enough to actually take that bet with me.

The carriage, when it landed, was silent but I could feel the wheels land and the steps of the huge, winged horses as they snorted and tossed their golden and white manes. The carriage was honestly house-sized, painted egg-shell blue and decorated in white and gold. Very… Baroque? No, it didn’t quite look Baroque, but it was damn fancy and intricate, and funnily enough, the door jutting from its side and nestled in the huge, dark wheels was a French door. It split open, fluttery white curtains spilling out along with a boy — sixteen or seventeen, would be my guess — in blue robes (surprisingly darker and less glossy than I was expecting), whom a whole host of girls sighed at in admiration. He was a pretty boy, really, and he shot a wink at a very flushed Hufflepuff before tapping at something on the carriage, which caused a set of equally intricately-decorated steps to fold out.

“You’d think they wouldn’t decorate with Rococo after the whole Revolution bit,” said Nate, a sarcastic smile on his face but his eyes hungrily roving over the carriage.

Oh? Was Nate an architecture nerd? Not only a history nerd, but an architecture and/or art nerd? He and Jay did talk to each other a lot, very willing to pair up since they were both calmer, quieter sorts even if Nate was not-so-secretly mean as fuck and Jay was the nicest person ever. They were leaving me out of their art discussions, dammit!

“Was the French Revolution magical in nature as well?” I asked interestingly.
Magical history, when not taught by Professor bloody Binns, was actually hella cool to learn about — and thank Merlin for Nate, since he was all too willing to explain and overexplain whatever he knew about it. I was much more invested in Nate’s gleaming eyes and muttered ranting about Binns and then a lofty, rushed blurb on magical French history than in the huge woman stepping out from the carriage and chatting with Alby for a bit. Crowd was noisy enough, ogling the maybe 9-10 foot Headmistress of Beauxbatons and whispering with each other about it, so we weren’t really standing out.

“which is why *The Swing* is such a representative artwork of that period of political *stupidity*, again backing the evidence that the last three French kings were probably victims of incest or curse-rituals, maybe both, and—”

“The lake!” someone interrupted Nate’s snide insults towards long-dead French kings. “Look at the lake!”

Wait, I knew that voice. That was Lee. I heard him yelling all the time.

The center of the lake began to bubble and the still, black surface became as turbulent as a seastorm. Harper started fretting about Squiddy and Lu had a gleam in his eye that meant he was thinking about something dangerous and probably flying, ergo I knew he was wondering if it’d be cool to fly through a storm over the lake. The crowd gasped as a huge, dark galleon rose from the whirlpool center of the lake slowly, all dark and ghostly and very huge-as-fuck — it was *triple-masted*. I had to hide a very amused smile when I looked over at Jay, whose face was still a picture of serene politeness, which greatly contrasted his twitching hands; he wanted to draw the ship, I knew, because it was a beautiful, haunted thing that even *I* — with my only okay-ish art skills — wanted to draw.

The ship plowed through rough (but now calming) waves, getting as close to the shore as possible but likely unable to get right up on the banks with how large it was. The Beauxbatons delegation had already shuffled inside, Hogwarts students scooting out of the way of the tall, elegant Headmistress; a crowd of blue-robed, quietly shivering students — many of whom were oddly pretty and being gawked at by Hogwarts students, whom I assumed had Veela blood somehow — following after her like ducklings.

“Did they repurpose the first-year boats?” asked Lu incredulously.

I looked back to the lake to see that… yeah, it looks like they did. The small, but very numerous rowboats driven by magic and lit with glass lanterns, were spilling from the galleon carrying one or two large figures. Probably couldn’t hold much more than that, since it was four firsties to a boat usually. The first of the wave of boats was led by a silver-haired man dressed in dark furs and a crimson coat cut in a military style. He had another figure with him on his boat, a teenager and one of his students I supposed, though it wasn’t until he strode forward with enthusiastic greetings for Alby that I recognize that student as Viktor Krum.

Huh. I wondered if he’d recognize me. I did heal his face that one time. And a face like mine was hard to forget. The scars and all.

“Scheming, Lyssie?” Nate asked.

