Belladonna

by SweetSunnyRose

Summary

Belladonna. In Italian it means “beautiful lady.” It is also known to many as deadly nightshade, a beautiful flower with toxic side effects known to cause psychosis and even death. For Ana, it’s the name she must live by, though she doesn’t yet know what that means.

Right now, all Ana wants to do is prove she’s the best. The best Potions Master. The best at Quidditch. But silly Gryffindors and that Harry Potter, keep getting in her way. Later, Ana discovers that not everything is as simple as black or white, good or bad, pretty or deadly. It’s a balancing act everyone must achieve…or attempt to at least.

Even in a world of magic, Ana must fight to balance the ups and downs of being a teenager. From making friends, to keeping friends, to finding a love worth dying for, and everything in between.
“Fred! George!” A formidable voice rang out above the noisy street. Ana looked up from her book. “I won’t warn you again! Stop teasing your brother!”

Ana watched with mild amusement as a pair of identical boys, no more than a year older herself, were dragged away by their ears from what was clearly their younger brother. Said mother and boys passed by Ana in a blur of red on their way to the bookshop.

“Imagine being in a family like that,” said a rather pretentious voice.

“I don’t know,” Ana replied thoughtfully. “Wouldn’t it be nice to have a brother or a sister?”

“Why would I want one of them, when I have you?”

Ana looked to the boy sitting next to her for the first time since his arrival.

“I’m not sure if that was supposed to be a compliment, or an insult. If it’s the latter, then you really need to work on that, Draco.”

“And if it’s the former?” Draco asked.

“You need to work on that too. One should never confuse the two.” Ana grinned.

“Where’s your mum?”

“Why must Mother be with me?” Draco asked, his eyes pinching in a sneer.

“Because you’re a Golden Boy, Draco. Narcissa would never let her precious Little Dr….”

“Don’t say it!” He quickly covered her mouth with his hand. “She’s in Flourish in Blotts.”

When Draco didn’t remove his hand from her mouth, Ana licked the inside of his palm. He pulled it away with a grimace.

“Eww! You’re disgusting.”

“Well next time, don’t put your hand on my face.”

The same family with the identical mischief makers passed by Ana and Draco again. Draco sneered as they passed.

“Why are there so many people out today?”

“Hogwarts starts in a week, Draco.”
“Oh. …Oh!” Draco turned to Ana with sudden interest. “So you got your letter then?”

“Of course I did! I got it weeks ago,” Ana said with lofty pride as she pulled the well-loved parchment from the bag beneath her feet.

Draco’s eyes roamed over the paper with vigor. “‘Course, I’ll be getting mine soon too.”

“Yeah… next summer.” Ana took back her acceptance letter and tucked it away for safe keeping.

“What house do you think you’ll be in?” Draco asked.

“No one really knows what house they’ll be in until they get there.”

“Well I know I’ll be in Slytherin; all of Mother’s and Father’s families were in Slytherin. Your dad was in Slytherin too, so you probably will be.”

“He’s not my dad.”

Draco rolled his eyes in dramatic fashion. “You know what I mean.”

“Does it really matter anyway? The lessons are the same.”

Draco stared back at Ana blankly. “Of course it matters, Ana. Your house says everything about you. Ravenclaws are all bookish… which, I suppose does fit you a bit.”

“I am not bookish.”

Draco dropped his eyes to the open book before Ana; she slammed it shut.

“It’s a beginner’s potions book. I could brew these in my sleep,” Ana said defensively. Draco simply smirked. “Shove off! What about the other two?”

“What other two?”

“Gryffindor and Hufflepuff.”

“Ana, no one wants to be in Hufflepuff. Why would they? Hufflepuffs are… they’re what’s left over when the other houses are full.”

Ana snorted, though she didn’t mean to.

“And Gryffindor… Ana, you simply cannot be in Gryffindor.”

“And why is that, Draco?”

“Because, once I was sorted into Slytherin then we couldn’t be friends anymore.”

“Really? You’d stop being my friend just because of what house we may or may not be in?”

“I’d have to. My Father says that Gryffindors are all a bunch of…”

“Oh! So I’m talking to Mr. Malfoy now?” Ana fired back. “When did you become your father’s duplicate?”

“You don’t understand, Ana. Just because you don’t have a father…”
Draco’s voice faded out and his eyes grew wide. He knew he had made a mistake the instant the words left his mouth. Instead of getting angry and yelling or calling him every foul name that had suddenly erupted in her head, though, Ana’s face simply became devoid of any emotion, like the shade coming down over a window.

“Wow. That’s cold, even for you, Draco. I think I see Sev leaving the apothecary.” Ana threw her new book in her bag and began to leave.

“Wait, Ana, I… I didn’t mean… I’m… It’s just that, you’re always saying how he’s not your father, and I…”

“Sev’s not my father!” Ana said fiercely. As she turned back around to face Draco, her braided hair swung like a whip he had to dodge.

“But he’s the closest I have to one,” she added softly. “And I don’t need you reminding me of that.”

“You’re right. I said I was sorry.”

“Actually, I don’t think you did.”

“Well, I… I meant to, but I… Malfoys don’t apologize.”

“That sounds more Like Mr. Malfoy speaking.”

Draco didn’t respond.

“You don’t have to be everything he tells you to be, Draco. You can be worth more than your money; you just have to choose to be so.”

“What does that even mean?” He asked with a sneer. Then he looked her over. Ana had always been taller than him, a feature she liked to hold over his head, but now something was different.

“Have you… Have you gotten…Taller?”

“How very observant of you, Draco,” Ana replied with an exasperated eye roll. “It’s a wonder we’re even friends.”

“A matter of convenience for us both.”

They stared one another down briefly before they each cracked a thin smile.

“I really do see Sev waiting now, and you know how he loathes waiting,” Ana said, dropping her voice to match the tone Sev’s so often took.

“Right… Well, I… I guess I’ll see you next year.”

Ana shrugged. “You might see me at Christmas again.”

“Write to me?”

“Like you’d read it.”

“True, unless…”
“…Unless I write in detail the Quidditch matches.”

“And that is the sole reason we are friends.”

“Bye, Draco.”

Ana turned and began to hurry across the cobbled street. Suddenly one of those boys from earlier ran in front of her nearly bumping into her.

“Oi! Watch it, Red!”

“Sorry! I didn’t see you there.”

“If I had been a snake…”

“Well it’s a good thing you’re not one then, yeah?”

“Weasley!”

“Uh-oh! Gotta go. Bye!” The boy took off before the shop keep could spot him.

Ana continued on her way to where a rather severe looking man stood waiting. On her way she slowly straightened her back and raised her head, as though reaching for that extra inch. And when she met him, eye to eye, she offered him no apology.

“I know I’m late, but I had to set Malfoy straight again.”

“And did you?”

“Of course, Sev. Would you expect anything less?”

His lip twitched slightly. “Did you gather all you needed?”

“Yes, Sir. I’ve got all my books, my robes, my wand…” Ana smiled with excitement. “Of course I had my cauldron already, but I got a set of new phials. Did you get everything you needed?”

He sneered in true form. “They over hydrate their eye of newt. I will have to gather my own.”

“Well you show me how? A true Potions Master must know how to gather her own supplies.”

Perhaps. If there is time.”

Ana smiled again before they both turned to leave.

“Sev, can I ask you something? …Besides that, obviously.”

Sev’s lip twitched again. “If you must.”

“I must,” Ana replied.

“Then by all means, proceed.”

“Well, it’s just that Draco and I were discussing Hogwarts, and more specifically, what houses we’d be in. He’s convinced that he’ll be in Slytherin because that’s where all his family
was sorted. But I… I’m not as certain.

“He… He says we can’t be friends anymore if I get into Gryffindor. And I was wondering, would you still like me if I’m in Gryffindor?”

They came to an abrupt halt. Sev slowly looked sideways at Ana, but Ana stared straight ahead. She didn’t want Sev to see how frightened she was. Sev, however, didn’t need to look into her eyes to see into her mind.

“Mum was a Gryffindor. Wasn’t she?”

“Yes, but you won’t be,” Sev replied aloud.

“It’s possible though,” Ana said, turning to look at him.

“Hardly. You’re far too… ambitious to be a fool-hearty Gryffindor.”

“Ambitious? Well… I suppose I do want to prove to everyone why I’m the best.” Ana’s lips twitched this time.

“What about Hufflepuff?” Ana asked as they passed through a stone archway and into a back alley.

“Absolutely not,” Sev said as though Hufflepuff wasn’t even an option.

“Ravenclaw?”

“Ravenclaw…” He sighed. “Ravenclaw would be…acceptable.”

“Acceptable, but not preferred?”

“Precisely.”

Ana nodded as they moved through the old Pub in silence. There were a few families here and there, and a few patrons of the pub scattered around. No one paid Ana and Sev any mind as they went straight for the floo. Ana reached for a handful of powder silently.

“Belladonna,” Sev called. Ana turned and gave him her full attention.

“I do not often give my approval for anything, but when I do, it is not given lightly. Likewise, it is not easily lost. You, Belladonna, have my approval, and shall continue to have it despite whichever house you are sorted into.”

Sev was a man of few words, but when he spoke them, he meant them. Ana knew this and she smiled.

“Thanks, Sev.” Then she stepped into the fireplace and threw down then powder. “170 Spinner’s End.” She vanished in a swirl of green flames.
Ana pushed her trolley through the barrier between platforms 9 and 10 with an almost regal confidence. Once she was on the other side, however, that confidence turned to wonder. Having grown up in the magical world, Ana was familiar with a fair bit of magic already. She wasn’t simply boasting when she told Draco she could already brew the potions in her text book, and she was quite adept at flying as well. Standing on platform 9 ¾ however, magic seemed to take on a new meaning.

The scarlet red engine, with its billowing white smoke, seemed to glisten with the magic with which it was imbued. All around her there were witches and wizards, both young and old, dressed in their wizarding robes. And as for the Muggleborns and their families, they were easily spotted by their Muggle attire and dream-like wonder on their faces. Owls screeched and fluttered their wings against their cages, and the cats hissed as she passed by, but Ana didn’t care.

She was on her way to Hogwarts.

Already dressed in her robes, and with no one to say goodbye to, Ana handed off her trunk to be loaded and boarded the train. The train was less crowded than the platform, but only marginally so. Returning students were breaking off to find their friends. While the first years were blundering around trying to make friends.

Ana did not bother with any of that. In a manner of speaking, Ana and Draco were friends of convenience. None of the other children around Spinners End seemed to like Ana very much. Her excommunication from them bothered her at first, but Sev taught her how to lock those feelings of ineptitude away. Then, when Sev began working, Ana began her lessons at Malfoy Manor. She was forced to sit in on Maths, Languages, and Etiquette lessons with Draco. Their shared dislike for Madame Bonaparte is what sparked their friendship.

As she walked the length of the train looking for the perfect compartment, Ana discovered that she seemed to have the unfortunate luck of having rambunctious boys step in front of her. This time it took the form of a rather rough looking red head, older by the looks of it, jumping backwards out of a nearby compartment and ramming Ana shoulder first into the wall. An instant later Ana realized why he had leapt out of the compartment. There was a pop and a puff of smoke followed by a most wretched smell.

“Fred! George!”

“Whoa, sorry.”

“Oh, Perc!”

“You all right?”

“Oh that’s foul in’it, Freddie?”

“Charlie! You’re a Prefect. Do something!”
“I warned you not to touch it!” said the boy who bumped into Ana. He was now holding her by the shoulders and trying to help her stand up right again.

Ana looked around and noticed that the perpetrators were a band of brothers; they shared far too many characteristics to be merely cousins. Three of them were rather thin and lanky, but the fourth, the eldest, was rather shorter.

“Well if it isn’t the little snake,” one of the taller ones said.

“Oh. It’s you,” Ana said plainly, for it was the same boy that had nearly run into her in Diagon Alley.

“You two know each other?” his twin asked.

“Hardly.”

“We met in Diagon Alley.”

“Brashness must also be a shared trait,” Ana said coolly.

“You mean, apart from the red hair—”

“—and the freckles—”

“—and the bumping into little first years?”

“Little?” Ana said. She’d never been called little before, and she didn’t particularly like it.

Ana had learned a little tactic from Sev on how to appear even taller than one actually was. By straightening your back, squaring your shoulders, looking down your nose at the person, and pricking their mind just a bit—nothing to evasive mind you—you could usually get the other person to back down. This boy, however, did not, and it baffled Ana. Either, she thought, he was a natural Occulmens—which was highly unlikely given how rare they were—or he simply wasn’t easy to intimidate. Ana suspected it was the latter, and that it was probably due to the numerous threats his Mother must have issued on a daily basis.

Instead of backing down, the boy chuckled.

“Little Snake’s got bite.”

“It’s venomous at times too…when provoked,” Ana said.

“The name’s Fred,” the boy said, pointing to himself before pointing to his twin. “This is George. Our brothers Charlie, and Percy’s in there.”

The other boys all waved in turn. Even Percy poked his head out from the cabin.

“Pleased, I’m sure,” Ana said dryly.

“You know, it’s customary to give your name in return,” George said.

“It’s also customary not to introduce yourself by running into someone.”

Charlie laughed. Fred grinned.

Ana rolled her eyes. “I’m Ana.”
“Nice to meet you, Ana. Would you like to sit with us?” Charlie asked.

“I think it’d be safer not to.”

Charlie laughed again. “A quick study. That will serve you well in your first year. Well, as Percy pointed out, I’m a Prefect and I’m certain there’s something I’m supposed to be doing right now.”

“You have a meeting with the Head Boy and Girl,” Percy said, poking his head out again. “And you’re going to be late.”

“Oh! That’s right! I best be off then, unless… if you’d like, I can help you find a safe place to sit.”

“I can manage on my own,” Ana said quickly. Then she realized he was only trying to be nice. “Thanks…though.”

Charlie smiled brightly. “No problem.” Then he walked away.

“It’s the other way!” Percy called and Charlie turned and headed in the right direction.

Ana moved on down the train too. She knew by now most of the compartments would be full; she’d have to find a seat where she could. She came across one that had a couple of girls in it already, and a few of them were chatting insistently. The thought annoyed Ana more than anything, but at least there weren’t any puffs of smoke and wretched smells.

Ana slid the door open, drawing all eyes to her.

“May I sit in here?” she asked.

One of the chatty girls, with red bushy hair, looked Ana over with a look of disproval. But the other two seemed decent enough.

“Sure,” said a girl with straight black hair pulled into a ponytail. “I’m Katie. What’s your name?”

“Ana,” she said, taking a seat next to Katie and across from the other two.

“Hi, Ana. I’m Cho and this is Marietta. Just ignore her.”

“That’s a foul thin to say about your best friend,” the bushy haired Marietta said.

“Well, you can be foul sometimes,” Cho replied.

Marietta continued to glare reproachfully at Ana, but Ana was used to such looks. The girls around Spinners End often looked at Ana with such disdain, simply because she was a little different. One girl had referred to Ana as the Giraffe because of her long neck and legs. The next day the same girl suffered from a terrible and unexplained illness that caused her hair to turn a putrid green and emit a foul odor. This ignited a vicious rumor that the Wicked Witch had returned to Spinner’s End, and Ana discovered that she could give as good as she got…if it was worth her time.

Ana decided Marietta wasn’t worth her time. She turned her attention to Katie and took notice of the Quidditch shirt beneath her jumper.
“Do you play?” Ana asked.

“A little, yeah,” Katie replied. “It’s a little hard to sometimes, with all the Muggles around my house.”

“I play in my friend’s orchard where there are no Muggles to bother us. It’s a shame first years aren’t allowed to bring their own brooms, or I would surely make the house team.”

“Who do you pull for?” Katie asked.

“Puddlemere. You?”

“The Holyhead Harpies,” Katie said proudly.

“They’re good, I suppose.” Ana shrugged. “But they’re all girls.”

“What’s wrong with that?”

“What’s so special about being the best girl on an all-girl team, when you can be the best player and beat out the boys?”

Katie laughed “That’s true.”

“I like the Tornadoes,” Cho said, not wanting to be left out of the conversation.

“Not you too,” Marietta screeched pinching her face in disgust. “If you want to talk about some ruddy sport, then go sit with the boys.”

Ana’s eyes narrowed. She wondered how much trouble she’d be in if she hexed another student before they even arrived at the castle.

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“Baldock, Sadie,” Professor McGonagall, a severe and formidable witch called the first student to the front for the sorting.

A petite blonde walked forward slowly. The whole hall fell silent as the Sorting Hat was placed on her head. At first it appeared as though nothing was happening. But then the slit at the brim opened up and the Hat shouted.

“Slytherin!”

The table to Ana’s far left, clad in green and silver, broke into cheer. Sadie proudly made her way over, while Professor McGonagall called the next student.

“Bell, Katie.”

The girl Ana had sat next to on the train and on the boat ride across the lake was sorted into Gryffindor. The table to Ana’s immediate left erupted in applause. Ana watched Katie take her seat at the table and noticed that Fred and all his brothers were sitting there as well. Of course they’d be in Gryffindor, Ana thought.

Bletchley, Miles was sorted into Slytherin; their applause this time was louder than before. Cadwallader, Eurig was the first for Hufflepuff while Carrow, Flora and her sister Hestia both joined Sadie and Miles in Slytherin. Chang, Cho and Edgecombe, Marietta were sorted into Ravenclaw.
Ana watched Marietta stroll over to the table on the far right with loathing. The one other house that might have been all right if she was sorted into it, would now be unbearable. Ana had showed great restraint in not hexing Marietta on the train. The same could not be said if she was forced to share a dorm with her.

“Evans, Belladonna,” McGonagall called.

Ana turned her attention back to the sorting, and made her way to the front. Thoughts of potential hexes that she might have to put on Marietta if they had to share living spaces were still plaguing her mind as the Sorting Hat was placed on her head.

“Oh! Intriguing. Quite intriguing. Such a quick mind, and a thirst for knowledge. You would do well in Ravenclaw. And yet, such dark thoughts for one so young.”

“She won’t survive the year if you put me with her. I’ll do it; I swear I will. Do you want that on your conscious, Hat?”

The Hat chuckled in her head. “Yes, indeed you would. I see that. A thirst for knowledge, and an eagerness to prove your worth.”

“I know my worth.”

“…Yes. There can be no other choice then.”

“Slytherin!” the Hat shouted for all to hear.

Ana smirked as she slid from the stool and made her way over to her house table. She took a seat next to Sadie and across from the Carrow girls, her back to the wall. As she scanned the hall from her new perspective, she saw a familiar head of hair; Fred was watching her. She offered him a smile, but he turned away from her.

Ana was confused. She knew he saw her, so why did he turn away. He had seemed nice enough on the train, even if he was a little cocky and rowdy. Maybe Draco had been right. Perhaps Gryffindors and Slytherins couldn’t be friends.

A slight tingling of her mind drew Ana’s attention to the front table where the Professors all sat. Ana quickly caught sight of another familiar face watching her. She thought it curious that he wore his hair differently here. At home, he always pulled it back, but here at Hogwarts he chose to wear it loose so that it hide his face like a thick black curtain. He tilted his head just slightly and caught Ana’s eye. The facial twitch was so miniscule that anyone else would have missed it, but Ana was trained to catch such miniscule twitches.

He smiled, and Ana knew without a doubt, that Sev was both pleased and proud of her sorting. Ana decided that was enough for her. She wouldn’t worry herself with the thoughts of silly little Gryffindors.
Ana stood on Platform 9 ¾ waiting to board the Hogwarts Express to begin her second year, but this time she was not alone.

“Thank you for bringing me to the station, Mrs. Malfoy,” she said politely.

“It was little trouble, Ana,” Narcissa Malfoy replied. “And you will do as we discussed?”

“Yes, Ma’am. It’s as good as done.”

Draco curled his lip and looked up at Ana. “What did you discuss with Mother?”

Ana smiled but didn’t answer him. Narcissa, on the other hand, gently placed a palm to Draco’s cheek in a tender caress.

“Now, Draco, you mind your Professors, all of them, but especially Professor Snape.”

“Yes, Mother.”

Ana could hear Draco roll his eyes, even if he didn’t actually roll them. With no other affectionate display than the cheek stroke—the Malfoys were not big on public displays of affection, nor private ones at that—Ana and Draco turned to board the train.

“What did you discuss with Mother?” Draco demanded.

Before Ana could respond, their way was obstructed by a pair of red heads dashing in front of them.

“Oi! Watch it, Red!”

“Sorry! Didn’t see you there, Little Snake!” Fred called over his shoulder.

Ana had no further interaction with Fred since her sorting, so she was surprised to discover that he remembered her. She was even more surprised by the realization that she was happy he remembered her. Ana smiled.

“What was that?” Draco asked, pulling Ana from her thoughts.

“It was nothing, just a silly little Gryffindor.”

“You know he’s a Weasley right?”

“I know perfectly well who he is.”

“Good. So you know they’ll all Blood-Traitors. You shouldn’t be seen associating with them.”
“Does it look like I’m associating with him? No. I’m standing here talking to you. Merlin help me as to why that is.”

“No one asked you to,” he spat.
“On the contrary, your Mother did.”

“She did what?”

“She asked me to look after you, to make sure you stayed out of trouble, and that you earned top marks in all your classes. Don’t make a liar out of me, Draco.”

“I don’t need your help,” he sneered.

“Nor I yours. Now, I had half considered permitting you to sit with me, but now I think not. It’s time you learn to fly; fly from the nest, Little Dragon.”

“You’re being an arse, Ana.”

She was, wasn’t she, but she wasn’t sure why exactly. The only thing she could link it to was Draco’s comment about Fred being a Blood-Traitor. She didn’t buy into that nonsense herself, but she didn’t think she’d get that upset over it.

Draco moved on down the train. Ana could see him gloating about how he’d had the last word, and Ana couldn’t let that slide.

“Haven’t you heard, Draco,” she called after him. “I’m the Wicked Witch of Spinner’s End!”

Ana opened the compartment door and slipped inside before Draco could respond.

“What was that all about?” Sadie asked as Ana placed her broom on the rack above.

“Malfoy became even more of an arrogant arse last year without my calm guidance to tame him.”

Flora and Hestia sniggered.

“He’s a Malfoy. Royal arsery is his entitlement.”

Ana laughed.

“I meant the bit about the Wicked Witch,” Sadie clarified.

“Oh? Didn’t you hear?”

“Ana caused quite the scandal at the Ministry this summer,” Flora and Hestia said. Their dad worked for the Daily Prophet.

“She was called in for questioning by the Ministry for terrorizing a Muggle.”

“Ana? Our Ana?” Sadie turned to Ana with wide eyes.

“They’re exaggerating, Sadie,” Ana said. “I wasn’t called in and I’d hardly classify it as terrorizing.”

“Papa said they contemplated expelling her from Hogwarts,” Hestia said with a giggle.
“I’d like to see them try!” Ana shot back. “I didn’t break any school rules, and I didn’t violate any wizarding laws either.”

“What did you do, Ana?” Sadie asked.

“I wore my school hat outside one day, which mind you, our hats look less like witches hats than the ones some Muggle costume shops sell, and this girl freaked out.”

“That’s not all, Ana.”

“She was chanting too.”

“Ana! You know we’re not supposed to do magic outside of school now,” Sadie said.

“I wasn’t, Sadie. I swear. And I wasn’t chanting…per say. I was repeating ‘Carpe Diam. Vita Brevis. Semper Fidelis.’”

Sadie laughed. “And she thought you were casting a spell with that?”

Ana nodded and Hestia and Flora laughed as well.

“Why, Ana?”

“Because, maybe now the stupid Muggle will learn to keep her fat mouth shut. She was saying nasty things about my family.”

“What did the Ministry do?”

“Nothing,” Flora and Hestia said together.

“There was nothing they could do,” Ana said. “Because I didn’t break any rules. But by the end of summer, there were moving trucks at the girl’s house.”

Ana and the girls sat and discussed the remainder of their summer holidays. The Trolley Witch came by and Ana bought a few licorice wands. She wasn’t allowed to have many sweets growing up; Sev didn’t have a sweet tooth, and therefore neither did Ana, but she liked a good bit of licorice. About an hour into their train ride, there was a knock and the compartment door slid open. A first year girl, with wild bushy hair and large front teeth, stood in the entryway.

“Sorry to bother you, but have any of you seen a toad? A boy named Neville’s lost one.”

Both Flora and Hestia gave the girl a blank stare, but Sadie and Ana looked a little more sympathetic.

“No. Sorry,” Ana said. The girl nodded and moved on to the next compartment.

“Do you think they’ll ever stop letting Mudbloods like her in to Hogwarts?” Flora asked.

“How do you know she’s a Mudblood?” Sadie asked.

“You could smell the Muggle on her,” Hestia declared.

“No,” said Ana, drawing all eyes to her. “I don’t think they will ever stop. You eliminate the Mudbloods, and then what’s next? Half-bloods? You’d lose…seventy-five percent of the
population then, and that’s a low estimate. Then you’ll have to contend with all the deformities amongst those of pure blood, and eventually…there’d be none left. The Muggles learned long ago to marry outside the family.”

Ana’s words left a bitter aftertaste in the air, so she excused herself to the loo to change. Ana didn’t know what had come over her. First she snapped at Draco, then at Flora and Hestia. She knew that families like the Malfoys and Carrows, even the Baldocks to some extent, believed in the notion of blood purity. They thought they were better than everyone else simply because they had kept magic in the family.

Ana was not a slave to such beliefs. She didn’t fancy herself better than others because her blood was more pure. No. She just simply was better. She didn’t terrorize that girl because she was a Muggle, but because she was talking rubbish about Ana’s mum, a mum Ana never knew.

As Ana braided her hair over her right shoulder, as usual, she was reminded that she needed to ask Sadie to help her figure out how to wear it for Quidditch. Sadie was a natural when it came to beauty spells and hair charms; Ana was not. She left her hair long and pulled it to the side in a simple braid. It kept the hair out of her face well enough for day wear, but when she was flying it was fairly useless.

Thoughts of Quidditch and braided hair were on her mind when she left the loo…and ran face first into a stone wall.

“Ow. You have a very boney back.”

“You rammed me in the shoulder blade.”

Ana knew that voice. The wall turned around and she came face to face, and nose to nose, with red hair and freckles.

“Little Snake,” Fred greeted with a grin.

Ana huffed and rolled her eyes as though annoyed. “Why is it that you’re always in my way, Red?”

“Uh-uh-uh,” he said, shaking a finger. “This time, you ran into me, Little Snake.”

“You mean you haven’t caught on yet? You’re a Gryffindor, which means you’re always in my way. Now, move.”

Ana flicked her wrists and Fed stepped back as though pushed aside. Ana smiled as she moved past him, but she didn’t get far before he called out to her again.

“Did you hear?”

Ana turned around. She was confused. Fred had no further reason to talk to her; he’d already moved out of her way. So why was he calling out to her still? By the looks of it, his brother George and fellow Gryffindor Lee Jordan were also confused.

“Hear what?” Ana asked, forgetting to be Slytherin in her answer.

“Harry Potter’s on the train. He’s starting his first year.”
Harry Potter. The Boy Who Lived. His name was legendary in the Wizarding World. Ana didn’t see the big deal; he was just a boy, but he was known for his great defeat of Who-Know-Who. Harry Potter was only a year old when he allegedly defeated the Greatest Dark Wizard of modern times, and no one knows how he did it. Ana suspected it had more to do with Who-Know-Who’s own mistake than any great power wielded by a toddler. Still, the boy was world famous.

“Is he now?” Ana asked, her full Slytherin back in play. “Did you get his autograph? It might buy you a new brain. Or better yet, a new broom. You’ll need it this year once I make the team.”

“The Slytherins haven’t let a girl on the team in a decade,” Lee Jordan said.

Ana shrugged as though his words were of no consequence to her. “They’ll make an exception once they see how good I am.”

Lee snorted, and Ana narrowed her eyes at him. If there was one thing she hated more than anything else, it was people doubting her abilities.

“What position should I look for you in? So I know where to aim the bludger that will knock you off,” Fred asked, still grinning.

Ana looked back at him and her smile returned. “Chaser of course.”

“Not a Seeker then?”

“Seekers are all arrogant fools who think the game’s all about them while the Chasers do all the heavy scoring.”

“Our brother Charlie was a seeker—”

“—You remember him don’t you?” Fred cut across his brother. “You ran into him last year on the train.”

“If my memory serves me correctly, and it always does, he ran into me,” Ana said. “He was the burly one right? He was also the best player you had, and that’s saying something. We pummeled you last year in the final, and we’ll do it again this year, only worse, much worse. So on second thought, you might want to keep that broom of yours, and get the brain instead. It will serve you better in the long run.”

“Ana?”

Ana turned around to find Sadie. She was dressed in her robes as well.

“I came to see if you were… Are these Gryffindors bothering you?” Her lip curled slightly.

“Not at all, Sadie. I was just telling them how we were going to pummel them in Quidditch again. I think they’ve got the picture now, but with Gryffindors, you never can tell. Come on.”

Ana and Sadie turned and began walking away. As they walked, Ana found herself wanting to look over her shoulder to see if Fred was still watching her. But she daren’t try with Sadie there beside her.

“What was that?” Sadie asked quietly once they were far enough away from the boys.
“It was nothing. I came out of the loo and they were just standing there. Then we started talking about Quidditch.”

“Oh. OK.” It was clear Sadie didn’t really believe Ana. “Because for a moment there, it looked an awful lot like flirting.”

“Don’t be ridiculous, Sadie. He’s a Gryffindor.”

“Worse, Ana; he’s a Weasley.”

XXX

“Evans! Oi, Evans!”

Ana was stepping off the train when Graham Montague, a third year Slytherin, called out to her. Miles Bletchley and an unknown first year were with him.

“Yes, Montague? What is it?”

“Is it true? Is Professor Snape really your dad?”

Ana glanced briefly at Sadie and the Carrows. She had told them towards the end of last year after they’d bonded as friends, but they each swore not to tell. She knew by their eyes that they hadn’t. So then how…

“Where did you hear that?” Ana asked, trying to make the idea sound ridiculous.

“Draco Malfoy,” Miles replied. “My brother says he’s telling everyone that will listen. So is it true?”

“Snape’s…” How could Ana get around this now? She didn’t want to be known as Snape’s daughter, because she didn’t want any special treatment. But to deny it would be to declare Draco a liar, and he knew too many details for that to be believable.

“Snape’s not my dad,” Ana said. “But he did adopt me when I was very little. I kept my family’s name.”

“You should have told us, Evans,” Montague said. “This changes everything.”

That was precisely what Ana didn’t want. As Miles and Montague walked away, Ana caught sight of Draco. He was smiling smugly. Ana turned her back on him and headed for the horseless carriages. Fred and his brother had just climbed into one, and the look Fred gave her before turning away, told Ana that he had heard the newest rumor too.

It seemed this year that Ana would not only have to contend with the thoughts of silly Gryffindors, but also the growing arrogance of Draco Malfoy.
Ana woke with a vigorous excitement. Today was the day of the first Quidditch match of the season. It was Slytherin versus Gryffindor, and Ana was playing chaser along with Adrian Pucey and Captain Marcus Flint. She’d made the team just as she said she would. In fact, she’d flown so well at tryouts, she made it through on the first round.

After dressing and sitting on the floor for Sadie, to pull her hair up into a braided bun, Ana went down for breakfast. The atmosphere in the Great Hall was full of the same excitement that filled Ana. Everyone enjoyed a good match it seemed, and Gryffindor and Slytherin were known for having some of the most epic matches. Not even the fact that Harry Potter, still in his first year, somehow managed to wheedle his way onto the team and secure the use of his own personal broom, could bring Ana down today.

“Come on, Ana; we should head down to the pitch now,” Sadie said.

“Yeah… yeah, ok,” Ana said a little distractedly. She had just seen a few of the Gryffindor players stand to leave as well; Fred was among them.

Fred and Ana hadn’t spoken since the train, but every now and then she caught his eye in the Great Hall or in between classes. Each time they did, he’d offer a small grin that Ana couldn’t help but return.

So when she saw him walking towards the pitch, Ana steered her friends into his path. Of course, she did this without her friends knowing her true intentions. After all, it’s not like she liked Fred or anything; he was a Gryffindor. She just liked the banter that seemed to arise between them. It kept her on her toes, and brought out her best Slytherin. It was…fun.

As Ana and the girls walked by the group of Gryffindors, Ana saw Fred turn his head her way. Say something. Say something, she thought. But then she began to wonder if he would even bother with saying anything with Ana’s friends being around. Ana began to lose hope that he would, until…

“Little Snake,” he called. Ana grinned to herself and signaled for the girls to stop. “I see you made the team after all.”

And schooled her features before turning around. “Was there ever any doubt, Red?”

“A little, if I’m honest.”

“Well that’s on you then. You see, I never doubt my convictions.” Ana paused and ran her eyes over him. “I see you decided to keep the broom, but I see no evidence of the brain either. So what did you decide to do?”

“I’m saving it for another day, to see what else it can get me.”

“You know… that almost sounds like a brilliant idea.”
“Almost?”

“Yeah, there’s just something that could make it better. What is it…?”

“If it wasn’t from the mouth of a Gryffindor,” Flora muttered under her breath with a scowl.

“That’s perfect, Flora! Definitely a good point,” Ana said. A few more Gryffindors joined them. Harry Potter was among this group, and Ana couldn’t help herself.

“Well, if it isn’t the local…celebrity.” Ana had heard a rumor that Sev had called Harry that on his first day. By the look on his face, the rumor was true.

“You know, for someone so famous, I thought you’d be…taller. But I guess I was right about you after all; there’s nothing special about you is there?”

“Nothing special? He’s the youngest seeker in a century,” said a boy with red hair and freckles. Ana looked him over before looking back at Fred.

“He’s one of yours isn’t he?”

Fred considered his response before he and George answered.

“Yeah, I guess we—”

“—can claim him today.”

“He’s our brother—”

“—Ron.”

“Great Merlin! How many of you are there?” Ana asked.

“Seven,” Fred replied.

“Our sister—”

“—Ginny—”

“—starts next year.”

“She’s the youngest.”

“Your poor mother,” Ana said with false sincerity.

“Why? For having seven of us?”

“No. For even having you as one of them.” Ana smirked. Then she turned her attention back to Harry. “Don’t expect us to take it easy on you, just because you’re a first year. That’s not how we play.”

“I wouldn’t want you to,” Harry replied.

“And when you fall, I hear tuck and roll works pretty well. But then again…I think that’s only for short distances so…”

“That’s alright. I won’t fall.”
“Hmm…” Ana had to hand it to him; he didn’t seem at all worried about his first match.

“Don’t worry, Harry,” Fred began. “A perfectly aimed bludger—”

“—will knock her right off—”

“—her broom.”

“Do me a favor, Red,” Ana said, looking back at him. “Try not to cry too hard when
you’re bested by a girl.”

“You’re not a girl. You’re a Slytherin,” Ron said.

In an instant Ana’s eyes narrowed and her head whipped around to look at him. At the
same time, Hestia hissed and made to launch herself at Ron, who was pulled back by Harry. Sadie,
who was standing closest to Hestia, quickly wrapped an arm around her and restrained her.

“Easy there, Hes,” Sadie said.

“Mind your words, Weasley. When you throw rocks into a snake pit, they strike back
with venomous acuity,” Flora threatened. “Like vipers out of nowhere, you’ll never see us
coming.”

“Simmer down, Flora; I hear Gryffindors are all tough and stringy. You’d be better off eating a
Mandrake Root.” Ana said.

“It would probably taste better too,” said Sadie.

“Come on, girls; you’ll all want the perfect seat to watch us annihilate them.”

Ana and the girls turned and walked away. Behind her she could hear the faint sound of a
smack followed by Fred’s voice.

“Git!”

“Ow!” Ron cried.

“Why’d you say that for?”

“She’s Snape’s daughter. She deserves it.”

There was another smacking sound, and Ana smiled.

Ana parted with the girls outside the locker room. Then she grabbed her gear and quickly
went into the bathroom to change. By the sound of it Fred had defended her. Maybe he didn’t care
that she was “Snape’s daughter”—even though she wasn’t actually his daughter, but no one wanted
to listen to that part. Then again…what did it matter if he cared or not? It didn’t change anything.
He couldn’t like her; she was a Slytherin. And why did she care either way if he did or not?

Ana stepped out of the bathroom—fully dressed, excited, and ready to play Quidditch—
and into a room with six pairs of eyes glaring viciously at her.
“What the bloody ‘ell was that?” Marcus Flint demanded, getting in her face.

“What was what?” Ana asked.

“You! You were talking to the Gryffindors! We all saw you!” he indicated to the rest of the team.

“I wasn’t giving them trade secrets, or anything.”

Flint had a look on his face that said he was trying to figure out what she had just said.

“It was just a little pre-match taunting,” she continued. “I was trying to get in their heads, play mind games with them, and psych them out. It’s Harry’s first match after all.”

“It’s your first match too, Evans.”

“Yes, but unlike him, I’ve been flying since I could walk. I’ve studied the ins and outs of Quidditch, from the best matches to the best players. I know I’m better than him. He only made the team because he’s Harry freaking Potter!”

“And you only made the team because you’re Snape’s daughter,” Flint countered.

“I…What?”

“Do you think I would have let a girl on the team otherwise? Don’t be an idiot, Evans. And… try not to drop the Quaffle.”

Ana was stunned. For once she had no come back, nothing to say. Flint’s words rattled her more than she wanted them to. When they made their way out onto the pitch, Ana couldn’t bring herself to look anyone in the eye, not even to see Fred smile at her. And she nearly missed the whistle to start.
The next few weeks at work are going to be long ones for me, so I'm not sure when I'll get to post again. So here you go. Hope you enjoy!

Belladonna 5

Room on the Fourth Floor

Later that same day

The match, for Ana, was a complete disaster. Adrian and Marcus had acted as though they were the only two chasers on the team; they never once passed the quaffle to Ana. The two times she did manage to get her hands on it was because she stole it from Gryffindor. She managed to dodge the bludger sent her way by George, and send the quaffle soaring through a hoop past the Gryffindor Keeper, Oliver Wood.

In the end, however, Harry caught the snitch and Ana’s efforts weren’t enough to secure a Slytherin victory. Marcus didn’t acknowledge Ana’s goals, but neither did he try to pin the loss on her, which was a good thing she supposed.

Presently, Ana was standing in a deserted classroom on the fourth floor. A window there had an unobstructed view of the pitch. Ana was staring at it, and reliving every horrible moment of the match. She was so lost in her head, she didn’t hear when someone called out to her, not once but three times. It wasn’t until they touched her shoulder that she was brought back to her surroundings.

She jumped and whipped out her wand, sending a spark of electricity to whoever touched her.

“Ow!” Fred shook out his hand.
“What are you doing here, Red?”
“I came to see if you were all right.”
“Of course I am. Why wouldn’t I be?” Ana snapped.
“Because you didn’t answer me the first ten times I called to you.”
“Did you ever consider that maybe I didn’t want to talk to you? Or was that too much for your brain to process?”

“Fine,” he said after a brief pause, looking slightly hurt. “I’ll just leave then.”

He turned to do just that, and he made it all the way to the door before Ana stopped him.

“Don’t.” Ana didn’t know why she stopped him from leaving, but she did. Fred looked
over his shoulder at her.

“I… I’m sorry,” she said. “You are neither Marcus nor Potter, and therefore, undeserving
of that.”

“Wow. That must have really hurt.”

“Don’t push it, Red.”

Fred moved back into the room and sat on a nearby desk, but it was a minute or two
before either one spoke again.

“You… you were good out there,” he said.

Ana huffed and rolled her eyes. “We lost.”

“I didn’t say your team was good. I said you were.”

Ana looked sideways at him.

“Wood’s a great keeper,” he continued. “And you got two goals by him. Flint had to
knock him out to be able to score himself. And you stole the quaffle from Angelina and Katie.
Even Wood thinks you’re good.”

“He does?”

Fred nodded. “In our post game talk, he told us to keep an eye on you.”

Ana smiled. “Well… of course I was good. I told you I was.”

Fred chuckled and shook his head.

“Thanks… though,” she added. “You… You weren’t a complete waste of air.”

Fred looked at her a little funny.

“That’s the most of a compliment you’ll get out of me, Red. I am a Slytherin after all.”

“Duly noted, Little Snake.”

Ana smiled a little more before she moved to sit on a desk as well.

“So… why are you up here alone?” Fred asked. “Why aren’t you with your friends?”

“Why aren’t you with yours?”

“I’m doing reconnaissance for our next prank,” he said proudly and without hesitation.
“Now it’s your turn.”

Ana sighed. “Sadie and the Carrows, they… they don’t get Quidditch like we do. They’re
all for Slytherin pride and squashing those pesky Gryffindors…”

“I’ll let that slide since you’re clearly upset.”

Ana grinned. “To them, Quidditch… it’s just… it’s a ruddy sport.”

Fred gasped loudly and clutched his chest. “Blaspheme!”
“I know! Those are their words, not mine!”

“You need to find some better friends.”

“I do hope you’re not suggesting yourself for the role.”

“I’ll have you know, that I’m an excellent friend.”

“Right… That’s why they send you to roam the castle alone…because you’re an excellent friend and not because they simply wanted to get rid of you.”

“I…” Fred’s mouth made a few popping sounds, like a fish out of water. “Well played, Little Snake.”

“Of course it was. And for the record, my friends are good friends. The Carrows are actually quite funny; though their sense of humor is a bit twisted. Flora does this impersonation of Professor Sprout that is brilliant. Hestia will jump to defend a friend in an instant, as demonstrated by this morning when she nearly devoured your brother…”

“Stupid git.”

“…And Sadie, Sadie’s just the best. They’re great, they just don’t understand what Quidditch means to me. So when I told them what Marcus said, they were sympathetic but they didn’t understand why it upset me the way it did.”

Fred’s demeanor changed slightly, and his posture stiffened. “What did Flint say?”

“He…” Ana looked at him and contemplated on whether or not she should tell him. She had a feeling, though, that Fred wouldn’t let up until she did.

“He said I only made the team because of my…connection to Professor Snape.”

Fred’s eyes widened. “Snape told him to put you on the team?”

“What? No! No, he wouldn’t do that,” Ana insisted. “No, that was all on Marcus Flint. Sev…”

“Sev?”

“That’s what I call Professor Snape; though, I’m not supposed to while at school, so don’t you dare say anything about it to anyone else. Not even George.”

“Alright, alright. I won’t repeat it; I promise. You were saying?”

“Well…Sev and I had an agreement. There’s a reason no one knew our connection until Draco blabbed his mouth; we didn’t want everyone to know.”

“Can’t say I blame you. I wouldn’t want anyone to know he’s my dad either.”

“He’s not my dad,” Ana said fiercely. “But I’ll still defend him as if he was.”

“He’s not your dad?” Fred asked, brows furrowed in confusion.

“No. He hasn’t even formerly adopted me. I’m just…his ward, his responsibility.”

“Where are your parents?”
“They’re both dead.”

“Oh. I’m sorry. I…I didn’t know. How?”

Ana shrugged. “In the war, I guess.”

“You guess? Snape hasn’t told you?”

“Sev… he doesn’t really like talking about them much. He’s mentioned my Mum once or twice, and I have a picture of her. It’s very old though; it’s faded and torn around the edges. She was eleven, I think, just starting Hogwarts. But even then, she was pretty.”

“What about your dad?”

“Sev never mentions him, except to say he’s not worth mentioning. I get the feeling he wasn’t a very good person though.”

“How did you end up with Snape of all people?”

“I…I’m not sure. But I don’t regret it. I don’t wish for it to have been someone else. I don’t even wish for it to have been my parents. They must have died when I was really little, because I don’t remember them at all. It’s always just been me and Sev.”

“So, let me get this straight… Snape’s not really your dad; he’s just your…what? Your guardian?”

Ana nodded.

“But, according to Flint, he’s the only reason you’re on the house team? Which, understandably, upset you and threw you off your game a bit.”

“More than just a bit, I’d say. Today’s match was not the debut match it was supposed to be.”

“Not for you anyway, right? I mean, Harry had a pretty impressive debut.”

Ana scoffed. “He couldn’t even keep his broom under control the whole time. You saw him up there, flapping about like blind hippogriff. Potter has no place on a Quidditch pitch. He only made it because of his defeat of You-Know-Who.”

“Harry’s actually a decent flyer; you’d think he’d been doing all his life. I don’t know what happened today. And he’s a pretty decent bloke too. You might get along with him if you gave him the chance.”

“If you’re going to sit here and sing the praises of Harry freaking Potter, then you can go. I’ll hear none of it.”

“What if… What if we didn’t talk about him or Marcus Flint?”

“Or your brother.”