“Do I look like I’m scheming?”

“Yes,” answered every single one of my boys in unison.
I laughed. “Beauxbatons will sit with... Ravenclaw, I’m guessing. And Durmstrang...”

“With Slytherin?” Lu asked, his eyes having never left Krum’s face or losing the awe for it — though he wasn’t like a lot of the other, numerous Quidditch nuts in the crowd and squealing about it, thank Merlin.

I nodded. “That’s what I’d bet. And you know, I don’t think I ever told any of you that I met him at the World Cup, did I? Sirius made nice with Minister Oblansk and decided his godchildren should meet the Bulgarian team.”

Harper and Lu gasped sharply.

Lu planted himself in front of me and gripped my shoulders, near shaking. “Tell me you’ll be able to get us to sit near him, Lyssie. Tell me.”

Since the Durmstrang students hadn’t quite all made it from their ship — though the tiny Hogwarts boats were certainly doing their best — no one was really going back inside, out of politeness. McGonagall was gone, though, having led the Beauxbatons through the castle at the Headmistress’ request. But soon everyone would be piling into the Great Hall for the Triwizard Tournament announcement and welcoming feast and all that, and it’d be to my advantage to have a choice spot picked out. Probably would need to grab as many of the Poached as I could, too. Krum might feel awkward sitting with a bunch of younger, foreign students, which meant I’d also have to leave space for any of his friends, too.

Doable, definitely. He’d recognize my scars if not my face, and international Quidditch player or not, it was always comforting to sit with someone you at least recognized.

“Let’s get inside and see, shall we?” I said, grinning.

The six of us started for the entrance hall, Lu and Harper cheering.

... 

“Should I cast a Loqutatio already?”

Dietrich raised his brows at me. “The Two Way Translation Charm?”

Harper frowned, sitting diagonally-across from me and Dietrich with Lu. “That’s not the best one, you know.”

Nate, spaced a bit further from Harper, nodded sagely. “Terribly inefficient,” he commented, glancing around the Great Hall. It was only just beginning to fill up, though the Beauxbatons delegation was already fluttering around the Ravenclaw table in a mass of blue. “It has a word quota of all things, and the magic runs out once you’ve hit it. It could happen mid-sentence.”

“It is suitable for smaller cores. And Grey, as well,” Dietrich said.

Nate grinned. “Me comprenez-vous, Lyssie?”

I rolled my eyes at him. “I haven’t even cast it yet, Nate, I was asking if you all have opinions on whether I should.”
Lu frowned. “Have you never cast it before?”

“Oooh, spontaneous casting is fun-”


Jay tapped my shoulder. “Maybe not now. Ask first, maybe? Otherwise you’d have to *Finite* to talk to us, which is a waste of magic.”

I nodded in agreement with Jay’s sound logic. I might have a hell of a core to burn through, but inefficiency was insulting to me as a Slytherin. Jay was very good at conserving magic in duels and such — never showed his hand until the time was right. And really, it’d be stupid if I had to shut my mouth around my friends until I heard Bulgarian anyways.

Dietrich was explaining the Two Way Translation Charm to a curious Lu, in the meantime.

“It would not work until Lys speaks back to Nathaniel, then the spell locks onto him and the language he spoke,” said Dietrich. He sighed, looking supremely disappointed. “It only works with two languages and one other person. It is a very simple spell.”

Dietrich as the resident casual trilingual probably knew best about these spells. I made a mental note to start a conversation with him one day about the subject; maybe when I was less busy, I’d be able to study languages more? I’d always been interested, back in my first life.

“What if Krum comes up and says Lyssie’s name, and not anything from, er, Bulgarian?” Lu asked.

“We’d just let Krum know, then,” Jay said, scooting a respectable distance away from the rest of us, as Nate and Lu were doing; those three would be more on watch than anything. “But Lyssie hasn’t cast it, Lu.”