“Which one?”

“The gitty one.”

Fred grinned. “Agreed.”
Fred and Ana stayed in the deserted classroom on the fourth floor for a half hour more, talking about anything other than gitty brothers, crappy captains, or Harry freaking Potter. Then Fred decided that he really should get back to his recon. Though now he was changing his target from his brother Ron to Marcus Flint.

“Just promise me you won’t do anything too…detrimental to him. He’s a prat, but we have a match against Ravenclaw coming up. Don’t jeopardize our chances at winning,” Ana said.

“So long as you promise to prove to Flint why he’s a prat and show him that you’re the best player on the team.”

“Somehow, I think I got the easier job.”

“You’re probably right. See you around, Little Snake.”

“If you’re lucky,” Ana replied, eliciting a grin from Fred.
Ana was feeling much better after her talk with Fred. She felt better than better really; she couldn’t explain it. She felt like she could have stayed there for another hour or two talking to him. Not only was he funny, but he was also quite brilliant.

Ana knew, however, that at some point Sadie would come looking for her. Ana could not risk being caught talking to Fred again, not after the confrontation in the locker room. So after he left, she made her way back to the dungeons. Instead of going straight to the common room, though, she stopped at Sev’s office.

“Enter,” he said in his dry, dull tone.

Ana stepped into a dimly lit room that reeked of freshly stewed frog legs. The cauldron still simmered in the corner. Sev stood behind his work bench, finely grinding the dried petals of a belladonna flower; his was hair was pulled back like she was so used to seeing.

“Miss Evans,” Sev said with a brief glance at Ana. “Tell me, what potion am I brewing?”

Ana moved forward to better asses the ingredients. “Are you using the whole frog leg, or just the toe?”

“The toe alone.”

“How many flowers?”

“Three and a quarter.”

“So a poison then.”

Ana looked around at some of the other ingredients. Frog toes and beetle eyes were very common ingredients and used in a variety of potions. Belladonna petals were common in poisons; the more flowers used the more toxic the poison. None of this, however, really helped narrow down the poison.

“Five…four…” Sev began counting.

Then she saw the key ingredient: a tangled, orange root with a deep-red, waxy sort of ooze dripping down the end.

“Three…two…”

“Bloodroot Poison,” Ana said confidently.

“It’s effects?”

“Bloodroot Poison, is a mild to moderate poison depending on the concentration of the bloodroot. It is not lethal, at first, but it is said to be highly uncomfortable and quite painful. It
causes roots to sprout from various points of the body, and burrow themselves in whatever they can rendering the victim immobile. The roots also kill the skin tissue from where they sprout, leaving behind large eschars in their wake once removed.”

“And the antidote?”

“There are a few things that can be used to counteract the effects. A bezoar, obviously, a cup of Antidote to Uncommon Poisons, or you can drink a whole liter of dragon’s blood, which is…ill advised.”

Sev remained quiet and Ana realized she’d made a mistake. She quickly searched her head for what she left out, but she came up empty.

“The stinksap from a mature Mimbulus mimbletonia will dissolve the roots,” he said.

“Yes, but without a proper antidote, the roots will res-sprout at dawn, and they’ll be reinforced in strength most likely killing the victim this time.”

Sev’s lips twitched with pride. “Grab a blade and slice the bloodroot into seven even strips.”

Ana was happy to oblige. She slid on a pair of dragon hide gloves and began slicing.

“Why, may I ask, are you brewing Bloodroot Poison?”

“That does not concern you.”

“Fine, then I’ll get to the reason why I came here.” Ana knew the answer already, but after her talk with Fred she needed confirmation. “Did you tell Marcus Flint to put me on the team?”

Her question was followed by a silence filled with the grinding of petals and the slicing of roots.

“So that is what had you so distracted this morning.”

“Flint said you’re the only reason why I made the team.”

“I am not in the business of handouts, Belladonna. If Mr. Flint thought putting you on the team would somehow earn favor with me, he was sorely mistaken. Mr. Flint has no favor to earn. He is not in my class; his abysmal skills rival those of Longbottom’s, and I certainly will not reward him for his failure to see your potential.”

Ana looked up and smiled. “What’s the next step?”

“Add the root slice by slice, stirring anti-clockwise twice and clockwise once.”

Ana did as instructed while Sev stood watch behind her.

“When it emits a red haze, add the powdered petal. Stir until it turns purple.”

After about a minute, Ana added the petal. She then continued to stir for a good ten minutes after that. She stirred anti-clockwise first then changed direction after every seventh turn. Sev had taught her long ago that switching directions accelerated the potion. Sev said nothing on how well, Ana brewed; he never did. He only spoke to offer corrections, not praise.
“Now it must stew for twenty four hours,” he said. Ana stepped back and removed her
gloves.

“Can I come by tomorrow to see if I was successful?”

“I’m afraid I have to turn this potion over as soon it’s ready.”

“Oh. I understand, Sir. Thank you for the instruction.”

“Perhaps I can set aside a phial for you to test later. I do not believe the Headmaster will
need the whole cauldron. Now, tell me, how are you lessons progressing?”

Ana and Sev moved over to his desk, and away from the stewing poison.

“Well, I think… for the most part.”

Sev rose a single eye brow, but said nothing.

“Herbology is great. We’re working with Mandrakes this year; Professor Sprout says
she’ll let me harvest some roots along the way for my stores. Professor Flitwick says I have a
talent for Charms, which I agree with. Professor Quirrell, however, is... odd; the persistent garlic
odor makes it hard to focus in class, so I have to do most of my own teaching there. And
transfiguration…it’s not bad, but it’s not an outstanding either. I think I’m averaging an acceptable
in it.”

“Belladonna…”

“I know; I know I can do better. And I’m trying. I really am, but… I don’t think Professor
McGonagall likes me very much. That’s not an excuse, Sev.” Ana could see him about to protest
so she pushed on.

“When the professor doesn’t like you, when she’s biased against you, it makes it difficult
to learn.”

“I can... speak with Minerva, if you like.”

“No. Please don’t, Sev. It’s my problem, and I’ll fix it. I’ll… work harder.”

“Indeed.”

Sev sat back in his chair and folded his hands on his lap. Ana felt the familiar pricking of
her mind, and she allowed him entrance.

Ana pushed everything to the back of her mind until all that remained was an empty
classroom on the fourth floor. This time, instead of a certain red haired boy standing before her, it
was Sev. He looked around curiously.

“A classroom?”

“It has a good view of the Quidditch pitch,” Ana replied. His eyes flicked out the window.
“Was there something you wanted? Something that couldn’t be said aloud?”

“I thought we would test your limit.”
“Oh! Brilliant!” Ana shook her head and the classroom disappeared, leaving only white space. Then she smirked. “Give it your best go.”

XXX

Ana and Sev remained sitting in his office in a battle of minds for nearly an hour before Sev decided she’d had enough. When he withdrew from her mind, Ana was left woozy. He quickly summoned a wideye potion, and Ana drank it at once.

“Am I interrupting?” said very calm voice from the doorway.

“Headmaster Dumbledore,” Ana greeted. “We were just practicing. How was I, Sev?”

“Your occulummy is strong for your age,” he replied. “Don’t let it weaken. Your legilimency could use some work. Perhaps it is time we resume your lessons.”

“Excellent! What about on Sundays then?”

“Weekdays would be better.”

“Yes but… I’ll have my lessons to study for and Quidditch practice. And then matches on Saturdays. Before you say anything about how these lessons are more… well, just more. You do want that Quidditch cup again, don’t you? You want to beat Gryffindor again. Well, I can do that for you.”

There was a moment of silence in which they stared one another down.

“Sunday’s then. Seven sharp, here, in my office, starting immediately.”

“Wonderful! Thanks. Well, I have a Charms essay to finish before then, so I should head back to the common room now. Thanks again, Sev. It was great to see you again, Headmaster Dumbledore. I missed you coming by for tea this summer.”

“My apologies, Miss Evans. I was very busy this summer, but I shall make every effort to come by this summer,” Dumbledore replied.

“I look forward to it. Goodnight, Sir. Goodnight, Sev.”

Sev simply nodded as Ana left. Albus Dumbledore turned and looked at his former pupil, now colleague, and smiled as he took Ana’s vacant chair.

“Fatherhood suits you well, Severus.”

“I am not her father,” Sev spat.

“No. Of course not. One wouldn’t want to make that mistake twice.”

Both men sat in silence for a minute.

“How is she?” Dumbledore asked.

“She is adjusting well to all her lessons. She is stubborn and prideful in her ways, but not reckless and arrogant like some.”

“So her house suits her then?”
“Very much so.”

“And how are her…other skills?”

Severus shared a look with the old Headmaster that many would have shied away from, but not Dumbledore. He sat as resolute as ever.

“She grows stronger. She nearly had me a moment ago.”

“Which, I presume, is why you offered to resume her lessons.”

“I need to strengthen the barrier that is there.”

“Do you think it…prudent, Severus, to continue to do so?”

“I think it is my duty to decide what is best for her. That is the task I was entrusted with, is it not?”

“Indeed it is, and you have performed it admirably.”

“Then, unless you wish to relieve me of it, I will continue to do as I deem necessary. I will deliver the Bloodroot Poison to you tomorrow, so that you may add it to the chamber. Is there anything more you require of me…Sir?”

Dumbledore sighed and rose from his chair. “Not tonight, Severus. Thank you.” He began to move towards the door, but stopped just shy of leaving. “You make a great show of not caring for young Miss Evans, Severus. But we both know that is not true. Goodnight.”
9 May 1992

“Evans takes the Quaffle again! Can anyone stop this girl? Please, someone stop her!” Jordan’s voice rang through the speaker.

“And she scores! Slytherin now leads ninety to ten! But wait! Diggory has spotted the snitch! Higgs is flying after him! The beaters are closing in. Stop him! Stop him!”

“Jordan…” McGonagall warned.

“Oh no! Evans has taken advantage of the distraction; she’s scored another ten points for Slytherin! Diggory’s on the snitch again. He’s a fingertip away! He’s going to get it! Hufflepuff’s going to… Oh Bludger!”

“Jordan!”

“Knocked him off his broom, Professor! Higgs has caught the snitch! Slytherin wins 250 to 10! It all comes down to the final match! Can Gryffindor beat Ravenclaw for the cup?!”

As Ana recalled the last few moments of the match that day, a reflection appeared behind her in the window.

“I wasn’t sure if you would come…not after last time,” Ana said.

Fred and Ana had continued to meet after each match in that same deserted classroom on the fourth floor. They’d sit and talk until curfew about the match, or world famous matches, or pranks if they so desired. Ana enjoyed every moment of it. But their last meeting had ended in a heated argument.

The match had been Gryffindor versus Hufflepuff, and for reasons unknown to them, Sev had decided to act as referee. When Fred pointed out Sev’s obvious biasedness, Ana had jumped to his defense. Needless to say, it did not end well.

Fred shrugged a shoulder as he slowly moved into the room. It was evident that he wasn’t too sure about being there either.

“He’s your…family, or whatever. I can understand defending your family.” He moved to the desk with the confidence more befitting of a Gryffindor. “If you had said some of the things
about George that I had said about Snape, then I would have reacted in a similar fashion.”

“I’m pretty sure I’d be hairless right about now, if that was the case,” Ana said.

“Not hairless,” Fred said quickly. “I…I might have turned it green or something…”

“Well, I wear green well.”

“Yes, you do…”

“I…”

Silence. There was silence as the blood rushed to both of their cheeks and they quickly averted their eyes from one another.

“In…In all fairness,” Ana said, breaking through the silence. “I must admit that Sev taking up refereeing is unusual. He doesn’t like flying and he likes Quidditch even less, except when it wins him the House Cup. And his calls weren’t…entirely justified. If McGonagall had decided to referee today’s match, then I too would be highly suspect of her motives.”

“Let’s make an agreement that no matter what happens, we’ll leave family out of it.”

“Agreed,” said Ana whole-heartedly.

“Now on to today’s match,” Fred said with a smile. “That was some brilliant flying you did. The way you evaded those bludgers, it was inspiring.”

“Thanks.” Ana blushed slightly under his praise. “But Hufflepuff’s beaters aren’t half as good as you and George are.”

“This is true.”

Ana rolled her eyes. “The cup is within our grasp.”

“It’s within ours too. When we beat Ravenclaw…”

“If you beat them; they’re really good this year.”

“So are we, Little Snake.” Fred grinned.

XXX

Things did not quite go the way they were expected to go. Harry Potter and his friends found themselves in the middle of a big to do that involved a stone, a series of trials, and Professor Quirrell possessed by Who-Know-Who. And apparently, Quirrell tried to kill Harry and so Harry killed him…or something like that.

As a result, Harry was in hospital when the final match between Gryffindor and Ravenclaw took place. Without their seeker, Gryffindor lost terribly and Slytherin won the Quidditch Cup, earning them enough points to secure the House Cup as well.

Ana walked into the Great Hall for the leaving feast to find it decorated in green and silver once again. The Slytherin table was bursting with pride, while the remaining three tables looked rather glum. As she made her way along the table with the girls, she was stopped by several people and congratulated for an excellent Quidditch season. Even Marcus Flint saw fit to acknowledge her as a valuable member of the team.
“Tryouts for next season will be on the first weekend back,” he said. “That is…if I’m still Captain.”

It was clear to Ana he was trying to assert his authority, and so she let him. For now. “Don’t worry, Marcus; I’m sure you will be. I’m not quite ready for that yet.”

He narrowed his eyes slightly. “Yes well… We will need to find a new seeker, as Higgs is leaving this year. And just because you flew decently enough this year, doesn’t secure your spot for next year. If you’re out flown, you will be replaced.”

“Naturally, but don’t worry, Marcus…” Ana smirked. “I won’t be out flown.”

He huffed, but Ana could have sworn she saw a smirk as he walked away. Finally, Ana caught back up with the girls and took her usual seat with her back to the windows. As she looked across the way she found Fred sitting next to his brother and Lee. He looked disappointed to have not won, but not quite displeased that Ana had. Ana smiled as he mouthed the words, “Next year.”

“I don’t think so,” Ana mouthed back.

“What was that?” Flora asked, turning to look over her shoulder. Fortunately for Ana, Fred had quick reflexes too and had turned to talk to his brother.

“Nothing,” Ana said. “I was yawning.” Flora pinched her eyes in suspicion, but did not give voice to them.

Students continued to flood the hall until all the tables were full. Then the Headmaster stood up for his traditional end of year speech. And it was rather typical for him: great job on the exams, don’t use magic outside of school, empty your heads so that you may fill them again next year. When he began discussing points, the results were as such. Gryffindor was in fourth with three hundred and twelve points. Hufflepuff had three hundred and fifty-two points. Ravenclaw sat in second with four hundred and twenty-six points, and Slytherin had four hundred and seventy-two points. Then Dumbledore said three words no Slytherin wanted to hear.

Last. Minute. Points.

He gave fifty points each to Harry’s friends, Ron and Hermione, for participating in events that they shouldn’t have been involved in. Sixty points went to Harry himself for destroying poor Professor Quirrell. Gryffindor was now tied for first with Slytherin. Ana might have been all right if Dumbledore had stopped there. Sharing the House Cup wasn’t ideal, but it would have been…acceptable. But Dumbledore didn’t stop there.

He gave ten points to a boy named Neville for “standing up to his friends.” What did that even mean? Ana stood up to her friends every day and told them when they were being prats. Where were her points?

The banners changed from green to red, and instantly, the room exploded in deafening applause. It wasn’t just the Gryffindors who were celebrating their unexpected and unforeseen win; Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff joined in on the action. Even a few teachers seemed pleased in the change of banner.

Ana, of course, was not. She didn’t like losing—who does really—but she was all right with it, if it was deserved. Ana did not feel these last minute points were deserved, especially not the amounts that were given. No teacher ever gave out fifty points, nor did they often take away so
many, unless it was for something severe like skipping curfew. And Ana was pretty sure that to do whatever it is they had to do, Harry and his friends had broken curfew along with several other school rules.

Ana also thought that Dumbledore’s “generosity” was highly self-serving in that his old house was once more on top. She would definitely have to speak with him about this. Because she refused to let Gryffindors, or Harry Potter, stand in her way.

Chapter End Notes

I know; it's short, but this finishes Harry Potter's first year. More to come with Fred and Ana soon.
12 August 1992

“Ana? Where did you go?”

“Freddie, you’ve got to see this. Freddie?”

It was a random Wednesday in August, and Ana had met up with Sadie and her father to do their back to school shopping. They weren’t they only ones who decided to do their shopping that day; Diagon Alley was full of other families doing their shopping too. Over the summer, Ana had missed her secret talks with a certain Gryffindor, in an empty classroom on the fourth floor, more than she thought she would. So when she saw that very same Gryffindor at the bookshop, she thought surely fate had smiled on her that day.

Ana and Fred had found each other in the towering stacks of Flourish and Blotts. Now they stood talking, rather animatedly, about the upcoming Quidditch season and marveling over the newly released *Nimbus 2001*. They had both seen it on display at Quality Quidditch Supplies and read about it in *Which Broomstick*. They were both eager to own one, but they both knew they never would. The Weasley’s simply could not afford one, and Sev, though he could, never would buy one. Perhaps in a few years when it was ten models old and the price significantly reduced, then they might get the chance.

When Ana didn’t answer her best friend, Sadie went looking for her. And when Fred didn’t respond to his brother, George went looking for him. They met somewhere in the middle.

“Weasley.”

“Baldock.” They greeted each other with mild hostility.

“You’re in my way,” Sadie said in a bored tone.

“No. I think you’re in my way,” George replied, towering over her four-eleven frame.

Sadie scoffed. “I’m hardly intimidated by height. Have you seen my best friend? She’s something of a giraffe.”

“Mind you, a very pretty giraffe,” Ana said as she came around a corner and joined the conversation.

“Meh… a semi-adequate one at least,” Sadie teased. “What are you doing up here?”

“I…”

Sadie’s eyes drifted over as Fred came around another corner and joined them.

“…was getting a book for one of my classes.” Ana held up a copy of *Unfogging the Future* by Cassandra Vablatsky.
“I can’t believe you signed up for divination.”

“Well, I didn’t want to bore myself with Arithmancy.”

“I chose classes I thought would challenge me.”

“And that is why you’ll be selected for Prefect over Flora or Hestia.”

“Not including yourself in that, Little Snake?” Fred asked.

Ana scoffed. “No. I know I won’t get it; Sev wouldn’t dare. Unlike some, I don’t need to be told I’m great, to know I’m great. Sev’s not really big on unsolicited praise.”

“He’s not big on solicited praise, either,” Sadie murmured.

“True. Very true. I could brew an absolutely perfect potion, which I have…on numerous occasions, and he’d never tell me how good it was. If he’s not constantly critiquing or calling your skills abysmal, then you know you’re doing fairly well.”

“Huh. Maybe that’s why he never says anything about our potions, Georgie,” Fred said, bumping his brother in the arm. George said nothing in response; neither did Sadie. Instead, they continued to glare at each other reproachfully.

“Wow—”

“—a couple of chatter boxes, aren’t they?”

“My thoughts exactly, Little Snake,” Fred and Ana said.

“You know, I…”

“Look! There he is, Ana!” Sadie exclaimed, interrupting Ana and pointing vigorously down at the ground floor. Gilderoy Lockhart, acclaimed author, had just stepped out onto a make shift stage. Sadie was something of an admiring fan of Lockhart’s. Ana was resigning herself to hold judgement until she read his books. She had to admit though, his smile was rather charming. But as they stood, looking over the railing, Ana was acutely aware of Fred standing next to her, and she couldn’t help but to notice that Lockhart’s smile paled in comparison to Fred’s.

Ana was busy admiring Fred’s smile when Sadie said, “What’s Potter doing down there?”

Ana quickly looked away from Fred and down at the stage below. Harry stood with Lockhart; Lockhart’s arm was around Harry’s shoulder, and they were posing for pictures together.

“Trying to steal someone else’s glory, by the looks of it,” Ana said.

“What are you talking about?” George asked, looking back at her.

“Exactly what I said,” Ana shot back. “He’s a glory thief.”

“Glory thief? Look at him! The poor bloke looks miserable down there.”

“He looks filthy,” Sadie said. “What happened to him? Did the Muggles not know how to bathe him?”

“Nah. It’s just his first attempt at the floo,” Fred replied.
“Of course it was,” Ana said, rolling her eyes. “And I bet he managed that about as well as his first match.”

“He won that match, in case you’ve forgotten,” George said, turning on her in anger.

Fred quickly stepped between them. “Easy now; let’s not fight, shall we?”

“But he didn’t win you the season, now did he?” Ana said, ignoring Fred. “No! He was laid out in hospital because taking my Quidditch glory wasn’t enough; he had to go and involve himself in some illicit affair all because he’s Harry Potter. But I promise you this, he won’t get one over on me again.”

“Sadie! Ana! It’s time to go girls,” Mr. Baldock called up to them.

“We’ll be right there, Dad. Come on, Ana.” Sadie pulled on Ana’s arm lightly and they both began to leave.

Fred watched her take a few steps before calling out to her. “Little Snake…”

And looked back at him, but he didn’t say anything more. He didn’t need to. Ana gave a faint smile and a slight nod; Fred relaxed. He knew she wasn’t mad at him, and he wasn’t mad at her. Ana turned back to Sadie and they carried on their way.

“Ana, please,” Sadie began in a whisper. “Please, be careful.”

“Why”

“He’s a Gryffindor, Ana.”

“Why do you keep telling me that?”

“Because, sometimes I wonder if you really know what that means.”

XXX

Fred watched Ana leave before turning back to his brother. George was looking at him with a face full of concern and confusion.

“I don’t know how you stand it, Freddie.”

“Stand what?”

“Being friends with the likes of her.”

“We’re not…” Fred tried protesting, but he knew it was pointless. “She’s really not all that bad, once you get to know her. You might even find her likable, Georgie.”

“Just…be careful with her, Freddie.”

“Be careful of what?”

George looked at his brother, wondering, not for the first time, if he needed to be reminded of what Slytherins really were.

“She’s a snake, Freddie. Remember that.”
Fred sighed deeply. “I know, Georgie. I know.”
Ana glanced over her shoulder to see a small blonde boy hurrying her way. She rolled her eyes and carried on her way to the pitch for tryouts, not bothering to slow down. If Draco Malfoy really wanted to talk to her, then he’d have to put forth the effort. He caught up to her with an almost breathless pant a moment later, broomstick in hand.