*Have you cast it before?” Harper asked.*

“Too many times,” I muttered, flexing my fingers and remembering the failed casts and how they stung. “Wandless and whispering, too, which was a *pain*, let me tell you, Harper…”

The rest of the schools began to file in, headed by Alby and Headmaster… shit, I forgot his name, but the Durmstrang Headmaster, not quite as tall and crooked and aged as Alby, walking with a sense of self-assured purpose. Krum was trailing just behind him, looking a bit uncomfortable as swathes of black-robed Hogwarts students, now swarming their House tables, were pointing and whispering. I noticed Ron being tugged by the wrist to Gryffindor table by Hermione, rolling her eyes (and not managing to hide her amused smile), like he was an errant toddler.

When Ron’s eyes widened at the Durmstrang students gravitating towards Slytherin, I smiled. And when Viktor Krum near-fled from his Headmaster’s shadow, hesitated, and then made a beeline for where I was sitting, well… I might’ve grinned. And Nate and Lu and Harper might’ve snorted when Malfoy’s mouth dropped open when Krum hovered just in front of me.

I would’ve loved to laugh, but I made myself look open and inviting and decidedly not obsessive-fan-like when I looked at Krum.

“Gven-vere Veasley,” he greeted with a solemn nod.

Honestly, I was surprised he remembered by name. But I grinned at him, nodding at the seat across from me. He wouldn’t be surrounded by third-years, at least, since I arranged a lot of space, and
Dietrich, bless him, had waved over Elena Chambers at some point while Harper’d somehow gotten Jacqueline Wilhelm to amble over with Cassius Warrington in tow.

“Viktor Krum,” I greeted back with a grin. “I didn’t think you’d remember me, honestly — you Quidditch players seem to get injured and Healed enough. Want to sit?”

I managed to coax out a small chuckle, I think, and I danced inwardly when he did, in fact, begin to sit. Chambers was on one side of him, and he separated himself from her (she looked relieved, honestly) by stripping off his fur cloak and folding it roughly, tucking it between them. Dietrich was on his other side, with Wilhelm and Warrington next. I was across, Harper next to me, then Westfall (a prefect) and Cobb (also a prefect), with Reinhardt and Falconer on the other side nearer to Chambers. All spaced out a little loosely, inviting Durmstrang students to sit in two’s and three’s around.

“It is the risk of Qvidditch, yah,” Krum said somewhat cavalierly, shrugging a little. “For haffing a Dark core, your Healing spells are not so bad, Gven-vere.”

“Practice, mostly. I’ve got a lot of big brothers who love Quidditch, so lots of people to practice on.”

“Brothers?” Viktor glanced around and found Jay, of all people, looking at his hair and then back at me.

To be perfectly fair, take the dark highlights and brownish roots out of Jay’s hair and replace it all with a warmer red, little hints of copper-orange, and you’d have my hair. Much shorter and with gentler waves since I didn’t braid my hair all the time, but it’d be close. Jay looked alarmed and rather sheepishly pleased at the comparison, a contrast to the considering and amused looks the others had since all of my boys were listening in; none of us really thought Jay and I, even having similar hair colors, looked much like the other.

“They’re all in Gryffindor,” I said, pointing across the Great Hall. If I wanted to be mean, I would’ve pointed at Ron, who still looked gobsmacked as I sat with one of his Quidditch heroes. I was, instead, mercifully motioning at the demon twins sandwiching Lee Jordan. “And I’ve always liked seeing if I could repurpose Light magic to suit Darker needs.”

“You should see what she does with wards in duels,” muttered Dietrich, voice part dark and part extremely proud. As Krum looked over to him curiously, he nodded and hesitated but did offer a handshake. (It wasn’t a normal pureblood greeting, handshakes.) “Dietrich Bastion, third-year Slytherin. Welcome to Hogwarts.”

Krum shook his hand firmly. “My thanks. Hogwarts vos one off the schools I considered, and vhen I chose othervise, I had not thought I vould be able to see it.”

“Do you wish you’d gone here, then?” Harper asked. “Oh, and I’m Tristan Harper. Everyone just calls me Harper, though! Nice to meet you, your Wronski Feint at the Cup was apparently amazing and I’m still outraged I didn’t get to see it.”