“You don’t speak to me for a year and so you revert back to ‘Evans;’ is that it?”

“Look, I… I didn’t know you and Snape were keeping it a secret, alright? Otherwise I wouldn’t have said anything. I swear, Ana,” Draco pleaded with her.

Ana didn’t believe him for a second, but…she was more or less over it now. “Yeah, all right,” she said.

“Good, because since we’re going to be on the team together, then I thought we should be friends again.”

“You’re a little sure of yourself. You have to make the team first, Draco.” Ana glanced sideways at him, and that’s when she saw it. They both came to an abrupt halt. “Wait! That’s a 2001!”

Draco grinned proudly at his new broom. “It’s a gift from father. It’s faster, sleeker and more efficient than the Nimbus 2000. I’ll be sure to make the team with this.”

“You may have the fastest broom, Draco, but you’ll still need to catch the snitch if you want on.”

“Don’t worry about that, Ana. It will all work itself out.”

Ana pinched her eyes in confusion, but quickly shook it off and resumed walking. Quite a few people had turned up to try their best at making the team. All the old faces were there, with the exception of Nott and Higgs who both left last year. Ana also noticed a few faces she beat out last year such as Graham Montague and Chadwick Warrington.

“Hey, Evans, I hope you don’t mind, but I’ll be going out for chaser again this year,” Montague said.

“That’s alright. I’m sure Adrian won’t mind giving up his spot for you,” Ana replied with a grin.

Adrian looked over at them and smiled. “And miss out on another season with you? Sorry, Graham, better luck next year.”

“Alright, alright, enough talk. Let’s get gowned to business. Who are my chasers?” Marcus
asked. Six people stepped forward including Ana and Adrian. “Pucey, Evans, and Montague, you’re on a team. Warrington, Bole, and… You, what’s your name?”

“Mc—McKoy,” the trembling first year replied. “Marcus McKoy.”

“Have you ever played Quidditch before?”

“Y—yes, Sir. Back home with my brothers.”

“Fine then. You’re on a team with Warrington and Bole. Bletchley, you’re keeper. Now let’s see what you six have? I’m only looking for two of you.”

The idea was simple. They acted as two opposing teams trying to score against Bletchley. Adrian and Ana, having been on the team together last year, worked well together. Montague and Warrington weren’t bad either, but whereas Warrington stole the quaffle from both Adrian and Montague, he could not steal it from Ana. And Ana had the most successful goal attempts, only missing once.

After a few attempts each, Marcus began eliminations. Believe it or not, but McKoy was not the first to go… if only because Marcus couldn’t remember his name and called Bole out first. Bole stuck around to try out for a beater position however. After that it became teams of two chasers trying to score while beaters were trying to knock them off with a bludger. Ana was paired with Montague. They made a good team, but in the end Ana and Adrian won out over the other two. Bole made it on as beater along with Derrick, and Bletchley kept his post as keeper.

Then it came down to the open seeker position. There were seven people trying out for seeker, of which Draco was one. Draco had the fastest broom by far, but it takes more than a fast broom to be a good seeker; you need dexterity, sight, and a good bit of skill. Draco was never the first to spot the snitch nor the quickest catch. And, to be frank, he spent most of his time showing off his new broom. So Ana was quite surprised when Marcus named him as the new seeker.

XXX

Ana’s surprise turned to disgust about a week later. She woke to find a long, narrow package at the foot of her bed. By its shape and size, Ana knew it could only be one thing, but she knew Sev wouldn’t have bought her new one. Especially not this one.

“Mother of Merlin,” she whispered as she opened the box.

“What is it?”

“It’s a new broom.”

“That’s not just any broom though.”

“Did Sev buy it for you as an early birthday?”

The girls carried on, asking question after question and answering themselves; Ana remained speechless. She knew, without a doubt, that Sev had not sent her the broom, not even as a birthday and Christmas gift for the next ten years. It simply was not his style. Ana searched the box over looking for a note or an explanation. All she found was a simple tag that read:

EVANS, BELLADONNA: CHASER

Ana had a suspicion as to where the broom came from, but she was hoping she was
wrong. She quickly got dressed in her practice robes, and went down to the common room with her new broom in tow. She wasn’t the only one in the common room, but she was the first team member there.

“Hey, Evans,” she was greeted.

“Morning, Montague. Have you seen anyone form the team yet?”

“No. Why…whoa! That’s a Nimbus 2001, isn’t it?”

“Yeah, I…”

“You got one too, Ana?” Adrian said, coming down the stairs. He had a shiny new 2001 in his possession too.

“Yes. Do you know where it came from?” Ana asked.

“No. There was just a note with my name and position on it.”

“Same here.”

“Wait? So there’s a mysterious donor handing out Nimbus 2001’s?” Montague asked.

“And Bole’s got one too!”

“I think the whole team has them. Bletchley had one on his bed too,” Bole said.

“Damn! What a year to not make the team,” exclaimed Montague. “Any idea who sent them?”

“I have my suspicions,” Ana confessed. She looked at Adrian. “Why do you think Draco made the team?”

Adrian’s eyes widened as he pieced it together too.

“Because he was a decent seeker,” Bole replied.

“Yes… the key word there is ‘decent.’ He wasn’t the best flyer.”

“So what…you…you think he bribed his way onto the team?” Montague asked in a quiet whisper as Derrick and Bletchley joined them, both carrying their new brooms too.

“That would explain why he was so confident he’d make the team, and what he and Marcus were whispering about,” said Adrian thoughtfully.

“This,” Ana held up her broom, “smells like Lucious’ doing. Trust me.”

“So what if he did?” Bole asked. “Maybe Malfoy did buy his way on. What does it matter? With these, there’ll be no stopping us this year. The cup is ours, boys!” Bole raised his broom over his head and was met with cheer from some of those around them.

Adrian looked at Ana a little uneasily. For a moment she thought she had one person on her side, but then Adrian shrugged a shoulder and raised his broom too. Adrian may not have loved the idea of Draco buying his way on to the team, but he wasn’t bothered by it enough to resist.

Was Ana?
Later that day

Ana was tired and sore, but she knew she’d feel better after a short shower. Practice was grueling. Marcus had put them through the ringer trying to test the limits of their new brooms. When Ana was soaring from one end of the pitch to the other, she could almost forget about the dirty money that was used to purchase the brooms.

Draco had used his father’s money and the promise of new brooms to buy his way onto the team. Ana had no doubt of that, especially after their run in with the Gryffindor team before practice. Ana hated the idea and was disgusted that Draco was fine with it; nay, he was proud of it. But she decided she wasn’t going to let Draco Malfoy and his father’s money ruin something she loved. So she accepted the broom and decided not to think on it anymore.

Ana stepped out of the locker room shower, slipped into some clean clothes, and pulled her still wet hair into a side braid before making her way to Hagrid’s hut. She was picking up some salamander saliva for Sev’s potion stores. Professor Kettleburn always got the diluted version; Hagrid knew how to get the potent stuff.

Ana knocked on the front door, but instead of hearing Hagrid’s booming voice inside, she heard Fang bark from around the back. An instant later, the friendly boarhound came bounding up beside her and offered her slobbery kisses.

“Hey, Fang,” she greeted, rubbing him behind the ears. “Is he back there then? Well, let’s go see him.”

“Who’s ther, Fang? Oh! Hello, Ana.”

“Hey, Hagrid. I came for…” Ana trailed off. She wasn’t the only one who had decided to pay Hagrid a visit that day. Harry Potter and his two friends were there too. Ana contemplated for a moment what she should do, what might irritate them the most. She decided just to act like they weren’t even there for the time being.

“…The salamander saliva for Professor Snape. Oh, Hagrid! Are these the pumpkins for the Halloween Feast this year?”

“Yea! Tha’s them.” Hagrid beamed with pride.

“They look remarkable! So did the potion I made work out alright then?”

“Sure did. Fixed ‘em right on up. Tha’s quite the skill yeh have.”

“Thanks, Hagrid.” She smiled. “But considering I was raised by the best Potions Master this side of the Atlantic—”

Ron scoffed, burping up a slug, and mumbled under his breath. Ana narrowed her eyes at
him before continuing.

—then it’s hardly a surprise that I’m good at potions too.

“I ’spose that’s true. I was no good at it meself.”

“Potions isn’t for everyone, but that’s alright. I know there are things you can do that Sev could never dream of doing. And growing the largest pumpkins in Britain is only one of them.”

Hagrid beamed behind his large beard, and waved off Ana’s compliment with a hand. Just beneath his half-lidded eyes, Ana saw rosy-red cheeks. There was a moment when no one said or did anything.

“Hagrid?” Ana said softly.

“Hmm? Yes?”

“The saliva please.”

“Oh! Oh, yeah! Tha’s right. Sorry ‘bout that. Lemme go an’ get it for yeh.”

He shuffled off inside his hut, leaving Ana alone with the Gryffindors. Ana reached out to scratch Fang behind the ears in the silence that followed. She knew they were watching her every move.

“It’s just a word, you know,” Ana said, still scratching Fang. When she finally looked up, it was to three sets of eyes exchanging curious looks. She focused on Hermione.

“Mudblood…” Harry and Ron each took a step towards Hermione; Ana rolled her eyes.

“It’s just a word, like…pumpkin, or tree, or…spider-legs.”

“Spider-legs?” Ron questioned.

Ana turned on him in an instant. “The last person to call me that ended up in a bed full of spiders.”

“That’s awful,” Hermione said.

“That…was an accident. I was eight and the Accidental Magic Reversal Squad cleared everything up. The family simply thought they had a bad pest problem, but that’s not the point. The point is…It’s just a word; it only carries weight if you give it weight.”

“Th—thanks…I think,” Hermione said.

Ana rolled her eyes. “Please, don’t turn all sentimental on me, Granger. And don’t allow a prick like Draco to ruin your happiness; I’m certainly not.”

“Why would you care about our happiness?” Harry asked.

“I said nothing about your happiness, Potter, and I don’t care. Do what you will with it. But if you must know…” Ana looked to Hermione again. “I saw you in the library a lot last year; you…impressed me.”

“Oh!” Hermione said, clearly surprised. “Thanks, I…”

“Yeah, I didn’t know Gryffindors even knew what the library was, let alone how to find
Ana smirked but was met with silence. Fred would have had a comeback of his own for that one. Ana found herself thinking about Fred a lot recently. From his smile, to his laugh, and to his clever comebacks. Ana just couldn’t stop herself, and she was beginning to not even try.

Ron, however, only seemed to annoy Ana to no end. He stumbled over, looking more than a little green, and said, “Keep away from her…you,” he burped up another slug, “…Wicked Witch.”

Ana rolled her eyes. Honestly, she was getting a little tired of people calling her that.

“What would you know about that?” she asked.

“My dad works at the Ministry of Magic,” he replied, a little smugly. “So I know all about your little inquiry last summer for terrorizing that Muggle.”

“You didn’t!” Hermione exclaimed.

“She did, ‘Mione. It was all over the Daily Prophet.”

“I remember now,” Ana said. “Your dad works in the Department of Misuse of Muggle Artifacts, doesn’t he? Tell me, wasn’t he recently investigated for performing illegal charms on a Muggle Car, enabling it to fly? The same car that you two decided to tear the Whomping Willow apart with? What? Is the Hogwarts Express not good enough for the great Harry Potter anymore? If I were you, Weasley—and thank Merlin I’m not—I’d be a little less worried about my ‘inquiry’ and more so about the stability of your dad’s job after his.”

Ron turned a shade greener and both Harry and Hermione stepped in front of him. Ana simply laughed. Thankfully, Hagrid returned at that moment with a large vial for Ana. She stepped away from the Gryffindors with a sudden smile, and held the vial up to the sunlight. The clear liquid inside caught the sun and cast a golden-red sheen.

“It’s perfect, Hagrid! Thanks. And this ought to last us at least a year.”

“It was no trouble, Ana. I was happy ter do it fer you.”

“I’ll see you later, Hagrid. Bye.”

Ana waved to Hagrid and gave Fang a parting scratch, but she paid no further mind to the others. For once, however, she was glad that Fred wasn’t around. What would he have done if he heard her say those things about his dad? Hadn’t they agreed to leave family out of it?

She thought about turning around, trying to explain herself. She wanted to tell them how she was only “wicked” to those who deserved it. She wanted to tell them that the Muggle she “terrorized” wasn’t only talking about Ana’s mother, but that she was also bullying another mother-less girl around the corner. But she didn’t; she couldn’t. For whatever reason, Ana could not bring herself to turn back. She couldn’t bring herself to tell them why she really did it. She hardly cared what a couple of Gryffindors thought of her; there was only one who’s opinion mattered, and she hoped that if he ever found out, that he wouldn’t care much either.
Hogsmeade was great! Ana had been there once or twice before with Sev, but it was one thing to be there under adult supervision, it was another thing to be there on a specially permitted weekend with all your friends, and yet quite another thing to be there with all your friends on your birthday.

Ana and the girls went by all the major shops. They stopped by Honeydukes, where Ana decided to try a few other sweets besides just licorice, before Sadie dragged them all to Gladrags. Flora took them to Dominic’s Music Shop, and Hestia wanted to go to Scrivenshaft’s Quills. Then the three of them dragged their feet to Spintwitches Sporting Needs because Ana claimed she needed a new pair of chaser gloves. Together they all agreed to check out Zonko’s Joke Shop, where Ana found a rather pleasant surprise.

Intsa-Change

Add a drop of this too any consumable

Liquid to instantly change the color of your Nemesis’s’ (or your best friend’s) hair!

“Hey, Hes!” Ana called, holding a bottle of Insta-Change. “We ought to add this to Edgecombe’s morning tea.”

Hestia took the bottle and read it over. Marietta Edgecombe, the same Marietta that Ana resisted hexing during her first year, had become something of a nuisance for Ana and the girls. They shared a number of classes together, including Divination which Ana was taking with Hestia. Marietta used any chance she could get to “critique” Ana and the girls in some form or fashion, to which they responded in kind.

“Oh, yes please,” Hestia said. “But which color should we go with?”

“Well I think she’d hate the green the most.”

“But how do we get it to her?” Flora asked.

“We can work that bit out. It shouldn’t be too complicated,” Ana said confidently.

“What’s this? Someone planning to pull a little prank?”

Ana grinned as the sound of Fred’s voice met her ears, and her heart gave a little flutter.

“What are you doing here, Weasley?” Flora said with a scowl.
“I should think that obvious, Flora,” Hestia said, rolling her eyes.

“You all go on and purchase this; I’ll handle them,” Ana suggested. Flora turned her scowl on Ana then. “I’m more than capable of handling a couple of Gryffindors, Flora.”

Flora’s scowl deepened, clearly she didn’t like being told what to do. Still, she and Hestia turned to leave. “Sadie! Where are you? Let’s get out of here!”

Only after Flora and Hestia had left did Ana turn to face Fred and his brother. As usual, Lee was with them too.

“Handle us?” George asked.

“Well, you certainly can’t handle me.”

Lee snorted at George’s expense.

“So, who’s the target?” Fred asked curiously.

“Just this Ravenclaw girl who’s a total tart.”

“And what’s the plan?”

“Well… The simplest one would be to do it in Divination. She sits just below us, and a simple levitation and notice-me-not charm would allow for easy delivery.”

“What about Professor Trelawney?” Lee asked.

“She’s blind as a bat even with her ‘inner-eye.’”

“She’s got a point there,” George said.

“Of course I do.”

“Of course she does.” Fred and Ana said at the same time. Then they both smiled while Lee and George rolled their eyes.

“The only downside to that plan, however,” Ana continued, “is that Flora and Sadie won’t be there, and I’d hate to rob them of the opportunity to see something so…delightful.”

“How thoughtful of you,” George said.

“So, Plan B then?” Fred asked.

“Plan B… Well, the Great Hall at dinner time would provide optimum exposure…”

“I like where this is going…”

“The trick will be the delivery.”

“Agreed. You may be good, but you’re a beginner, and even you’d have difficulty getting that across the whole hall unnoticed.”

“Is that doubt I hear?”

“Not in you, I assure you. But you’ll have a whole table full of Professors to get by and not all of them will be as blind as Trelawney.”
“So… I break into the kitchens.”

“Now we’re talking.”

“Yeah… I just have to find them first and find a way in, which can’t be that hard if you lot figured it out.”

All three of them hissed and groaned as though being hit. Ana grinned.

“I suspect they’ll be somewhere beneath the Great Hall itself, so I’m already half-way there.”

“How do you figure that?” George asked.

“It’s logic, something you Gryffindors clearly lack.”

Fred laughed.

“You know she meant you too, right?” Lee asked.

“And that just sort of proves my point,” Ana said.

“You’ll still have to find a way in.”

“Not a problem. But here’s a question for the three of you: What happens if you use more than one color and add a semi-permanent hold to it to make it last longer?”

“That’s an interesting idea, and I’m keen to know the answer,” George said.

“Well, Georgie, let’s test it and see,” said Fred. “We have a candidate right here.”

Ana smiled until Fred turned his eyes towards her. She knew what he was thinking.

“What? No. You can’t.”

Ana took a step back and wrapped a hand around her braid as though that would somehow protect it.

“‘Can’t’ she says. Why can’t, Georgie?”

“No,” Ana said again, taking yet another step away. “No, not me, not my… My hair’s actually one of the things I really love about myself.”

Ana continued to step back, while they continued to slowly encircle her.

“Apart from my intellect of course,” she added. “And my all around potions mastery…my superior Quidditch skills…”

“I still haven’t heard a reason yet. Have you, Lee?”

“No, Freddie, I haven’t.”

“You can’t,” Ana said more firmly, suddenly hitting a shelf so she could go no further. She stood tall. “You can’t, because it’s my birthday.”

“No it isn’t. Is it?” Fred asked.
“It is, actually. So... I get a free pass.”

“Say’s who?” Lee asked.

“Say’s me, and that’ all that really matters.”

“Rubbish,” George said, moving to step forward again, but Fred stopped him.

“It’s alright, Georgie. It won’t be her birthday next week when we pummel her in Quidditch.”

“Ah. But you’ll have to catch me first... Freddie.” Ana eyed the sugar quill in Fred’s hand. Then she slowly wrapped her hand around his, held it there for a second, and then pulled the quill form his grasp.

“It’s my birthday,” she said as his eyebrows rose. She popped the quill in her mouth before he could take it back. “Thanks.”

She grabbed a few more colors of Insta-Change, before walking off.

“Hey, Ana!” Fred called after her. “Try tickling the pear!”

Ana was confused until Lee’s exclamation of “Fred!” And Ana knew, somehow, that Fred had just told her how to get into the kitchens; she just had to make sense of it.

The girls were waiting for Ana just outside the shop. Flora’s scowl was still in place.

“Where did you get that?” Sadie asked, as they began walking.

“I nicked it off of Fred.”

“Eww. What if he had that in his mouth, Ana?” Flora asked.

“So what if did?”

“You are so disgusting sometimes, Ana,” Hestia said.

“Why? Because he’s a Gryffindor?”

“And a Weasley to boot,” said Flora.

“He doesn’t have cooties, Flora! We’re not five years old anymore; come off it!”

“It’s sickening to watch you flirt with him, and don’t think we haven’t seen.”

“So what if I do? It’s just a little harmless flirting. Just because no boy wants to flirt with you, don’t spoil it for the rest of us!”

“Ana!”

“Flora, don’t!”

“Come on, girls. Please don’t fight. You’re best friends,” Sadie said as she and Hestia tried to calm Ana and Flora down. It took another minute or two of standing in the cold, staring each other down, for Ana and Flora to come around.
“I…I’m sorry, Flora,” Ana apologized. “That was a bit…”

“Wicked of you?”

Ana gave a slight smirk. “A little, yeah. But it goes without saying, Flora. Everyone knows you’re the pretty twin.”

“Hey!”

“This is true,” Flora agreed.

“Flora!”

“Calm down, Hes. You’re the smart one,” Ana added.

“I… I can live with that.”

“Good. So, are we all friends again?” Sadie asked.

“Come on, Flora; I’ll let you put the Insta-Change in Edgecombe’s tea,” Ana offered.

“Alright, but we still have to figure out how to do it.”

“Don’t worry, I have a plan.”

“And that’s why you’re the diabolical one,” Hestia said with a laugh.

“Hang on! Then what am I?”

“Sadie, you’re the gentle one.”

Sadie accepted her role with a casual shrug.

“So, what’s the plan, Ana?”

Ana grinned before they stepped into the Three Broomsticks, where she shared the plan that Fred had helped her devise over four mugs of butterbeer. Then they all made their way back to the castle in hopes of pulling it off successfully.

That night the attendees of the Halloween Feast were treated to a lovely surprise as various students, including Marietta, had a sudden case of changing hair colors. It was when was when the gray hairs of Professor Sprout suddenly turned a lovely shade of garden green to match the plants she so dearly loved, however, that the hall truly erupted into chaos, and Fred and George were led away to rapturous applause.

“Ana! You didn’t!” Hestia whispered.

“No; it wasn’t me. I swear,” Ana defended.

“Sadie, you sly devil,” Flora said, noticing the smirk on her friend’s face.

“Who’s the gentle one now?” Sadie asked, before giving way to her own laughter.

But their elation was overturned that evening when a cryptic message appeared on one of the castle walls…written in blood.
THE CHAMBER OF SECRETS HAS BEEN OPENED.

ENEMIES OF THE HEIR, BEWARE.
The Rogue Bludger

Belladonna 12

The Rogue Bludger

7 November 1992

“I want a good clean match. That goes for everyone.”

Madame Hooch said her words were meant for everyone, but her eyes lingered on Marcus and the Slytherin beaters. Ana stood on the front line next to Adrian and Draco, but her eyes were on Fred. She admired the way he never backed down. Marcus and Wood shook hands, and Madame Hooch blew her whistle.

Ana was the first in the air, and she rose above everyone else to grab the quaffle. She raced towards the Gryffindor goal posts, swerved to dodge a bludger—curtesy of Fred—and passed the quaffle to Adrian. From there it was a fast paced game of “catch-me-if-you-can.” On their new brooms the Slytherins were a blur of green. They had thirty points in before Ana realized that something was off.

Ana hadn’t seen or heard Fred and George since the beginning of the match, and only one bludger was being targeted at the Gryffindor team. Ana looked around to find the twins circling Harry and continuously knocking away an unusually persistent bludger. The Slytherins got in three more goals before Wood called for a timeout. Ana landed on the ground beside Adrian.

“Those two dunder-heads can’t see us enough to knock the bludger our way,” Bole said smugly.

“That’s not what’s going on,” Ana defended before she could stop herself.

“What would you know of it?”

“A bit more than you.”

“Ana’s right,” Adrian said. “They’re focused on trying to keep the other bludger from Potter. I think they’re looking for a quick win.”

“Well that’s their mistake,” Marcus said. “We’ll draw it out; make it long and agonizing.”

“We should call for an inquiry.” Ana’s suggestion was met with a cold silence.

“You’re mad,” Draco said at last.

“Calling for an inquiry would mean forfeiting the match,” Marcus said.

“Yes, but as the leading team we’d have the right to call for a rematch,” Ana said. “That bludger has clearly been tampered with.”

“This match would still go down as a loss.”

“Even I think that’s mad, Ana,” Adrian said.
“Call for an inquiry, Marcus. We can get this bludger sorted out, have a rematch next Saturday, and then slaughter them. Wouldn’t you rather win without any outside interference?”

“A win is a win,” Bole said. Then he turned to Marcus. “She’s mental, Marcus. Don’t listen to her.”

“She’s always been at bit barmy,” Draco added.

“Oh! I’m sorry. I forgot. Prince Draco needs a little extra help to catch the snitch before Potter does.”

Draco narrowed his beady eyes at Ana and stepped towards her menacingly.

“Please. You’ll have to do better than that, Draco, if you wish to frighten the Wicked Witch.”

Marcus stepped between the two, a toothy snarl on his face. “You need to learn your place, Evans, or do you need a further lesson in that matter. I’m the captain, and we’re not calling for an inquiry.”

There was a tense silence between all those present, until Adrian broke it. “Better mount up; looks like they’re ready to play again.”

Ana hitched a leg over her broom and left the others in her dust. She was furious with them, all of them really. She wanted to win as much as they did, but she didn’t want for there to be any doubt in anyone’s mind that they were the best. A rouge bludger was reason to doubt.

Ana may have been furious with her team members, but she was taking it out on her opponents. She flew more aggressively than ever before, while still keeping it just shy of a foul. Somehow she found herself speeding towards the Gryffindor goal posts, surrounded by the Gryffindor chasers. Her own teammates were out of sight.

And looked to her right. “Bell,” she said. She looked to her left. “Johnson. And let me guess, Spinnet is nearby as well?”

Ana gripped the quaffle a little tighter as Katie Bell moved in to steal it.

“Sorry girls, but this quaffle’s got a date with Wood.”

Ana leaned forward on her broom and picked up speed. She accelerated just enough so that she was out of reach of Katie and Angelina, and that’s when it happened. Ana never saw it coming. Normally she was very good about keeping an eye on her surroundings. She always knew where her teammates were, and she knew where the other team was too. It’s how she managed to avoid the bludgers so well.

But no one can be perfect all the time.

One moment Ana was zooming along towards the goal, preparing for a toss that would surely make it, and then WHAM! Ana took a bludger to the side of the head. There was no way to prepare for it, no way to stop it. And it wasn’t a gentle tap either. It was a full force strike meant to take someone out, and that’s what it did. Ana tipped sideways, slipping off her broom and losing her grip on the quaffle. The last thing she saw before the deep black of unconsciousness overtook her, was a blur of red streaking towards her.
Ana was falling, continuously falling. She didn’t know which way was up or which was down. She just continued to fall, performing somersaults in the air, while disconnected images and disembodied voices flitted through her head.

“Ana? Ana, wake up…”

~~

“Belladonna, open your eyes. Belladonna…”

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“Belladonna? That’s a stupid name in’it?” said the nasally voice of Isobel Florence, a young beauty queen in the making.

Isobel’s auburn hair was done in little ringlet curls; her cheeks were rosy-red, and her lips tinted pink. Her dress had pretty pink flowers on it as she stood over Ana, who sat in the mud where she’d been pushed. Her own frock was dingy and too short for her long limbs.

“Who names their daughter ‘Belladonna?’ A mother who doesn’t love her, obviously.” Isobel laughed and her gaggle of girls followed suit.

~~

Ana’s hand closed around Fred’s fist. There was a fluttering in her stomach at the simple touch, and it spread like fire when her eyes met his. With a small, coy smile she pulled the quill from his grasp.

“It’s my birthday,” she said, and he did nothing to stop her from taking it.

~~

“Severus, please, let me do my job,” Madam Pomfrey urged.

“She’s in the best hands, Severus,” Albus Dumbledore added. Still, Severus Snape did not move from where he stood watch at the foot of Ana’s bed.

“Right now she needs rest. I will alert you the instant anything changes,” Pomfrey continued.

Severus turned his cold, thin eyes on the medi-witch. “Be sure that you do.” Then he turned with a switch of his cloak and stalked out, presumably to his potions lab.

Pomfrey sighed. “I will never understand how that man became a father.”

Dumbledore said nothing.

~~

“Severus, please…” a woman pleaded.

Ana was in a room she knew, but couldn’t place. She was clinging tightly to the neck of a man she ought to know, but it was dark and the faces around her were blurry. The tear tracks on her own cheeks were hard and crusty. She was so very tired, but she refused to close her eyes for
fear of what she’d see if she did.

“Help us, Sev,” the woman pleaded again.

A moment later two men were shaking hands, and Ana was mesmerized by the swirling light that wound its way around them. Then Ana was being passed from one man to the other, but she resisted.

“No. No go. Ana stay. Ana be good.”

The man to whose neck Ana clung, gave her a kiss on her forehead. “Yes,” he said. “Ana is a very good little girl. Ana is the best little girl. And Daddy will come for his Little Flower soon, very soon.”

He kissed her head again before passing her into the arms of the other man. Then he wrapped his arm around the weeping woman beside him.

“If you harm her…” he threatened.

“Then I will surely die now, too.”

“That’s not as much comfort right now as you may think, Severus.”

Ana did not cry as she left with the other man, though her little heart was breaking.

~~

“Mum… Dad…?” Ana murmured in her haze. “Come back… No go… Ana be good…”

There was a loud crack of apparition and Ana opened her eyes.
A loud crack awoke Ana from her dreamy haze. She was lying in bed in a darkened hospital wing. The night sky, with its many stars, shone through the window across from her. Ana thought she was alone until she heard movement beside her. She turned her head and found her sick companion to be none other than Harry Potter.

Before she could question his presence there, her head was filled with a terrible ringing. She moaned and grabbed her head.

“Ohhh… What happened?”

There was a stretch of silence before Harry answered her. “You took a bludger to the head.”

“Mother of Merlin, you’re a bloody genius aren’t you? I meant the match. What happened in the match? Please tell me it was worth it. Tell me they didn’t blow it after I left.”

Harry didn’t respond, but when Ana looked over at him, she saw his cheeky grin.

“Oh bugger! You caught the snitch didn’t you?”

“I don’t know why you’re so surprised.”

“Brilliant. Marcus if going to try and pin this on me, just what I need.”

There was more silence before Harry offered, “Actually, he looked pretty upset with Malfoy.”

“Not his precious Draco, surely; he can do no wrong. Why? What did he do?”

Harry’s grin seemed to grow at the memory. “The snitch was floating right by his head, but he was too busy laughing at me to notice it. He would have had it if he had just looked.”

“Somehow I’m not surprised. His distinguished seeker abilities were not the reason he made the team.”

Ana and Harry drifted into yet another silent spell. Ana tenderly pushed herself into a seated position. She knew it was late and she should try going back to sleep, but the last image that had passed through her mind was unsettling. She tried to hang on to it now to make sense of it, but it was fading quickly. And when it was gone, Ana couldn’t bring it back and she couldn’t pull any meaning from it.

She looked around her and found a small table next to the bed. She expected to see the little lamp there, but not the small potions vial. Ana picked up the vial and the note that came with
It was written in Sev’s hand. Ana smiled at the gesture. She was about to pop the cork on the bottle when she saw something else on the table: a sugar quill. There was no note with this gift, but Ana knew it was from Fred.

A sudden, agonizing groan from Harry drew her attention.

“What’s wrong with you?” she asked.

“My arm…the bludger broke it during the match… Afterwards…afterwards Professor Lockhart tried to fix it.”

“You let Professor Dimwit try to fix your arm?”

“I…” Harry looked at Ana curiously. “I didn’t let him; I tried to stop him, but he wouldn’t listen.”

“Well that’s because he doesn’t listen to anything besides his own voice. Let me guess, instead of mending the bone, he removed it.”

“Yeah, but it wasn’t just the one bone,” he mumbled under his breath.

“What? No! How many?”

“All of them.” Harry held up his still floppy arm to show her, and Ana laughed. She couldn’t help it.

“I…I’m sorry…I’m not….laughing…at you, just… Oh! What an idiot! Not you…this time at least, but…Oh! He really is one isn’t he? I knew there was something not right about his books. I mean…does he really expect us to believe that he wrestled a full-grown werewolf to the ground? The werewolf would have crushed his delicate bones…which, I suppose explains why he can’t perform a simple bone-mending charm. He’s probably never had to use one before! So… Madam Pomfrey gave you skelegrow, I bet?”

Harry nodded.

“I also bet that it tastes rather revolting.”

“Have you ever had it before?”

“No, but I know what goes into it, and believe me, you don’t want to know. And…I imagine it’s doing very little for the pain as there’s no pain relief in it.”

Harry nodded again, this time with a grimace as he held his arm. Ana looked at the vial in her hand. It was intended for her, and yeah, her head still hurt a little, but Fred’s sugar quill was helping with that. And judging by the look on his face, Harry’s pain was a lot worse. Ana was not Harry’s biggest fan by any means, she certainly wouldn’t be lining up for one of those signed photos he was apparently handing out, but the boy had all the bones in his arm removed by an incompetent Professor. She felt slightly bad for the boy.

“Here,” she said holding out the vial towards him. “Drink this. It will help with the pain.”

He just stared at the vial in her hand. “Why?”
“Because you’re obviously in pain and I’m offering to relieve you of that pain. Sev brewed this especially for me, so you know it’s not poisoned. Take it.”

Harry continued to just stare at her.

“The offer won’t last all night, Potter. Take it.”

Harry reached out for the vial and immediately felt its numbing affects take over.

“Thanks,” he said.

“Don’t mention it,” Ana replied. “Really, don’t tell anyone about it. I wouldn’t want word to get around that I’m…nice or something.”

“I doubt anyone would believe me if I did tell them.”

“People will always believe what they want to believe. As long as you, and those important to you, know the truth, then that’s all that really matters. That’s why I’ve decided to embrace the Wicked and Snape’s Daughter bit.”

Harry furrowed his brows and looked at Ana. “But you are his daughter…aren’t you?”

“My point exactly. He’s not really my dad. I’d be Ana Snape then, wouldn’t I?”

“I…I guess so, yeah…”

“But no one stops to think about that, do they? They don’t stop to think about a lot of things…like Professor Dimwit’s accomplishments. I bet if people stopped to think about it a bit more, and looked past the charming smile and pretty hair, then…”

Ana stopped suddenly as she heard footsteps coming down the hall. She and Harry looked at each other before they both lay back down and pretended to be asleep. Professor Dumbledore backed into the room a moment later, followed closely by Professor McGonagall. They were carrying something like a stiff board between them. They headed towards the nearest bed and lifted the board onto it. It wasn’t until McGonagall went to get Madam Pomfrey that Ana saw two hands sticking up in the air holding a camera.

It wasn’t a board they’d placed on the bed; it was a student as petrified as the cat, Mrs. Norris, had been on Halloween. The Heir of Slytherin had struck again.
Sleep did not come easily for Ana for the next several weeks. Her dreams were plagued by strange, swirling lights, blurry faces, and a weeping woman begging for Sev to help. At night she’d toss and turn in a restless state, but come morning the dreams would vanish quickly and she could make no more sense of them than the first night.

Unfortunately for Ana, the lack of sleep began to show in her school work. One week in Herbology, she was so distracted she got entangled in the Venomous Tentacula and had to go see Madam Pomfrey when she injured herself with a severing charm. In Charms, she’d accidentally sent Professor Flitwick flying across the classroom and sent him to the hospital wing. She’d actually received a Dreadful on an assignment in Transfiguration because she fell asleep half-way through and had to turn it in incomplete. She always left Divination with a headache; though, that could have been from the heavy incense as opposed to the lack of sleep. But…even Potions was affected by the lack of sleep.

“Miss Evans,” Professor Snape said from directly behind Ana, causing her to jump. “Restate what I just said.”

“Uh… Evans miss?”

Flora and Hestia giggled, as did many others, but Sev was not amused.

“Ten points from Slytherin for your lack of focus, and five for your cheek.”

Ana nodded. She probably deserved that.

“Now, pay attention, and see me after class.”

Much of the class heckled until Sev turned on them as well. The remaining thirty minutes seemed to drag on forever. Ana tried to pay attention, truly, but she’d had Divination before that and her head was still foggy. It didn’t help matters that this lesson was of the lecture variety and not a practical one.

When the bell finally rang, Ana told the girls to go to lunch without her; she’d catch up with them later. Then she waited for the rest of the class to file out before approaching Sev. He stood near the front of his desk with a look he usually reserved for the Gryffindors.

“Please don’t look at me like that, Sir,” Ana said.

“And how is it that I look?” he asked dryly.

“Like I’m the biggest regret of your life.”

The softening of his features were miniscule, but Ana noticed them and was appreciative of them.
“Take a seat, Belladonna, and tell me…what troubles you now?”

“Nothing,” Ana lied. She didn’t want to tell Sev about the dreams because she didn’t want to sound like a child complaining.

“I would disagree. You failed to perform a simple seize and pull charm, and instead you sent Filius to hospital. You received a Dreadful on an assignment for Minerva, and now you cannot tell me what is in a shrinking solution.”

“I can too! It’s… that’s what you asked, isn’t it? You know I can brew a shrinking solution, Sev.”

“Then speak.”

“I…” Ana sighed. “I haven’t been sleeping well lately.” She knew it was probably a foolish notion to think that would be a sufficient enough of an explanation for him. His look told her she’d been correct in that assumption, so she continued.

“I…I’ve been having these…strange dreams ever since the bludger incident.”

She was looking down at her hands as she spoke so she missed the fleeting look that grazed his face at the mention of dreams. He quickly concealed it before his next words however.

“What are these dreams about?”

“That’s sort of the problem, Sev! I…I’m sorry, Sir. I didn’t mean to snap; I’m just tired.” She rubbed the corner of her eyes before continuing.

“I don’t know what they’re about. I can’t figure them out. I just know that I hardly sleep through them and when I wake I’m just as tried, if not more, than when I went to bed. I told Professor Trelawney, and she lent me a copy of The Dream Oracle and she said that I should write it all down. I’ve tried, but the dreams fade so quickly when I wake. I can’t gather much.”

“And what have you managed to gather from them?”

“I… There’s this girl…a little girl…I think she may be me…or something. And there’s this…this man and woman…there are two men, and…”

Ana started off by simply focusing on the log she’d started keeping, and she was fine. But when she started trying to actually recall the dream itself, she began to have a terrible headache, like an acute stabbing pain behind her eyes. She pinched her eyes shut until she saw bursts of light on her eyelids as she tried to force more of the dream out.

“That’s enough!” Sev said severely. Ana opened her eyes wide and it took a moment for Sev to come into focus. The dream faded quickly leaving only a dull ach behind.

“Sir?”

“This is foolish, Belladonna. It is merely a dream; it means nothing. I don’t want you to think on it anymore. It is clearly causing undue distress. Holiday begins tomorrow; you will get proper rest then. And I…I will mix up a mild sleeping draught to help with that.”

Ana was confused and surprised. This was not the first time Ana had trouble sleeping; most young children go through a period of bad dreams, and Sev had never offered to make a sleeping draught for her then. So why now? It didn’t really sound like him, but she was desperate
for a bit of sleep and decided not to question it.

“Thank you, Sir,” she said.

“Now… about this…Dreadful,” his lip curled in disgust. “I have arranged for you to meet with Minerva for a little extra credit assignment…”

“You did what?! But, Sev…”

“I will not hear it, Belladonna. A Dreadful is absolutely unacceptable. No ward of mine will settle for such disgrace. I should dock more points from Slytherin for it, but I will not…this time.”

“There won’t be a second time.”

“Obviously. We are done here. You may go and speak with her now. I will have the draught ready for you tonight.”

He waved his hand towards the door and Ana knew she’d been dismissed. She grabbed her bag and left quickly.

Ana was not looking forward to talking to Professor McGonagall about receiving extra credit. The woman was not known for her extreme kindness, especially towards Slytherins. She was as strict as Sev was, which made Ana curious as to what Sev had to sacrifice to get her to agree to this.

McGonagall was not in her classroom; of course she wouldn’t be now as the bell for lunch had already rung. Ana doubted she’d be in her office either, but she figured she’d try just so she could say she did. When she stood just outside the door, she could hear voices on the other side. Oh well. Best to get it over with, right? She raised her hand to knock, but before she could the door opened and there stood…George.

“Little Snake!” Fred popped up over his brother’s shoulder. “So you like spending extra time with McGonagall too, huh?”

“Who doesn’t?” Ana asked through clenched teeth.

“Well, I imagine…” Fred looked like he was about to list names but McGonagall stopped him.

“Mr. Weasley! Let Miss Evans through; I don’t have all day to doddle.”

“Right you are, Professor.”

Ana moved back to allow them to exit. George passed quickly and without a word or a glance in Ana’s direction. Fred, however, did not. As he passed Ana he laid a hand on her shoulder and leaned in to whisper in her ear.

“Good luck.”

The sensation of his touch and his breath on her skin sent shivers down her back. She smiled as she watched him walk away.

“Miss Evans, today if you please,” McGonagall said.
“Three rolls! Three bleedin’ rolls! How does she expect me to write three rolls on this nonsense?!”

“Whoa, Little Snake, where are you off to?”

Ana left McGonagall’s office in such a tizzy she didn’t notice Fred and George still lingering down the corridor. A feat really since Fred still looked so remarkable and George so…out of place at the appearance of Ana.

“Oi! Little Snake…” Fred reached out and grabbed Ana’s arm, bringing her to a grinding halt. She whipped out her wand quickly and directed it at him.

“Oh! Red, sorry, I…I didn’t see you there.” Ana lowered her wand.

“Clearly. What’s wrong?” Fred did not let go of her arm.

“It’s…McGonagall; she’s… And people call me wicked.”

“What’s she making you do, because chances are, we’ve already done it. Polishing the trophies—” There was a pause as Fred expected George to add on; when he didn’t, Fred bumped him in the arm

“—removing all the gum from the desks—” George added dryly.

“—mucking out the stables—”

“Stables?” Ana questioned. “What are you talking about?”

“There are stables out in the forest.”

“Like, for a horse?”

“What else?

“Hogwarts doesn’t house horses, Red.”

“Ah, well these aren’t your ordinary horses.” Again George didn’t want to participate, so Fred finished for him. “They’re invisible.”

“Invisible horses? Now I know you’re pulling my leg.”

“Well, we’ve never seen them, but something keeps filling those stables.”

Ana laughed, “Never mind. Sounds more like McGonagall is pulling your leg.”
Fred looked thoughtful for a moment.

“Anyway, it’s none of those,” Ana said. “It’s not detention; she’s making me write three rolls of parchment on the lapifors spell.”

“Isn’t that the one that turns things into little rabbits?” Fred asked.

“It is,” George said.

“What’s wrong with wittle wabbits? Haven’t you always wanted a cute, cuddly little pet?”

Ana looked at Fred dryly. “Does Sev look like the cute, cuddly pet type?”

“Now that you mention it, he seems more like a greasy, slimy, never bathes pet type.” This time, Fred didn’t give George an opportunity to speak.

“I had a frog once,” Ana said.

“Did you now? Well that’s…something,” Fred said.

“Yeah. I brought it home from the park one night. Course…it died within the hour, somehow… Oddly enough Sev had fresh frog legs in his potion stores that night too.”

Fred and George’s eyes grew wide. Ana laughed at the look they shared with each other.

“You’re—”

“—pulling your leg? Like the invisible horse pulls the carriage,” Ana replied, still laughing. “The frog was already dead when I plucked the legs off myself.”

“You what?” asked George.

“A true Potions Master must know how to gather her own supplies.”

George continued to stare at her like she was mental.

“What? It was dead. Freshly dead at that, and no, I didn’t kill it myself. Stop looking at me like that. Red, tell your brother to stop looking at me like that.”

“George, come on,” Fred nudged his brother with his elbow. Finally, he seemed to snap out of it.

“I promised Lee I’d meet him, yeah? I’ll see you class.” George walked off with little more to say than that, leaving Fred and Ana alone.

“Sorry about him; he…he doesn’t understand…”

“Understand what?” Ana asked.

Fred couldn’t bring himself to say more, and Ana wasn’t quite brazen enough to try and pull anything more from him. They locked eyes for a moment, before they both looked down. Fred’s hand was still on Ana’s arm, but it had slowly slid down her arm so that now he held her by the wrist. He left his hand there a moment more, before dropping it quickly.

“Oh…er…uh… Why the essay?” he asked after a bit of uncharacteristic fumbling.
“It’s…a…re-write,” Ana answered, feeling the same way Fred seemed to be.

“Wait? McGonagall’s letting you do a re-write?”

“Shh! Not so loud or she’ll take it back. No one is supposed to know. Sev had to bargain for it and I’d hate to see what he put up.”

“That is intriguing. So, why the re-write?”

Ana didn’t pause to consider it. She told Fred all about how she fell asleep writing the first; though she didn’t tell him it was because of some stupid dream. She went on to complain about how the re-write had to be twice as long, and include history, development, and notable cases of use. What notable cases could there possibly be for turning objects into rabbits?

“And, she wants a demonstration of the spell, all before the start of next term.”

“Wow, that…”

“Sucks?”

“Yeah. I’d offer to help—”

“—there’s a scary thought—”

“—buuut…” Fred gave her a sideways grin. “I’m more of a Charms guy. George is the Transfiguration expert.”

Ana grimaced. “I don’t think he likes me very much.”

“He doesn’t know you,” Fred said as consolation.

“Not that it really matters anyway. What do I care for the thoughts of a few Gryffindors?” Ana said.

“About the same as I care for those of most Slytherins.”

Ana and Fred were silent for a moment. It was nearly impossible for Ana to contain her excitement over Fred’s confession. However, when the silence carried on and he proved no more adept at breaking it than she did, Ana began to grow uneasy.