Harper’s enthusiastic hand-shaking reminded me of Dad at his most hyper and Muggle-fixated. Harmlessly, cheerfully adorable. Krum must’ve been thinking along those lines, because his very bare smile — he was almost as stoic as Dietrich — quirked up a bit more as Harper chattered. Or else he was being indulgent…

“…Thank you,” Krum managed.
…Or Krum was just awkward. Yeah, I could see that. As famous as Harry was, he was awkward as hell, too, especially when the Boy-Who-Lived business was brought up. Completely and utterly understandable.

But it was easy enough to talk about other things and to draw him into conversation. What did he think about Britain, about Hogwarts? Why did he choose Durmstrang in the end? Oh, Durmstrang was situated in the mountains as well! Oh, and you had satyr colonies in your magical forests instead of centaur tribes, very cool–

You know. Shit like that. Harper had to be kicked a few times because Krum seemed to clam up a little when he thought he was about to be fanboy’ed on for his Quidditch skills — like, seriously, his eyes started to glaze over — but Dietrich drew Krum into a conversation about translation charms and then spontaneous casting and then spellwork, which Harper was more than happy to chime in for. More than. I had high hopes that Krum would walk away from dinner knowing Harper was the explosion kid of our yeargroup (there was always one, and usually they were Gryffindors, like Harper’s predecessor Finnigan) rather than an enthusiastic Quidditch fan.

Seats filled up, Bulgarian and Russian and Czech and Belaruusian and English and halted attempts in both languages flying across Slytherin table, along with lots of bug-eyed stares at Krum, hard interference from Nate and Jay and Lu from anyone trying to weasel in to my attempts to ensnare Krum into a friendship, some stupidity when a part-Veela at the Ravenclaw table flared her aura too hard, etc. It was a lively dinner, that was for sure. And I did notice, with more than a touch of smug pride, that the Poached and my potesta were more than happy to chime in for the Durmstrang students — aka make fools of themselves, the way any language barrier always forced on people — than not.

Translation spells were abound, too, of course. But the firsties didn’t know them, and the Durmstrang students seemed very willing to practice their English (they were all better than most assumed, I think, though some students were a little less fluent than others — Krum was one of the best English-speakers, actually). It was honestly really interesting to just sit and listen to all the accents and rowdiness and stumbling tongues that Durmstrang inserted into Slytherin’s cultured, carefully-chosen words and precise, cutting language and subtleties.

And I did find it rather fun to poke at the foreign foods the House Elves prepared for the guests. I’d never seen so much caviar in such a non-fancy setting. Though I guess as a welcoming feast, this was fancy. Bunch of Hogwarts students were still wearing our hats, too.

Eventually, though, dinner was through. And Alby stood, and I felt his magic flare gently — subtly motioning for silence, his hands un-subtly doing the same. Hush spread in waves as everyone’s anticipation rose sharply, after the nice winding-down that was dinner.

“The time has come,” Alby announced, voice still pleasant and conversational, but magically amplified to carry through the Great Hall.

Oh, I was so tempted to peek through Mage Sight to look at the Goblet inside of its really fancy box. Filch of all people was carrying it, and the man did look his best for the job — didn’t seem to break out the dress robes often, though I was one to talk, really. It was a really cool-looking chest, looked hand-carved though the carvings were worn down like crazy; only the lining of silver and jewels gave away the shapes of floral, vine-like patterns and swords and wands. Must’ve had a Featherlight on it, too, because it looked heavy and big enough that Filch should be staggering.

“Mr. Bagman and Mr. Crouch have worked tirelessly over the last few months on the arrangements for the Triwizard Tournament,” Alby was saying as I inspected Filch lurking in the corner of the Hall, “and they will be joining myself, Professor Karkaroff, and Madame Maxime on the panel that
will judge the champions’ efforts.”

Ah, I hadn’t realized there were more seats at the head table. Right, right, Crouch and Bagman. One would be dead and the other would be broke by the end of the school year.

Yikes. Morbid thought.

Filch walked forward with the chest, and the entire Hall craned their necks to look at it. Everyone was whispering, now, “champions” the word on the wind.