What was holding them back? If they both liked each other—and yes, Ana could admit that she liked Fred now, and she was fairly certain that he liked her—and if neither one of them cared what the other’s house thought of them, then what was the hold up? Why didn’t he just ask her to the next Hogsmeade weekend? Why didn’t she just ask him?

“You know, Red, I… I…”

Ana hesitated. What if she was wrong? Ana didn’t have a whole lot of experience dealing with boys who actually liked her. Bole hated her, no question about that. Draco was only her friend when it suited him. Marcus tolerated her—only because as thick as he was about everything else, he knew Quidditch and he knew she was his best player. Warrington and Miles were indifferent. And Adrian…well, she supposed Adrian liked her as a person, but nothing more.

Maybe that’s all it was with Fred too. He was pretty much friends with everyone; that’s just the way he was. In fact, Ana was pretty sure that if he had been sorted into Slytherin, then he would have befriended the Giant Squid through the common room window, on his first night!
What if he thought of Ana no differently than he thought of Lee Jordan? It was risky: putting yourself out there and hoping a boy liked you as much as you thought you liked him. It was the sort of risk a Gryffindor might take, even though he wasn’t, and no one could accuse Ana of being a Gryffindor. So she would wait and say nothing.

“I…should get going,” she said at last.

“Oh…”

“Yeah, I…I should find Sadie; she’s really good at Transfiguration, a natural even. I almost hate her for it. Maybe I can convince her to help me. I’m sure I can actually, as I’ve said before, she’s the best. I…”

Ana realized she was rambling nervously, so she closed her mouth quickly and tried to play it cool, but she was long past ‘cool.’ Fred grinned crookedly, but said nothing.

“I’ll…I’ll see you around,” Ana said before turning and attempting to flee. She made it half-way down the hall.

“Hey, Ana, wait…” Fred came running after her. “I…”

Ana waited, holding her breath and biting her tongue to keep from saying anything else stupid.

“I may not be able to help with the spell, but I do have a few ideas for the demonstration. If you’re interested?” He grinned.

“Yeah… sure.” Ana was a little hesitant to say more until she knew she had complete control again.

“Great! How about over lunch?”

“Lunch? You mean now?”

“In the kitchens,” he said quickly, “if you want to.”

Ana smiled. It may not have been an invite to Hogsmeade, but Hogsmeade wasn’t until February. This was now.

“Well, I suppose I can come along, so long as you make it worth my time and promise to provide explicit details of these ideas.”

When Ana entered the History of Magic classroom forty-minutes later, she was all smiles.

“Where have you been?” Flora asked.

“I had to stay behind and talk to Sev,” she replied, still unable to vanish her smile.

“Yes, but then he came to the Great Hall and you didn’t.”

“That’s because afterwards he sent me to McGonagall’s. What’s with the inquisition?”

“You missed it at lunch. Bole asked Flora to the next Hogsmeade visit,” Hestia said quickly, trying to keep the peace.
“What! No. It’s over a month away. What did you tell him?”

“I said I’d have to think about it.”

“What’s there to think about?”

“My thoughts exactly, Ana,” Hestia whispered as she leaned in towards her. Professor Binns had begun reading from the textbook. “He’s so fit, I would have said yes right away.”

“No you wouldn’t,” Flora argued. “You’d have been all quiet and shy like you always are.”

As Flora and Hestia began to argue quietly in that way sisters do best, Ana turned her attention to Sadie on her other side.

“Hey, Sae, I need your help.”

XXX

When Fred met up with George and Lee outside greenhouse 3, he was grinning from one ear to the other and walking with a spring in his step. Fred thought his lunch with Ana couldn’t have gone any better. He had come off as brilliant and funny, as indicated by her approving smile and ardent laugh. And she… Well, he couldn’t find the words to properly describe how amazing she had been.

George and Lee were laughing and joking around; they appeared to be in rather good spirits as well. But the moment Fred joined them, the laughter left George’s eyes. Lee quickly looked between them before shaking his head and walking away. He knew better than to get between them when one was upset with the other.

Fred knew there was no use in trying to play coy; George knew exactly where Fred had been and with whom he had been with. The Marauders told him that much. Fred was determined, however, to not let George’s sour mood spoil his good one. He had probably just had his best lunch with the best girl he could imagine.

“Look, I won’t lie to you, so do me the same curtesy and don’t go all ‘Mum-like’ one me. I know you don’t like her; she knows you don’t like her, but I do. Shouldn’t that be enough for you to be civil about this at least?”

“I…I just don’t want to see you get hurt,” George said.

“It’s Ana; she’s harmless.”

“They call her the Wicked Witch.”

“That name came from a bunch of Muggles who don’t know real magic when they see it.”

“She died the hair of half the school, including Professor Sprout’s.”

“Ok, she had nothing to do with Professor Sprout’s hair. That was her friend Sadie.”

George opened his mouth to protest, but Fred cut across him. “Annd…we’ve done much worse. If anything, her pranking should endear her to you.”
George was losing this battle, but he wasn’t ready to give up on it. “Just remember, Freddie, if you dangle your hand in front of a snake long enough, eventually they’ll strike.”

“Class has begun, Misters Weasley. You can either join us now, or go tell Professor Dumbledore what’s more important than my lesson,” Professor Sprout said with a very disapproving voice.

George walked into the greenhouse first, giving him the last word. Professor Sprout gave Fred a pointed look before he followed along with a sigh. George had successfully spoiled his mood.

Fred liked Ana, perhaps a bit more than he cared to admit to George just yet considering his stance. It’s true, Fred didn’t care what the rest of Slytherin thought of him. Neither did he care what the rest of Gryffindor thought of him, but he did care a great deal what George thought. Their bond was inseparable, and he didn’t like the feeling that Ana might be the one thing to come between them.

So, no. Fred would have to show George that he was still his brother, while simultaneously finding a way to convince him that Ana was not all that Wicked.

It was a task that would prove to be much harder than Fred ever conceived.
Ana’s anticipated Hogsmeade date never came.

After the holidays, which proved to be rather dull for Ana since the Carrows and Sadie all went home, Ana didn’t have any more time with Fred. He didn’t ask her to the Valentine’s Hogsmeade trip, so she spent the day with Hestia, as they were the only two without dates. Then he didn’t make their post-match chat after the Slytherin-Ravenclaw match in February (which Slytherin won of course) because he found himself in detention. By the time the Gryffindor-Hufflepuff match came around three weeks later, Sev turned up in the common room just as Ana was about to head down. He came with the announcement that Quidditch had been canceled for the remainder of the season!

There had been another attack on a Muggle-born student, bringing the total to four now. The first had been the Gryffindor boy in November. Then a Hufflepuff was attacked over the Christmas holiday. And now there was a double attack with a Ravenclaw prefect and Hermione Granger. At least now maybe the ridiculous rumor that Potter was the Heir of Slytherin would be put to rest. Everyone knew that Granger was one of his best mates.

The only time that Ana got any sort of recognition from Fred was just before the start of term at the Welcome Back Feast. Ana had spent her holiday pouring over the books Sadie had suggested before leaving, and scouring through the tips and tricks she provided in her letters. Ana’s revised paper for McGonagall was not three rolls, but three-and-a-half. Then she provided a lovely demonstration at the feast by transfiguring several objects, including the hat on Dumbledore’s head, into little rabbits. Fred grinned and gave her a thumb’s up when she transfigured the fork in his hand just as he was about to take a bite.

That was it; nothing more.

Of course, apart from their post-match chats, Ana and Fred didn’t really have the opportunity for any other interactions, as they were on different schedules. And thanks to the attacks, the Professors were all in a frenzy. Free time had been disbanded and the Professors were now escorting students to their next class, making it impossible to stop and talk in the corridor. If students weren’t in class, then they were either in the library, the Great Hall, or their common rooms.

The Professors weren’t the only ones in a frenzy, though, the school Governors were too. In fact, they were so upset that they voted Professor Dumbledore out because they said he couldn’t “contain the situation.” McGonagall was now the acting Headmistress. Hagrid had been arrested too, and sent to Azkaban, though Ana didn’t know why. Rumor had it that he was somehow responsible for the attacks, but Ana didn’t believe it. He was far too much of a gentle-giant type to harm anyone.

His arrest, however, meant Fang was left alone. So Ana went down to feed him and take care of him as much as she could. She could tell he was rather depressed at Hagrid’s departure, but Ana’s visits seemed to cheer him up a bit. When Sev caught her trying to sneak back in one night,
however, he was livid.

Ana spent a good hour and a half, at least, in his office listening to his tirade. He went on and on about how it was completely irresponsible of her to be sneaking out, and how he surely had trained her better. When he accused her friends of being a bad influence, Ana lost it. She yelled right back at him. Of course, raising her voice and firing back didn’t help the situation.

Surprisingly, or perhaps not considering the volume of their raised voices, Ana was rescued from Sev’s relentless anger by Professor McGonagall. McGonagall, however, did not have to raise her voice to be heard over the shouting match. At her appearance, both Ana and Sev stopped yelling and merely stared, fuming, at each other. McGonagall sent Ana to wait in the corridor while she spoke to Sev alone. While she was waiting, Ana couldn’t stop the angry tears that ran down her cheeks.

When she returned, McGonagall instructed Ana to follow her and they set off at brisk pace. She did not take Ana back to her office, but rather she led her up the spiral staircase to the Headmaster’s office. Which, Ana supposed, was her office for the time being, even though it still looked like Dumbledore’s.

McGonagall took a seat behind the great oak desk and gestured for Ana to sit as well. There was a slight shuffling from the portraits around the room as they repositioned themselves for optimum hearing. Really, the portraits in Dumbledore’s office were some of the noisiest Ana had ever come across. Meanwhile, McGonagall remained quiet as Ana tried to discreetly wipe away the rest of her tears.

McGonagall’s lips formed words, but Ana was replaying every cruel word that had left Sev’s mouth and she didn’t catch what McGonagall said.

“I’m sorry, Professor, but what did you say?”

McGonagall huffed with mild irritation. She was not one to repeat herself very often.

“I said, have a biscuit, Miss Evans.” She indicated to a tin canister on the desk; it was the only thing in the large room that appeared to be hers.

Ana pinched her face in confusion. “Umm… no thanks, Professor. I…” She sniffed and dabbed at her eyes. “I’m not much a biscuit person.”

“Not a… How is that possible?” McGonagall seemed quite taken back with this news, but Ana simply shrugged.

“Sev’s not really the type to don and apron and bake a batch of chocolate chip.”

A thin line appeared on McGonagall’s lips, and she seemed to be fighting to restrain a smile. “I suppose not. Very well then, what sort of pudding do you like?”

Ana thought for a moment before offering another feeble shrug. “The treacle tart here is pretty good. Or… I like sugar quills.”

“Sugar quills will rot your teeth,” McGonagall said sternly. “But…who can say no to a treacle tart or two?”

She took two biscuits from the tin and pulled out her wand. A moment later there were two biscuit-sized tarts sitting on the desk. McGonagall took one and bit into it delicately.
“Hmm,” she dabbed at her mouth. “Perhaps not as good as the ones made here, but certainly not bad by any means. Try one.”

Ana hesitated but couldn’t refuse this offer. She took the second tart and bit into the sweet indulgence. And it almost felt as though her sorrows were melting away with every bite. She would have told McGonagall that she thought the tart was equal to those of the House Elves, but she didn’t want to seem too friendly right now. She just wanted to get on with her punishment so she could get on with everything else. However, she did have enough sense to say “thank you.”

“You’re welcome. Now, tell me, why were you out on the grounds when you know you’re not supposed to be there?” She spoke nice enough, but there was no denying the firmness in her voice.

Ana did not respond immediately, and McGonagall took the silence as denial.

“Portraits talk, Miss Evans; there’s no use denying where you were.”

McGonagall pointed over Ana’s shoulder, and Ana knew she was pointing to an old Potions Master that liked to frequent the Potions hall. Ana sighed in defeat. If McGonagall had not simply heard their argument, then he likely told her everything he’d overhead.

“I was down at Hagrid’s tending to Fang, because when he gets out of that awful place, he’s going to need Fang to cheer him up again. Fang can’t do that if he’s been starved and neglected himself; the poor thing hardly touches his food.”

“Perhaps that is because he is being fed more than he is used to.”

“Can’t be. I’ve only been down there once a day, and there were a couple of times I couldn’t make it. I felt bad about it, but I didn’t want to make the girls suspicious. And he seemed all right when I made it the next day.”

“That is because you are not the only one who’s been down to feed him. I, myself, and Professors Sprout and Flitwick, have all gone down to care for him as well. Hagrid is one of ours, Miss Evans; we would not let Fang be neglected.”

“Oh. Well, I… I suppose I didn’t consider that. Still… Sev could have just said as much; he didn’t have to get so upset.”

“He was upset because you broke school rules.”

“I was hardly the first; I’m not even the first Slytherin to break a rule or two. In fact, I’d like to know how many school rules he broke in his time.”

McGonagall pressed her lips into a thin line. “We are not here to discuss his school days; we are discussing yours. And it’s not that you broke school rules, it’s the ones you broke. It may have escaped your notice, but we are in a very perilous situation right now. The curfew is in place to protect you.”

“It doesn’t matter. If I was attacked while trying to care for Fang, then so be it. It would have been worth it just to know that he was properly cared for.”

“How very Gryffindor of you.”

This time it was Ana’s lips that pressed into a thin line, and her face grew hard. McGonagall gave a small, triumphant smile. “Perhaps that is why Severus was so upset. Not
because you broke rules, but because you placed yourself in grave danger without concern for your own wellbeing, and by doing so, proved yourself to be, perhaps, a bit more Gryffindor than either of you would care to admit.”

Ana didn’t think McGonagall’s assessment was very accurate. She didn’t feel like a Gryffindor and she certainly didn’t want others to see her that way, and yet there was some small part of her that seemed excited at the prospect.

“How many points then? And when should I expect to fulfill my detention?” Ana asked, deciding to ignore McGonagall’s statement altogether.


“But I…” Ana stopped herself. Why argue with a Professor when they’d decided not to give a detention for something you clearly deserved?

“I think, perhaps, your…disagreement with Severus serves as punishment enough.”

Again Ana was reminded of some of the harsher things Sev had said, and she could feel the bitter sting of tears threatening to spill. She pushed them back, and nodded.

“Now, if you feel fit enough, I shall escort you back to the common room.”

Harry Potter did it again. He stole Ana’s glory.

It wasn’t long after her argument with Sev, and just before the start of exams, that Professor McGonagall announced that the Mandrakes had fully matured. Sev approached Ana after the announcement, and extended an offer for her to assist in the brewing of the potion that would revive all those who had been petrified. Ana and Sev had spoken very little since their argument, and Ana knew this was his way of trying to mend the fracture that had occurred. Of course it was a chance Ana couldn’t refuse; Sev knew as much.

Yet still, Harry Potter found a way to outshine her. He, Ron and Professor Dimwit traipsed into the Chamber of Secrets and rescued Ginny Weasley, from the monster that resided there. Ana didn’t have all the details, and she didn’t care to know all the details. (She was, of course, glad that Ginny was all right, because she knew Fred would have been distraught if anything had happened to her.) On the positive side, Professor Dumbledore was brought back by the Governors, Hagrid had been released from Azkaban, and exams were canceled for the term.

Ana was heading down the down the train with the girls when she passed a rather noisy compartment. A moment later the door opened and Fred stuck his head out.

“Oi! Little Snake, come here.”

Ana debated; it had been months since Fred last acknowledged her. She wanted to show him that she was still upset, but she couldn’t turn him down. She walked back to where he was hanging out the door. Behind him were George, Ginny, Harry, Ron, and Hermione. The compartment fell silent at her appearance. Fred seemed oblivious.

“Is it true?” he asked.
“A lot of things are true, Red. You’ll have to be more specific.”

“Did you help brew the Mandrake draught?”

“I…How did you know?”

“I know these things, Little Snake.” He grinned cheekily, leaning on the doorframe behind him and crossing his arms over his chest.

“Yeah, I helped. Why?”

“Nothing, I…” He faltered slightly; it almost wasn’t noticeable. “I just won a bet with George is all.”

For some reason, Ana didn’t quite buy that story. Why had he been making a bet with George pertaining to her? But it meant he was talking to her, and smiling at her like he was. And try as she might, when he did those things, she couldn’t stay mad at him. A smile spread across her face.

“Well then, perhaps George should learn not to bet against me.”

“I tried to warn him.”

Flora called out to her and Ana sighed. “I should get going, before she throws a temper-tantrum.”

Fred’s smile widened. “Have a nice summer.”

“Always,” Ana replied. She turned to leave, but he caught her hand and quickly slipped a piece of paper into it. He slipped back into his compartment before Ana knew what was going on. It wasn’t until she returned home that she opened it to reveal his address.
Summer Correspondence

Belladonna 17

Summer Correspondence

The downside to Fred giving Ana his address, was that it meant Ana had to write to him first so that he could get her address. It took her no less than fifty drafts for her to be satisfied before sending the first letter. She couldn’t decide how casual or flirtatious she should be. And she didn’t have anyone who could help her with it.

Sev would be of no use, even if she wanted to tell him. Hestia might secretly be all right with it, but no one would ever know because she’d go along with whatever Flora said. Flora would absolutely abhor it. She’d throw a tantrum about how unfit he was, and how his family were all blood traitors and that sort of nonsense. Sadie would help her write a letter to any boy but Fred, because she’d be worried about what Flora would say and she’d want to keep the peace between them. And Ana couldn’t turn to any of the Muggle girls around Spinner’s End, because they all either hated her or feared her, and Ana didn’t know which was worse.

So…she did the best she could.

30 June 1993

Red,

I hope your summer is going well so far. Mine is rather dull. Flora and Hestia have gone to visit their aunt and uncle up North; they’re going to be gone nearly all summer. I met their Uncle Amycus on the platform, and I found him rather unpleasant. I wouldn’t want to spend all summer in his company, but I guess family is family and sometimes we just have to deal with it.

Sadie has gone to Paris for the summer and won’t be back until it’s time to catch the train back. So it’s just me and Sev. Oh joy! (Please note the extreme excitement of spending all summer in silence reading, doing homework, and brewing potions. Though I do rather enjoy a good brewing.)

Honestly, I wouldn’t be too surprised if the Wicked Witch was called in for another inquiry this year.

Well, I’m sure I’ve bored you enough with the prospect of my summer fun. Maybe you could return the favor?

Ana went on to include details on how Fred should deliver his letter and then simply signed it as Ana. Since Ana lived in a Muggle dense community, she couldn’t have owls flying in and out of their home. Fortunately, there was a secret entrance to the local post office. Ana took all her letters there and they saw that it was properly sorted and delivered via owl. Any return letters would arrive there by owl and then be sorted and arrive at Ana’s door via the Muggle Postman.

When Ana went to send off her letter, she stopped and turned around three times before
finally gaining the courage to send it. She felt ill the whole walk home and had to lie in bed for the rest of the afternoon. Then she had to wait nearly a week for his response. (But oh, when he responded you couldn’t find a happier girl in Cokeworth.)

5 July 1993

Little Snake,

Wow. I hope you can manage to contain all the excitement in store for you. Not that you need any help, but should you find a little time were you’re not having so much…fun…try these out on the unsuspecting person. Stink pellets from Zonko’s. I told George I’d used all mine, so don’t tell him where you got these. And since there’s no magic required to set them off, there should be no need for the Ministry to come question you.

I suppose I can’t really say much. My summers aren’t much different. It helps to have a few siblings to tease, however…

His letter went on to describe what sort of pranks he pulled on his brothers, which was usually Ron. Ana treasured every word. He concluded his letter with…

If I sent you my homework, would you do it as well?

Fred’s next letter arrived before Ana could finish responding to his first.

6 July 1993

Little Snake,

WE’RE GOING TO EGYPT!

I don’t know if you get the Daily Prophet or not, but Dad won the annual Galleon draw. TOP PRIZE! So the he and Mum are taking the whole family to see my brother Bill in Egypt. He’s a curse breaker for Gringotts. Even Charlie is going to be there.

It may be more difficult to write, but we’re not leaving until the end of July.

9 July 1993

Red,

Wow! That’s awesome! I read that the cursed vaults are a must see, so I hope you find a way of exploring them.

Thanks for the stink pellets; though, I think one of them burst during travel. Sev was not happy when the letter arrived, but I blamed it on Flora. I took a few down to the park yesterday, but there was no one there to use them on. I’ll have to find where the hang out now. Probably at the shops on Denning Street.

Did you hear? The Quidditch World cup for next year has been announced. It’s going to
be in England! I’ll have to be extra nice to Sev this year to convince him to let me buy tickets. And I’ll have to find someone to go with, because I know he won’t take me. You don’t happen to know anyone who’d be interested, do you?

Hope you have fun in Egypt. You’ll have to tell me all about it!

Until next time,

Ana

P.S. Isn’t it your OWL year? I think your mum might have something to say about me doing your homework. I might consider it, however, in exchange for say… four sugar quills and a butterbeer from Hogsmeade.

Ana couldn’t believe she actually sent that! Her hand was shaking as she handed the letter over to the Postman, and she almost tore it from his grasp.

Fred was not the only one Ana was exchanging letters with. Sadie and Hestia were both writing avidly. Sadie wrote of her exploits in Paris, and all the fit French boys. Hestia wrote asking for a reprieve from her family, in particular her sister. So she and Ana flooed to Diagon Ally one day for a bit of lite shopping and ice cream from Fortescue’s.

Hestia prattled on about how Flora was being a right prat, and how she felt they were growing more apart. Most people thought that since they were twins, they were supposed to be just alike. But those that knew them best knew that Flora and Hestia had very different personalities. Hestia, who was older by an hour, was quiet, more reserved, and slightly more open-minded. Flora didn’t like being the second born and was more dominating and assertive in her personality. Which is why she and Ana clashed more often than the other girls. Their family and friends attributed the difference to the fact that they were fraternal twins, not identical ones like Fred and George.

As they sat down for their sundaes, Ana debated telling Hestia about her letters to Fred. She was really starting to fancy him something fierce, and she wanted to share her news with someone. As open-minded as Hestia was though, she still had her limits. Ana worried that dating a blood traitor was one of those limits. And Fred still hadn’t responded to her last letter about Hogsmeade.

“How do you know if a boy fancies you?” Ana said out of nowhere.

“You’re asking me?” Hestia said incredulously. “Flora and Sae are the bloke experts.”