Alby explained as everyone gawked. “The instructions for the tasks the champions will face this year have already been examined by Mr. Crouch and Mr. Bagman, and they have made the necessary arrangements for each challenge. There will be three tasks, spaced throughout the school year, and they will test the champions in many different ways… Their magical prowess. Their daring. Their powers of deduction. And, of course, their ability to cope with danger.”

Harper leaned over to whisper to me, “Sounds mighty Gryffindorish, if you ask me.”

I nodded. “Yes, the ‘daring’ bit was a bit emphasized, wasn’t it?”

“And the coping with danger thing,” he agreed.

Alby went on to explain that three champions, one from each of the schools, would be chosen as a representative. The chest had been set on the ground right in front of him, centered by the head table and the Headmaster’s seat, and Alby made a slow circle around it before leaning down to tap the chest with his wand.

My mouth was not the only one that dropped open when the chest shuddered, and then the fucking leafy vines and swords and wands pattern starting growing out, wood and metal and jewels blooming and weaving upwards and forming a pedestal, holding a goblet made of the same pattern and materials as its pedestal but burning with white-blue flames that hummed. Shit. That was so not book- or movie-verse, fuck, but it had been so cool.

“I want one,” I said quietly.

Krum was the one who heard me, actually, and he snorted a bit. “Impressive magic,” he noted.

I turned and looked straight at Jay, whose eyes were wide and whose hands were sketching already. He met my eyes and grinned a little, and I felt so jealous of the fact that he’d be able to draw that work of art that I had to turn away with an exaggerated pout. Aside from being the whole, y’know, Lord of House Rookwood and such, later, I hoped that Jay took an interest in magical illustration — he’d really like it, and god, I wanted to learn how to do that.

Alby smiled at everyone, probably very amused and appreciative of the awe every student was exuding. “Anybody wishing to submit themselves as champion must write their name and school clearly upon a slip of parchment and drop it into the goblet,” he said. “Aspiring champions have twenty-four hours in which to put their names forward. Tomorrow night, Halloween, the Goblet will return the names of the three it has judged most worthy to represent their schools. The Goblet will be placed in the entrance hall tonight, where it will be freely accessible to all those wishing to compete.

“To ensure that no underage student yields to temptation, I will be drawing an Age Line around the Goblet of Fire once it has been placed in the entrance hall. Nobody under the age of seventeen will be able to cross this line.”
That last statement met more groans and whispers and complaints, but none loud enough to really hear properly.

Alby went on, "Finally, I wish to impress upon any of you wishing to compete that this tournament is not to be entered into lightly. There have been deaths, and some fates worse than. Once a champion has been selected by the Goblet of Fire, he or she is obliged to see the tournament through to the end.

"The placing of your name in the Goblet constitutes a binding, magical contract. Copies of the contract, written to be understandable, will be made available upon request, and the basics of which will be posted along the halls — rewritten and reworded by Mr. Crouch and Mr. Bagman. There can be no change of heart once you have become a champion. Please be very sure, therefore, that you are wholeheartedly prepared to play before you drop your name into the goblet.

"Now, I think it is time for bed. Durmstrang students, if you would please follow Headmaster Karkaroff back to your ship… I will personally ensure that there will be enough boats tomorrow morning when you wish to take class in the castle. Durmstrang professors, please follow Professor Snape, as he will show you to your temporary classrooms and quarters. For Beauxbatons, students, please follow Headmistress Maxime to your carriage, and to the professors, Professor Flitwick will assist you tonight. My own students, please return to your dormitories in good time and, of course, good cheer. Good night to you all."

The Great Hall return to motion slowly and sluggishly, students blinking out of the excitement and awe that the brightly-burning Goblet pulled out of them and starting to speak excitedly with friends, scramble back to their dormitories to write their names on slips of parchment. I knew that tons of underage students were planning on how to get around the age line glowing around the Goblet and the pedestal, my brothers being some of them. The demon twins in particular.

"Will you enter, Krum?" I asked as we all started to rise from the benches.

He nodded, a glint in his eye. "Yes. I vould very much like the chance to compete."

I smiled. "You’ll get it."