“What about that Ravenclaw boy? Oh, what’s his name? The one with the funny hair and glasses.”

“Duncan?”

“Yeah, him. He was trying to chat you up at the end of term.”

Hestia gave a non-committal shrug. “He’s alright, I suppose. But he…he’s not really my type.”
“Too blue?” Ana asked. “Or is it the hair?”

“No, it’s not the hair. He’s just too…” Hestia hesitated and churned her ice cream a bit. “Male,” she offered up at last, not looking at Ana. When Ana didn’t respond though, she chanced a glance up to find Ana with a small smile on her face.

“You knew?”

“I had a feeling,” Ana said with a shrug.

“How?”

“There was something in the way you’d talk about boys. I don’t know. I’m really good at reading people, and you’re one of my best friends, Hes. Does your family know?”

“No!” she said quickly. “And they can’t. Not yet. I don’t think they’d understand, especially Flora. They already praise her as being the perfect, pure-blood daughter. I don’t want to give them another reason to be disappointed in me.”

“Hestia, stop! You are beautiful and brilliant, and anyone who has any sense is honored to know and love you. Don’t let anyone make you feel less than perfect, even if they are family.”

Hestia gave a genuine smile. “Thanks Ana. I knew I could trust you with this.”

Ana was feeling very hopeful. Hestia had just shared a secret with her; perhaps she could tell her about Fred after all.

“Besides, it’s not like I’d ever go for a Mudblood or anything.”

Or perhaps not.

“So… you’re wondering if Pucey likes you? Or is it Montague you’re interested in?” Hestia asked as she scooped another spoonful of ice cream in her mouth. Ana smiled feebly and took a bite as well, to keep from answering.

29 July 1993

Little Snake,

Egypt is wicked fun! You were right; the cursed vaults are amazing! Mum won’t let Ginny go in some of them. George and I are getting so many ideas for future pranks. This next school year is going to be the best one yet!

Sorry it took so long to write back to you. Mum caught us trying to pull a really good one over on Ron, and she took away our owl privileges. We only just got them back.

I did hear about the World Cup. Dad said he’d try to get us some tickets too. It’d be great if we could all go together. Maybe this year we can discuss our picks to win?

A reporter from the Daily Prophet followed us out to Egypt. They interviewed Mum and Dad and they’re going to put a picture of the whole family in the issue. Be on the lookout for it.

Well, I should go now. We’re having dinner on the Nile tonight.
Fred

Oh! And Hogsmeade sounds great, even if you don’t do my homework.

Ana was ecstatic. It sounded an awful lot like Fred had just agreed to a Hogsmeade date.
ESCAPE FROM AZKABAN

That was the headline of the Daily Prophet at the end of July. Notorious mass murderer, Sirius Black had escaped Azkaban. It was all anyone could talk about, even the Muggles down Spinner’s End. Though, of course, they didn’t know who Black really was nor what he’d really done; they simply knew him as one of their own escaped convicts. Ana didn’t really know much about him either, apart from what the Daily Prophet said.

Ana knew Sev had been a spy during the war, so she thought it likely that Sev had known Black since he was Who-Know-Who’s second in command. But Sev refused to talk about him. And when Ana tried practicing her legilimency on him, he’d closed his mind so hard it felt like hitting a stone wall and left her with a headache. Ana had never seen him so angry before; it even frightened her a little. Black’s continued evasion of the Aurors only left Sev in a fouler mood, and he refused to let Ana out of his sight. Which, unfortunately for Ana, meant she wasn’t allowed to ride the Hogwarts Express with everyone else.

Ana was really quite lonely sitting at the Slytherin table by herself. Since she hadn’t been allowed to travel to King’s Cross alone, she’d been forced to stay at the castle early. Ana now sat in the Great Hall waiting for the rest of her classmates. A few of the Professors were around as well, but they were all at the head table and not talking to Ana.

At last there was a great clamor of voices echoing in the hall outside, and they all began trickling in. Ana craned her neck to look for the girls. She saw Sadie first; it was impossible to miss her. Sadie returned from her French Holiday looking a little more tan and hair a little more golden. Flora and Hestia were next. Hestia smiled when she saw Ana and hurried over. Flora had her nose stuck in the air and walked with the poise to befit a queen.

“Hey! Why weren’t you on the train?” Sadie asked as she hugged Ana and took her seat next to her.

“We missed you,” Hestia added.

“Well, they did at least,” Flora quipped with a smile.

“I missed you too,” Ana said, choosing to ignore Flora. “Sev is being a foul prick and wouldn’t let me travel alone.”

“What did you do?” Flora asked.

“I didn’t do anything,” Ana defended. “It’s all Black’s fault.”

“Sirius Black?” Hestia asked.
“What’s he got to do with it?” said Sadie.

“I’m not sure. But ever since his escape, Sev has been grumpier and moodier, and it’s only gotten worse since we arrived at the castle and he spoke with Dumbledore.”

“Potions ought to be a real blast this year then. Thanks for the heads up,” Hestia said.

“Sure thing. So, how was your summer? You promised pictures, Sadie.”

“I did, and I do.”

Sadie pulled out an album of photos from France. Instead of showcasing the monuments and many historical sights, each picture contained Sadie with a different French boy. Sadie began explaining the story behind each meeting. It was while she was doing this that Ana caught sound of a familiar laugh. She looked up and spotted Fred laughing with his brother and Lee.

At the sight of Fred, Ana nearly lost her breath. She thought he was cute before, but now… It was like all the features she liked about him had been multiplied by ten. He was ten times taller, his hair was ten times redder, his eyes shone ten times brighter, and his laughter was ten timers more contagious. Ana couldn’t wait for Fred to look her way so she could give him her best smile, but he never did.

Since his last letter in July, Fred had been as silent as an Egyptian Mummy, despite the two she’d sent him. At first she attributed his silence to the fact that he was having fun, or perhaps he had been grounded again. But then he took a seat at the Gryffindor table, his back to Ana as though purposefully avoiding her, and Ana wasn’t sure what to think anymore. She bit back the pain his silence caused, and decided that if he didn’t want to talk to her, then she wasn’t going to talk to him. Two could play that game, and Ana would not be the first to break.

She turned her attention back to Sadie and her album.

Ana’s first lesson of the year was Defense Against the Dark Arts. After last year’s debacle, Dumbledore hired a new professor, a man by the name R. J. Lupin. Professor Lupin didn’t look like much at first glance. He was a little tall and gangly. His robes were patched in several places, and he looked as though he were in dire need of a hearty meal. But, Ana thought, he had a kind face.

He picked up the roster from his desk, and began to read down it.

“Sadie Baldock?” He looked up and around the room until his eyes fell upon Sadie sitting next to Flora. He smiled gently and moved on.

“Katie Bell?” Katie looked up and waved at the sound of her name.

Professor Lupin moved on down his list. There was a short pause between each name as he sought out and made eye contact with each student. Ana liked that; she also liked the sound of his voice. It was calm and soothing.

“Belladonna—” His voice hitched as though choking on Ana’s name. He stared at the paper a second more before looking up. “Belladonna Evans?”

He looked for her among the Gryffindors first, so Ana raised her hand higher.
“It’s just ‘Ana’, please, Professor.”

“Ah.” His eyes widened slightly as he caught sight of her hand in the air. Then his gaze lingered on her a moment longer. He took in the green and silver tie around her neck, and the snake embossed on her cloak. When he smiled, it seemed a little more forced.

“Yes, of course…” There was a moment of hesitation as though he struggled to say her name again. “Ana.” He tore his eyes away from her and moved to the next name.

“What was that all about?” Hestia whispered softly.

“I have no idea,” Ana confessed.

It took Professor Lupin less than five minutes to complete the roll call. When he was finished, he laid the roster on his desk, tucked his hands into his pockets, and strode towards the class.

“Now, who can tell me some things you learned in Defense last year?” he asked. When no one answered, Sadie raised her hand. “Yes, Miss… Forgive an old man; you’ll have to help me with all these names.”

“Sadie Baldock, Professor.”

“Ah yes, Miss Sadie.”

“With all due respect to Professor Lockhart, he was rather…”

“Dimwitted?” Flora suggested. There was a collective gasp from the class. It was one thing to talk about a professor behind his back with your friends; it was quite another to do so in front of another professor, whether he was new or not.

“I was going to be more polite about it, Flora.”

“Yeah, and I thought it was Ana’s job to be Wicked,” Hestia added.

“Well, she’s been slacking as of late.” Flora replied. She spoke with a smile so most would mistake her words for a playful jab, but Ana and the girls heard the bitter bite behind them.

Ana replied in a similar fashion. “That’s because I have enough sense not to be so in class. You’ll have to excuse Flora, Professor Lupin; she didn’t finish her happy juice this morning.”

“Nor the morning before that,” Hestia added.

“Or the one before that…”

“Or…”

“He gets the picture,” Sadie said reproachfully as she turned around in her seat.

“I think we’re embarrassing, Sadie,” Ana said.

Sadie rolled her eyes. “I stopped being embarrassed by you three years ago.”

“Three? What have I done?” Flora protested.

“You started it.”
Ana raised her hand all proper like, but she didn’t wait for Professor Lupin to call on her. If she had, she might not ever have had the chance to speak, because he seemed to hesitate on her name again when he turned his focus on her.

“I think what Sadie was going to say, Professor, was that Lockhart was an excellent Professor…when it came to teaching us about himself. But when it came to practical magic and things of actual importance, he was sorely lacking.”

“I’m not so sure I would have been that polite about it,” Sadie said with a smile.

Professor Lupin nodded. “I see I have my work cut out for me then. In more ways than one, it would appear.”

He smiled softly at them. Ana liked his smile too; there was a familiar gleam to it. And he didn’t appear at all daunted by Ana and her friends. He almost seemed to welcome the challenge.

The lesson progressed with Professor Lupin asking for various teams to demonstrate some things they knew. It was rather a light class, but fun nevertheless. It quickly became clear that Professor Lupin was no novice at defensive magic.

Later that day, Professor Lupin was sitting in the staff room reviewing some notes he jotted down about his various students. He was sitting alone until Professor McGonagall walked in. He greeted the older Professor with a kind smile. She fixed herself a cup of tea and took a seat at the table alongside him.

“So? How was your first day?” she asked.

“Enlightening. Invigorating. And yet… so very exhausting too.”

McGonagall smiled as Lupin ran a hand down his face. She could see the exhaustion in his every move. The years since the end of the war had not been kind to him.

He sighed heavily. “I knew she’d be here too; Dumbledore warned me, but I…”

“Didn’t think it’d be so hard?”

He nodded. “Yeah. It just hits you like brick. And in Slytherin? Of all the houses, it had to be Slytherin?”

“Pity isn’t it?”

“A damn shame.”

McGonagall smiled coyly.

“She’s quite talented though, and a skilled chaser; they’d be proud of that.”

“What does she know of her family?”

“Very little, I’m afraid. She doesn’t seem to have any memory of them.”

“And I’m sure Snape has been all too willing to divulge everything he knows about them.”
“He…does what he can. She seems happy, though, and well cared for; that’s what matters, isn’t it?”

“Yeah… yeah I suppose that is all that matters. But…she deserves to know.”

“Perhaps so, but it’s not your place to tell her. Just as it has not been mine. Have you had Harry yet?”

“Wednesday,” Lupin replied.

“He’s another tough one, but he’ll surprise you I think. Watch out for the Weasley boy’s though; they would have given you four a challenge I think.”

Lupin smiled. “I look forward to a good challenge, Professor.”

“You’re one of us now, Remus. Call me Minerva.”
Potent Potions

Belladonna 19

Potent Potions

4 September 1993

Fred remained silent throughout the first week of school. It both angered and annoyed Ana. She’d lay in bed wondering what she did wrong and trying to convince herself that it didn’t matter. It was his loss. But nothing worked.

Saturday was the first day in a month where she woke and he wasn’t on her mind. Quidditch was. Marcus was once again hosting tryouts on the first Saturday, and Ana was eager to begin a new season. She entered the common room with her broom and gear in hand. Meanwhile, Adrian was there with a pile of books and notes, but no broom.

“Oi! Adrian, did you forget what day it is? We have to get to tryouts.”

He looked up with a deep-set frown. “I can’t this year. My parents won’t let me.”

“Can’t? Won’t? What do you mean by these…strange words? I do not know them,” Ana teased as she sat next to him on the sofa. Adrian offered her a sad smile.

“It’s OWL year,” he offered as an explanation. “My marks aren’t quite where my parents want them to be. They insist that I focus on classes this year; they expect nothing less than an E in every subject.”

“That doesn’t sound so bad.”

“It’s not. And in most of my classes, it’s possible with a good bit of studying. Potions, however…” His voice trailed off and he grimaced.

“Potions? Is that it? Adrian, you forget who you’re talking to!”

“Belladonna Evans?”

“And my father is…”

“I thought he wasn’t…”

“Oh, you know what I mean! Is that your potion’s book there?” Ana asked as she picked up a book from the table.

“Yep. Uh-huh. I’ve done that one,” she said as she flipped through the pages. “Ooo, that looks interesting. I did this one this summer. Ha! I did that one two summers ago!”

“What are you? Some kind of potions genius?”

“I prefer the term ‘prodigy.’ It sounds more prestigious.”

Adrian laughed.

“But really, for all intents and purposes, my dad is the youngest Potions Master in recent
history. And before I had friends to occupy my time, or when my friends abandon me for wickedly awesome summers, I brew potions. I think it’s a shame they won’t let you take your OWLs early, but I do plan on getting my NEWT in potions by the end of my sixth year. That way, during my seventh, I can focus on modifying and creating my own potions, making me the youngest Potions Master ever!”

“So… What I gather from all of that is…you’re moderately good at potions?”

Ana stared blankly at him, and he grinned. “Care to share your knowledge with a poor chap like me?” he asked.

“With praise like yours… how can I say no?” Ana smiled.

“Great! With your help, maybe I’ll manage a high A.”

“No. With my help, you’ll get an O.”

“You overestimate my skills.”

“And you underestimate mine.”

“Ana! We’re going to be late,” Montague said as he hurried over to the sofa. “Adrian, are you coming?”

Adrian sighed heavily. “Not this year.”

“But I thought…” Ana began but stopped short. “Still?”

“Still. You don’t know my parents. But I…I’d still like to…”

“Oh! Absolutely! I’d be delighted to.”

“Great!”

“Great. Well I…I better be going then. Come on, Montague; let’s see if you improved any over the summer.”

Graham Montague had improved, so much so that he made the team as a chaser alongside Ana and Marcus. After the Slytherins had their tryouts, the Gryffindors had theirs. As Graham and Ana made their way back to the castle, Ana pointedly ignored a pair of red-headed beaters…

…If only because she was so shocked by Graham’s inquiry.

“So… You and Pucey, are you a thing now? Officially?”

“What!?”

“He asked you to Hogsmeade, didn’t he?”

Ana stared at him in confusion. “No. Why would you think that?”

“I… I thought that’s what you were discussing in the common room this morning. You
“said, ‘you’d be delighted to,’” he quoted almost bitterly.

“To help him…with potions,” Ana said with a laugh. “He’s taking his OWLs this year, and he’s worried about his potions exam. That’s why his parents won’t let him play.”

“So you’re… not dating him?”

“No.”

“Oh! Ok… So then…you’re free? I mean—you’re not dating anyone then?”

“Gee. Thanks for the reminder.”

“No that’s not… I didn’t mean to…” Graham Montague was a fumbling, nervous wreck. He couldn’t get the words he wanted to say to come out in the way he wanted them to come out. And Ana, who’d only ever focused on Fred, was completely oblivious to Graham’s intentions. Graham took a deep breath and tried to start again, but before he could begin, Hestia called out to Ana.

“Sorry,” Ana said cutting across Graham. “I promised Hess I’d help her with something. Edgecombe’s being a right twit this year. We’ll catch up later, yeah? I want to go over some of the maneuvers Adrian and I have.”

“Yeah… Yeah. That’s what I was going to suggest.”

“Great! See you then!” Ana rushed off to join her friends, leaving Graham behind.

After all the tryouts were complete, the Quidditch season was officially underway. There were no other changes to the Slytherin team apart from Graham replacing Adrian. The Gryffindor line-up stayed the same, from Captain Oliver Wood to Seeker Harry Potter. Hufflepuff had almost an entirely new team; they had a new captain, Cedric Diggory, two new chasers, and a new keeper. Ravenclaw only had a new seeker: Cho Chang.

But Fred still didn’t talk to Ana.

Ana met with Adrian twice a week to help him review for potions. They met in the potions classroom, under the watchful eye of Sev. Their study session ran about as smoothly as could be expected. Adrian refused to stand too close to Ana, and every time she got too close, Sev would make a disapproving grunt and Adrian would jump away. This often resulted in various near-disasters such as: adding too much of an ingredient, sloshing due to over-zealous stirring, setting a robe on fire, or (in one instance) very nearly chopping off a finger.

About four weeks into their tutoring sessions, Ana decided enough was enough.

“Alright! That’s it; I can’t do this anymore,” Ana said after Adrian had set his sleeve on fire for the third time that day.

Adrian tried to mask his hurt with a smile. “I told you, you were overestimating my skills.”

“Sorry. Not you, Adrian. You!” Ana suddenly turned around to confront Sev. “I have had
enough. I can’t instruct with you huffing and grunting every ten seconds!”

“If you would keep a respectable distance…”

“If I kept anymore of a ‘respectable distance,’ I’d be out the door. And seeing as how I have yet to develop the ability to see through walls, then that wouldn’t do us any good!”

This wasn’t the first time Ana and Sev had argued over a “respectable distance,” but Adrian knew better than to try and intervene, now at least. The first time they had argued, Adrian spoke up only to have them both turn on him. So when Professor Lupin walked in and looked like he was about to say something, Adrian quickly flagged him down and warned him not to.

“I am trying to teach…”

“You’re a student…”

“But you know I can do this; you just don’t want me doing it better than you!” Ana said.

“Don’t be foolish.”

“I ought to say the same to you, but it’s too late for that!”

Professor Lupin gave a none-too-subtle cough, effectively gaining everyone’s attention. Sev’s scowl deepened and Ana’s eyes widened slightly. As far as she knew, Professor Lupin was not aware of her relationship with Professor Snape. She scrambled to try and explain why she’d been yelling at a Professor.

“Professor Lupin, I… It’s not what you think. Ss—Professor Snape is my—ah…” She was about to say ‘dad,’ but there’s nothing Sev disliked more than when someone called him her dad.

“I’m aware,” Professor Lupin said kindly. “Professor Dumbledore told me as much. Still, perhaps those weren’t the kindest of words to say to someone who raised you?”

“Well, I don’t think you understand, Professor, just how ridiculous he’s being right now. You are being ridiculous, S-Sir,” Ana said, anticipating Sev’s retort. “I’m just tutoring him. It’s not like we’re going to suddenly start snogging. If I wanted to do that, I’d do it in the common room, or a broom cupboard like everyone else.”

Sev’s face turned ten shades whiter, and his eyes grew wide. Professor Lupin began choking on air. And Adrian stumbled forward.

“I promise you, Professor, there is absolutely no snogging going on, in or out of broom cupboards.”

Ana tried to not let the hurt from Adrian’s remark show on her face. What did she care? In his coldest, hardest voice, Sev said one word and Adrian fled, likely from the whole castle.

“Out.”

Ana felt the familiar prick of her mind and she knew this argument would be continued without words.
“We weren’t finished,” Ana said as she folded her arms over her chest. They were still in the Potions classroom, but they were alone.

“You are now. Permanently,” Sev replied icily. “I don’t want you to see anymore of him.”

Ana scoffed. “We’re in the same house! I see him every day. And you can’t stop me from helping a friend. If he’s even my friend after this.”

When Sev didn’t respond, Ana went on. “You could at least pretend to be sympathetic.”

“Why?”

“Forget it. You probably wouldn’t understand anyway.”

“I understand plenty.”

“Oh? You understand that I’m a fifteen-year-old girl who likes boys, and who might actually want to kiss a boy one day, but that’s looking less and less likely with you around, especially since I can’t even offer a boy a friendly tutoring session without you huffing and grunting all the time. And before you say anything about keeping a ‘respectable distance,’ it’s potions for Merlin’s sake! I have to be close enough to observe what he’s doing, and you know that a second can make a world of difference when mixing.”

Ana sucked in a great breath of air.

“I understand that you’re still fourteen…”

“Only for a few more weeks!”

“…and still a petulant child incapable of restraining her emotions.”

“Petulant?” Ana bit back her tears. “I knew you wouldn’t understand. How could you? It isn’t petulance; it’s called being human. I don’t want to grow up miserable and alone. I want to have friends, unlike you. And I want to help my friends succeed, with or without your help!”

Without warning, Ana closed off her mind and kicked Sev out. He was unprepared for the sudden shove, and it forced him to step back into his desk. While Sev recovered, Ana stared him down.

“May I be excused now, Sir?” she said between her teeth. Sev’s only response was to nod his head towards the door.

Ana turned and rushed by a confused looking Professor Lupin, in a manner usually attributed to Sev, with her black robes billowing behind her. She’d return for her things later, when Sev wasn’t there. Out in the cold, damp hall, Ana was surprised to find that her cheeks were wet with the tears she hadn’t managed to stop.
Ana was sure that after their last session, when she mouthed off to Sev, that Adrian would never want to speak to her again.

She was wrong.

Adrian approached her a few days later asking to resume their sessions. Ana was happy to oblige, and so they met without the direct knowledge of Sev. Ana was certain he still knew, but she never told and he never asked.

September rolled into October, and the first Hogsmeade weekend loomed nearer. Still, Fred kept his distance and his silence. All the girls had dates already, even Hestia had agreed to go with Duncan from Ravenclaw. Ana, however, wasn’t sure of her date status, and that was something Flora loved to comment on any chance she got.

That uncertainty, however, was about to change.

“Oh, Professor,” Marietta Edgecombe sang in a mockingly sweet voice.

It was the Friday before the Hogsmeade weekend. Ana and Hestia were leaving Divination where once again, Ana had been a shining star. She was, apparently, really good at it and rather enjoyed the class, even though it always left her with a headache. Marietta, as it turned out, was not so good at the subject. And so she often took out her frustrations on Ana and Hestia.

Marietta opened her mouth to deliver what was sure to be a mediocre insult at best, but Ana and Hestia beat her to the punch and delivered an insult that Marietta could not counter.

“You know, Edgecombe, there are three types of people in this world,” Ana began.