He raised a dark brow, donning his fur cloak again with a flourish that had to be taught, because all the Durmstrang students were swirling their fur around theatrically. "You vere the von who had to cast Healing spells on me, no? I vould not think blood and vounds vould make such a strong impression, Gven-vere."

"Call it a gut feeling. I’ll see you later, hey? Your Headmaster looks like he’s about to swoop down and carry you off."

Krum’s expression turned sour, more so when a quick glance gave him the sight I was seeing: Karkaroff plowing through crowds of black and blue robes, zeroed in on Krum unerringly.

"Not a fan of your Headmaster, Krum?" Dietrich asked.

"Сами ще го видите,” Krum muttered. Then he blinked, shaking his head. “You’ll see.”

"Viktor," Karkaroff called as he finally got within speaking distance. His accent was almost nonexistent, actually. “I am sure you’d like to offer your name as soon as possible. Classes do not begin as early in this country, but a full night’s rest would benefit. Back to the ship, then.” He looked critically at Viktor, didn’t seem to see anything else, really. “Viktor, how are you feeling? Did you eat enough? Should I send for some mulled wine from the kitchens?”
“Professor, I would like some mulled vine-” another Durmstrang student, who’d been rather successfully charming the socks off of a red-faced Chambers, said hopefully.

“I wasn’t offering it to you, Poliakoff,” the man snapped.

Viktor made eye contact with me, and the stare was deadpan enough that I had to turn away to hide a snort. Karkaroff seemed like the sort of asshole who’d notice perceived disrespect with eagle vision, but would otherwise ignore whoever didn’t seem to help his interests. Scarred little Hogwarts students included.

With that, my boys gathered around me, and we set off; Dietrich and I nodded silently to an exasperated but very straight-faced Krum, while Harper waved and beamed. Once we all got out of Krum and Karkaroff’s sight, Lu smacked Harper on the shoulder and started grilling him for details. We passed my brothers and Harry and Hermione on the way out — they looked fascinated at Karkaroff’s fawning, the Great Hall empty enough to listen to the ridiculous, one-sided conversation — and I made sure to say quick good night’s to them as well.

“Think you’ve got an in with Krum, then, Lyssie?” Lu asked.

And as excitable and Quidditch-obsessed as Lu was, I was proud to note that he wasn’t implying the in was for autograph purposes. Wasn’t a subtle move at all, drawing eyes on me by placing myself next to Krum and convincing him through pleasant conversation and friendship to keep me there. No one wanted to be the dick who was harassing Krum’s only foreign friend. The magnus and those Ravenclaws who swore eternal vengeance on me would have to be very subtle from now on. Which would be annoying to deal with, sure, but it did give me a bit more legitimacy.

I smiled at them all. “It’s going to be a lot more quiet, now. And a lot more vicious. They’re going to hate that Snape will have to favor me again since I followed his orders to a tee.”

“Under no circumstances are you to make a bad impression on the foreign schools,” quoted Jay, from when Snape had drawn us all up in the common room before we’d headed out to welcome the schools, “particularly Durmstrang, whose schedules will align more closely with our House than with others.”

“Make them wish they had come to Britain for their magical education!” Harper quoted with glee.

“Will Krum’s fame not isolate him? Jealousy and the like,” said Dietrich.

“Well, that’s what Lyssie put all the others around for. She’ll work on Krum, everyone else will befriend other Durmstrang students, and we all follow her, so they’ll all have to speak to her, and then maybe even Krum’ll be less isolated, right?” Lu reasoned.

Nate gave him a look. “That was so terribly astute, I can’t believe it. Dietrich, check for Polyjuice-”

“Piss off, Nathaniel.”

“I’m not a bloody idiot, Nate, why are you always saying this rubbish about me-”

Jay bumped shoulders with me as the boys squabbled. He smiled when I looked over. “I saw the look on your face when the Goblet was revealed.”

I brightened. “Can you blame me? This is why Charms and Transfiguration are my favorite classes, cool things always happen-”
“Of course not,” he laughed. “I bet if we asked Flitwick tomorrow, he’d explain more. And maybe we’d run into some Beauxbatons students?”

“You’re a genius, Jay. Let’s do that. Get a few good impressions in before the Ravenclaws poison them all against me.”

Jay raised a brow. “For good reason. Lyssie, you are entirely too sadistic with Lovegood’s bullies.”

I wanted to argue, but I knew it was true. And Jay did, too. Nate made everyone cry when he was a first- and second-year, but I seemed to have been able to focus my energies on idiots who thought it’d be funny to torment Luna, who’d never say anything against them. I probably went overboard when I was a firstie. I guess being a Slytherin pariah had been more infuriating than I remember, since I bled out so much irritation and stress by tormenting Luna’s bullies. Hm.

Something to think about.

“I’m trying to be better about that,” I mumbled.

“But you’re not sorry?”

“…Honestly, it’s sort of awesome that I’m a boogey-man in Ravenclaw.”

“Lys.”

I held up my hands. “I kid! I kid. It’s morally wrong that I shot straight past the point of acceptable revenge and am rather apathetic about realizing it. Merlin, Jay, you’re more like my mother than my brother.”

Jay rolled his eyes, and I grinned at the proof that he wasn’t too vexed with me.

An arm slung around my shoulder, and I realized Lu somehow wriggled his way out of the fuss — ah, he’d somehow gotten Dietrich and Nate going, with Harper egging on their argument for fun. He was always a fan of casual affection like hugging and arm-slinging and such, Lu, though he tried to pretend he wasn’t; Harper didn’t even bother to pretend. Lu grinned at me.

“Dietrich thinks he’s so cool-headed, really,” Lu laughed, nodding at our friends.

“He is, but there are a few certain-kill buttons you can press,” I said.

“They’re: Lyssie being reckless and impulsive, anyone bullying Harper, anyone making fun of his parents, and Nate,” Jay listed off.

“Nate’s had a hand in all of the above,” I said helpfully. “He thinks he’s funny to set me off on people and he definitely helped me translate Sollertia Augurium. Which I still need back from him, the hoarding thief.”

Lu looked insulted. “Isn’t that the book he chucked at my head?” At my nod, he put on an exaggerated grimace. Then his face smoothed as he thought for a moment. “Have you got an in with Krum, though, Lyssie?”

“More of one than anyone else, which I think is a tentative yes.”

“So Snape’ll be less pissed, then.”

“Hopefully. Why?”
Lu sighed, “The first Hogsmeade trip’s coming up.”

I blinked. Oh shit.

“You forgot, didn’t you?” Jay asked.

“Well… yes. Bloody hell, that’s going to happen soon, isn’t it? Right, then. Forgery program has to be rushed through, then. Lu, you’ve got a letter from home? Jay, I put you and Nate on that, didn’t? And Dietrich. Let’s take care of that, then we’ll see how the foreign schools change things up tomorrow, and I need to start bets on the champion selection because I need Galleons if we’re going to Hogsmeade, dammit.”

Chapter End Notes

My apologies for the wait, in any case, but HAH at least in my timezone, I made it!

Let’s see… Huge, unending THANK YOU to all who read and comment and kudos. :D You commentors especially. :) All y’all, though, are patient saints and I appreciate you. Haven’t had the greatest month, so I have soaked up the positive vibes of the comments and just tried to excise the bad feels away. :’D

Anyway. NEWS! Yeah, so, school started up again and I have an internship and it’s been hectic and I honestly always put off writing this fic when I have to rip lines from canon, since my idiot-brain thinks, ”Yeah, you’ve got material, you can put it off for a bit!” Yes. Yes, I know. Yes, I am a fool. :’D I am a fool and I am becoming a busier fool, and holy hell, I've been writing this fic for years so I'm a bit tired, too. Not burnt out yet, though!

So I think that’s all the news? My update schedule barely holds on, I’ll try to be better about it, thank you for your patience and enthusiasm for the fic even 63 fucking chapters in (goddamn, honestly), and I will see y'all next month. :)

Works inspired by this one

Where the stars hide their graves by Morte_Sangriz, Britain Hath No Fury Like a Korean Girl Scorned by Phantomheart

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!