“There are those like me who have to work hard to be great,” Hestia continued. “And there are those like Ana who are just born great.”

“Then there are people like you, who fall into the pit of failure no matter what they do.”

“And do you know what happens to the people in the pit?”

“The snakes devour them whole.”

On cue, Ana and Hestia both licked their lips and gave a gentle hiss. Marietta’s eyes were wide with fear and disgust as Cho Chang dragged her away.

“I couldn’t have said it better myself,” Hestia said with a smile.

“I don’t know…I think it may have been a little much.”
Hestia cocked an eyebrow. “Really?”

“Yes. I mean, I’m great; I know I am, but was I really born great, or is it simply a compilation of all the great people around me?”

Hestia’s eyebrow rose even higher.

“No. You’re right, Hes. I was just born this way.”

Hestia rolled her eyes and laughed. “For a moment there you had me worried. I thought perhaps you’d been body snatched.”

“That I’d been what?”

“Body snatched…It’s this talking picture that Duncan keeps raving about.”

“Oh… right… So, you and Duncan?”

“Please don’t start, Ana. I know what you’re going to say, but you don’t know the rest of my family. You think Flora is cruel; she’s as mild as Sadie compared to my Aunt and Uncle. All summer I had to listen to them rant about the pure-blood society, and how mingling with Muggles and Mudbloods will be the end of us. Good pure-blood daughters are expected to marry good pure-blood sons, and make good pure-blood babies, Ana.”

“Wow, Hes, that’s… a lot of pressure. I’m sorry. I didn’t realize. But I still don’t think it’s right that you have to hide yourself.”

Hestia shrugged her shoulder. “It’s not so bad; at least I have you.”

“Yes. I’m here for whatever you need me for. Except…I…I can’t go to Hogsmeade with you, or…”

Hestia laughed. “Don’t worry, Ana. You’re my best friend; I want it to stay that way. And besides, you’re not really my type.”

“Good, me too. But wait…that means… not even you want to ask me to Hogsmeade. Great.”

“He still hasn’t asked?”

Ana shook her head; though, she was certain that Hestia wasn’t thinking of the right “he.”

“I’m beginning to think you were right,” Ana said. “Boys are just stupid gits.”

“Of course they are,” Sadie said as she joined them in the Entrance Hall. “Is there one, in particular, we’re talking about?”

“Adrian still hasn’t asked Ana to Hogsme…”

Ana lost track of what they were saying. Like suddenly being swept into a wind tunnel, all sound became muffled. The three of them were on the edge of the Entrance Hall where half the castle was congregated. The other half had already pushed their way into the Great Hall for lunch. Across the hall from them, Fred and George stood laughing and smiling.

That wasn’t what caught Ana’s eye; though Fred always caught her eye despite her efforts to not let him. No. What Ana found particularly disturbing that day, was the young Hufflepuff that
stood with them. She was shorter than Ana with brown, plain hair that probably only reached her shoulders but it was currently pulled up into a ponytail, a few loose strands refusing to obey. Her back was to Ana, but that’s okay; Ana recognized her anyway. She could almost see the number 9 on her back.

Heidi Macavoy.

Or was it Hilda? Henrietta? It didn’t matter. Ana knew she was a chaser for Hufflepuff; a mediocre one at best. Now it wasn’t uncommon for Fred or George to talk to another player, same house or not, such was their love for the game. That wasn’t what put Ana on edge.

It was the all too friendly, too charming, too blech way Macavoy reached up to brush something off Fred’s shoulder that set Ana’s insides on fire. But it was the way he looked at her that extinguished those flames and turned Ana into a pile of ash. And then, because it was Fred, Ana’s ears honed in on the sound of his voice.

“Are we still on for this weekend?” he asked.

“I am if you are,” Macavoy replied.

Ana felt sick. Ana felt humiliated. All that time she spent trying to convince herself that she didn’t like him, that she didn’t care what he did, was time wasted. Had he ever really liked her? Had he ever really considered a friend? Or had it all been some ruse? Some great joke? He was probably over there laughing at her at this very moment with Macavoy and George.

“Ooo, Belladonna. Such a silly name for a silly girl.”

“Who name’s their daughter Belladonna?”

This couldn’t be happening, but it was.

“Ana? Ana, are you all right?” Sadie asked, gently turning Ana’s shoulder her way.

“I… No,” Ana said faintly. “No, I’m not all right. How can I be all right?” Ana was losing it and fast. She had to get control again. She couldn’t tell them about Fred. Not now.

“What’s wrong?” Hestia asked.

“I… I think I’m going to be sick.”

“Well come on, let’s get in and we can sit down. If that doesn’t work we’ll go to the Hospital Wing.” Sadie tugged on Ana’s arm to guide her into the Great Hall, but Ana pulled back.

“No… No, I… You go on without me. I’m… I’ll just go back to the dorm. I’ll take one of my potions and sleep it off.”

“Ana,” Hestia began to protest.

“I started,” Ana said quickly. “That’s all it is. You know how the first day can be. I just need a good pain draught and some rest. I’ll be fine.” Even as she said the words, she didn’t believe them. How could she ever be fine again?

“Are you sure?”

“Absolutely.” Ana smiled. “Go. Eat. I’ll see you later.”
Ana didn’t wait for them to try and protest anymore. She just walked towards the dungeons. Of course… Fred was standing on the side of the hall nearest the staircase. In order to get to the dungeons, Ana would have to walk right by him.

She couldn’t let him see her like this: falling apart on the inside. She wouldn’t give him the satisfaction. So she walked tall, with a cool mask of indifference, trying everything Sev taught her about controlling her emotions. Her fellow classmates noticed, and they parted before her in reverent fear. When she passed by Fred, she didn’t even glance his way. So she didn’t notice him turn her way and leave George’s side.

“Little Snake!”

Ana lost her breath but continued walking.

“Little Snake! Hey, Ana!” Fred reached out and grabbed Ana’s wrist.

It took everything Ana had not to crumble at the very touch.

“Hey, didn’t you hear me? I was…”

Ana turned around and gave Fred an icy glare. He dropped her wrist as though it burned.

“Are you all right?” he asked.

She smiled coldly. “Never better.”

“Oh… Are you…”

“What is this, Weasley?” Her use of his surname jolted him a bit. “Have you come crawling back at last?”

“Wh—what?”

“After your silence these last few months, I thought perhaps you’d figured it out. Your mere presence here now, however, proves otherwise.”

“What are you talking about, Ana?” His face was pinched in confusion, and not the pain Ana felt. Her smile turned dangerously sweet.

“You don’t understand? Well let me put it in a way that you can grasp; I’ll use little words, so try to follow along. I. Was. Using. You.” She spoke slowly, enunciating each word. Then she laughed mockingly. “And you fell for it. Pathetic.”

“Ana… don’t…”

“It’s already been done, Weasley.” She said his name pointedly, knowing that if she called him by anything other than his surname, then her own pain would be reflected in her words.

He gave a slight shake of his head and looked at her with something more akin to pity than sadness.

“I don’t know why you’re doing this, Ana, but I know it’s not you.”

His sympathy unleashed an anger in Ana. How dare he presume to still know her so well after his silence. How dare he pity her. And yet, there was a part of her that tried to claw its way to the surface and admit that he was right and beg his forgiveness.
Ana pushed that part of her into a dark corner.

“You still don’t get it. I have never been more me than I am right now. Everything you think you knew about me was a ruse, a fabrication to lure you in. But that’s over now. I’m done playing this game. You mean nothing to me, Weasley; you never did.”

At last, Ana struck a nerve. She could see it wash over his whole body. The pain she had felt finally reflected in his eyes; her own pain, however, had somehow intensified. Ana had no time to question her new level of pain as two more heads of red hair popped up between her and Fred.

“Leave him alone,” Ginny Weasley said.

“Yeah. That’s our brother; only we can talk to him like that,” Ron added.

The two youngest Weasley’s weren’t the only two to get involved; Ana and Fred had drawn quite the crowd. Harry and Hermione stood there too, along with George, of course, and Lee, as well as most of the Gryffindor Quidditch team. Ana did not stand alone, either. She was backed by the Slytherin team, which unsurprisingly included Draco; he took any opportunity he could to taunt Harry and his friends. If Ana had been paying attention though, she may have been surprised to see that it was Flora who stood by her side and not Sadie or Hestia.

“Is there something going on here?” Professor Lupin asked gently.

Ana’s lips turned up into a lopsided grin as she looked towards him. “Not at all, Professor,” she said with false innocence. Then she turned her eyes back to Fred. “There is nothing going on here.”

“Then I suggest you all proceed into the Great Hall for lunch.”

There was a moment in which neither side moved. Then George pushed his way through the crowd, and gently pulled Fred away. The others followed slowly, but not without casting menacing glares towards Ana.

“Looks like Wicked has struck again,” Flora said. “It’s nice to have you back.”
Regret

Belladonna 21

29 October 1993

Regret

Ana sat in darkness. She didn’t know what time it was; she didn’t care to know what time it was. Though with the Dementors drifting around the perimeter making everything dark and cold, it probably wasn’t as late as it looked, or maybe it was later. That wasn’t important. Time wasn’t important. What mattered right then, was that Ana was alone.

After her confrontation with Fred that afternoon, Ana needed to be alone. When the crowd had dispersed, Ana retreated to the dorm like she’d planned. She was certain that once she’d made it there, she would break down. She did not. She’d focused so hard on holding her mask that it eventually set in. When she reached her bed, it continued to hold.

It was still holding now, hours later, but it was finally growing weaker. That was why Ana was alone and glad for it. Suddenly a bit of movement caught her attention. She whipped her head around.

“Fr…” Ana bit back the traitorous name that had nearly slipped out. It wasn’t Fred that stood in the doorway; it was Sadie.

Ana stood frozen in silence. Since she had bunked off the rest of her lessons that day, she hadn’t seen any of the girls since lunch. She hadn’t seen anyone in general. Ana wanted to tell Sadie to go away, but to do so Ana would have to speak. And if Ana tried to speak, she knew her mask would crumble.

“Is this where you’d meet?” Sadie asked as she looked around the empty classroom.

Ana fought to keep her mask up, but Sadie was one of her best friends.

“It’s secluded, I suppose,” Sadie continued. She wrinkled her pretty little nose when she saw the dust on the empty desk. “Grungy, but secluded.”

Sadie turned her attention back to Ana as she moved forward.

“I…I heard what happened; by now most of the castle has heard some version of it. Flora saw to that. I’m sorry I wasn’t there. I’m sorry I didn’t stop…”

“It was no big deal,” Ana said through her teeth.

“I know that’s a lie.”

“It meant nothing to me.”

“I know that’s a lie too.”

Ana turned away hastily, using the movement to wipe away the tear that had started to fall. She could feel more pushing to the surface. It was about to happen.
“If it meant nothing, then why did you miss classes?”

“I told you; I wasn’t feeling well.”

“Because you saw him with Heidi?”

“Don’t!” Ana whipped her head around again. “Go away, Sadie. Please.”

Sadie did not leave. Rather, she moved forward and sat on the desk next to Ana.

“I know you liked him. I don’t know why you liked him, but I know you did. I watched you flirt with him many times. Sometimes we can’t choose the people we fancy; it just happens and we have to deal with it. For better or for worse.

“What you did today, Ana…” Sadie shook her head. “I know half of what Flora is saying is a lie, and I really hope the other half isn’t true either, but…Ana?”

Ana had turned to Sadie at last. Her eyes were swollen with tears, her lips trembling, her cheeks and nose turning red from lack of air.

“What have I done, Sadie? What have I done?”

It was over. The battle was lost. Ana burst into sobs as the last remnants of her mask crumbled. Sadie, ever the gentle friend, slid closer to Ana and allowed her head to rest on her shoulder. Sadie could offer no words of solace. She knew nothing could ease Ana’s pain. She was just glad that Ana was finally letting it out.

They stayed in that empty classroom on the fourth floor for most of the night. They sat huddled together in a corner, and Ana told Sadie everything. From her first run-in with Fred in Diagon Ally, to their secret talks in that very classroom, to that horrible moment when Ana said he meant nothing to her. And Sadie listened and offered up her shoulder again when the pain became too much to handle. The sky outside was turning grey with the early morning light when they finally tip-toed back to the dungeons.

Understandably, Ana did not attend Hogsmeade with anyone the next day. Sadie, too, canceled her date. Ana tried to protest, but Sadie insisted, saying she couldn’t see anyone after staying up all night. So they stayed in the dorm, eating fattening sweets, coloring their nails, and doing each other’s hair. It was all very girly and sentimental, but it was a distraction. And Ana needed a distraction.

The fem-fest continued Sunday and expanded to include the girls from other years. They took over a section of the common room with their nail colors and hair products. The Slytherin boys were all very put out about it, especially when one of the older girls began a discussion hating on the boys, but there was little they could do.

No one, apart from Ana and Sadie, knew why the fem-fest had begun, and no one cared.

For most of the weekend, Ana was able to avoid the rest of the school, but Sunday was the Halloween Feast. Ana had no good excuse to give Flora for not wanting to attend, especially since they all knew it was her favorite feast and her birthday. So around six that evening, Ana walked into the Great Hall with her head held high, her hair in long curls down her back instead of
her trademark braid, and a thin smile on her face.

All through dinner, Ana smiled and laughed with her friends. Though her smile never reached its full potential, and her laugh was forced. By her appearance alone, however, no one would know that being the most hated girl in the school had any effect on her what so ever. But inside, her heart was hammering and her stomach was churning. For the first time in four years, Ana was glad the feast ended so she could return to the comfort and solitude of her dorm.

That solitude did not last long.

Ana had just settled under the covers and was ready to close her eyes when there was a sharp knock at the door. Hestia answered.

“Oh good; you’re all still awake,” the Sixth Year Prefect said. “Snape is calling everyone to the common room.”

“Why?” Flora asked.

“Don’t know. He didn’t say. He just said not to keep him waiting. No, come as you are,” the Prefect added when Flora tried to change. Then she left to alert the other dorms.

“What do you suppose this is about?” Sadie asked. Everyone looked to Ana as though she’d magically have the answer.

“I have no idea,” Ana said. “But I do know, that if he said not to keep him waiting, then you really shouldn’t.”

Ana threw back her covers, slipped into her shoes, and grabbed her night robe. Sadie and Hestia followed suit, but Flora lingered.

“Go on; I’ll be there in a moment. I can’t let Lucian see me like this.”

Ana looked at Hestia, and they both rolled their eyes. Sadie led them up the staircase to the common room first, and they arrived to find their housemates in various states of sleep. Some of the older or more studious students, like Adrian, were still fully dressed and sitting around piles of notes. Graham was sitting on the couch with Adrian.

Sev stood near the exit, arms folded over his chest as he waited for everyone to arrive. When Ana emerged, his eyes quickly caught hers and Ana knew instantly that something dire had happened. She hoped it had nothing to do with Professor Lupin as he had been looking rather pale and sickly over the past week or so. Ana knew Sev was working on a special potion for him, but she had yet to figure out what it was.

Adrian also caught Ana’s eye and beckoned her over. “What’s this about?”

“Why does everyone think I know what’s going on?”

“Well, can’t you do that thing where you figure it out?” Graham asked.

“What thing?” Ana asked.

“You know, the one where you stare at Professor Snape and it’s like you’re having an entire conversation—or argument—without saying a word,” Adrian said.
“You mean when we use legilimency?”

“Is that what it is? I didn’t know you knew legilimency.”

Ana nodded. “Occlumency too.”

“Wow,” was all Graham could manage to say. Adrian simply nodded. “So, can you do it?”

Ana looked back to Sev. She prodded gently and immediately his eyes locked with her hers; the warning was clear: stay out.

“No,” Ana said. “He doesn’t want me in right now, and I know better than to push.”

They didn’t have to wait much longer as Flora finally emerged from the common room. She looked pristine, as usual. Her hair was immaculate, and she had changed clothes.

“Thank you for finally deciding to join us, Miss Carrow. Perhaps next time you can model your efforts after those of your sister,” Sev said sternly.

Hestia tried to mask her pleasure, but Ana did not; it wasn’t often that Flora was told to be more like Hestia.

“Now, follow me.”

“Where are we going, Professor?” Draco asked, sounding confident he would get an answer.

“To the Great Hall.”

“But why?”

“That does not concern you, Mister Malfoy.”

Ana thought that statement was mildly absurd. It very clearly did concern them as they were all being dragged from the beds and herded out. But Ana was not going to argue with Sev on that matter; the look on Draco’s face was too good to argue.

They followed Sev obediently but grudgingly. They arrived just as Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw did; Gryffindor was somehow already there. The other Heads of House were securing the exits while Dumbledore addressed the student body.

“The Professors and I need to conduct a thorough search of the castle,” he said. “I’m afraid that, for your own safety, you will have to spend the night here.”

He placed the prefects and the Head Boy and Head Girl in charge, sent the tables to the side of the hall, and summoned sleeping bags before leaving.

“Does the barmy old man really expect us to sleep here? On this nasty floor?” Flora asked.

“Looks like it,” Ana replied as she bent down to grab a bag for her and Sadie.

“Get over it, Flora. I have,” Hestia finished with a sly grin. Flora scowled and pulled the offered bag roughly from Hestia’s hands.
While Flora had been complaining about the sleeping conditions, word had quickly spread through the Great Hall. Sirius Black had broken into the castle and attempted to break into Gryffindor Tower. When his attempts on the latter failed, he tore at the portrait guarding the entrance. He was now suspected to be loose somewhere within the castle.

“I hope they don’t find him,” Flora said.

“You’d rather a raving lunatic roam free?” Hestia asked.

Flora shrugged. “If only so next time he’ll finish the job and rid us of Potter, the Mudblood, and the Blood Traitor.”

Ana wanted to say something to Flora; she wanted to tell her how despicable she was being, advocating for murder like she was, but Ana couldn’t speak. Ana could barely breathe. While Flora was talking about Potter and his friends, Ana had subconsciously searched the room to find them. It wasn’t hard of course, but in doing so she also found Fred.

She hadn’t seen him since Friday evening; she made a point not to look towards the Gryffindor table during the feast. He hadn’t noticed her staring at him yet for which she was glad. At the mere sight of him, a great and terrible pain swelled up in her chest and threatened to spill forth. Then he turned his head, and Ana had to look away quickly, but it wasn’t enough.

As the Prefects called for them to settle down and announced “lights off in ten,” Ana knew sleep would never come to her. When she closed her eyes, all she would see would be the crushed and broken look on Fred’s face. And again she thought, “What have I done?”
A Trick to Forget

Belladonna 22

A Trick to Forget

11 November 1993

There could be no doubt that Ana was, indeed, the most hated girl, if not person, in the castle.

Fred was a very lovable person and wildly popular amongst the houses; yes, even in Slytherin he had his secret admirers. The pranks he pulled with George always brought smiles to faces. Except, perhaps, for the one being pranked, but rest assured they too were laughing and smiling the next time someone else was pranked.

But in the days following that day, Fred was not himself. The castle was oddly quiet as there were no great shenanigans at meal times or noisy disturbances amongst the fifth year classes. Even the fact that, for the first time in a decade, Gryffindor would not be facing off against Slytherin in the opening match, did not rile Fred into his typical pre-match antics. There was only one person to blame for this.

Ana, the Wicked Witch.

Only within her own house, was Ana awarded with any amount of praise for her annihilation of Fred. Some still did not wholly approve, like Sadie, most said nothing at all, like Hestia, but a few, like Draco and Flora, saw the incident as Ana re-asserting her loyalties to the “Slytherin way.”

Ana, herself, was stuck in the middle. She was in a constant struggle to maintain the façade that she didn’t care while burying the hurt deep within. Her mind was often in such a tangled web that she had little time to focus on anything else…like her school work.

Ana was leaning on her desk with her head propped up on her arm. She wasn’t even pretending to pay attention. She hadn’t heard a word of Professor Lupin’s lesson; she didn’t know what they were discussing, and she didn’t know what he was doing when he began walking amongst the desks. He stopped at Ana’s row and waited expectantly.

“That includes you as well, Ana,” he said.

Ana turned her unfocused attention to him slowly. “I’m sorry? What does?”

“You’re homework, Miss Evans.”

“Oh. Right. What was that again?”

“The questions regarding chapter six of your textbook.” Professor Lupin was being extremely patient with her, but it was beginning to fade.
“Oh. That. Yeah. I didn’t do that.”

Professor Lupin bristled slightly. “And may I ask why not?”

Ana shrugged. “Which answer would you prefer? ‘I tried but I didn’t understand it.’ ‘I had Quidditch practice forgot.’ Or honestly, ‘I just didn’t feel like it.’”

There was a collective intake of air.

“I mean really, what’s the point?” Ana continued. “You’ll leave at the end of the year, and we’ll have another, likely incompetent, placeholder until the next year.”

“Ana!” Sadie hissed.

“Oh! Don’t give me that, Sae. You know it’s true as well as I do. The position’s cursed!”

“So in the absence of persistent instruction, you think it best to just simply…give up? To not even attempt to learn anything?” Professor Lupin asked.

“Sure. We’ll go with that,” Ana said.

“I see.” He moved to the front of the class. “Well then, you and I can have a long discussion about this new…philosophy of yours, when you join me for detention. Tonight. Six sharp.”

Ana leaned back in her chair, but gave no outward sign of being upset; she wasn’t. She wasn’t surprised either. Without Fred’s contagious laugh, what was the point of anything?

Ana wasn’t really sure why she showed up for the detention, but she did. Professor Lupin was stacking papers on his desk when she walked in. He looked up at her but finished his organizing before he crossed to the front of his desk and leaned against it. He then shoved his hands in his pockets and looked at her with genuine concern.

“What’s going on, Ana?” he asked.

Ana looked away and did not answer. Hestia had asked her something very similar after class; she refused to answer her as well.

“This new attitude of yours isn’t like you. Coming in late, not paying attention in class, failing to do your assignments, these aren’t the actions of the same Ana I met two months ago. What’s changed? Does this have anything to do with…?”

“What would you know of it?” Ana snapped. “You don’t know me, Professor. Maybe this is me, the real me, the wicked me!”

Professor Lupin was silent for a moment. He knew he had struck a nerve, but then so had she. “You’re right, Ana; I don’t know you. Fortunately,” his eyes drifted towards a bit of movement at the door. “There are those in this castle who do know you.”

Ana could smell the bitterness of hemlock and knew exactly what had caught Professor Lupin’s eye. Or rather, who. She turned around to face him slowly.

“So he called you, did he? Unbelievable. The other students aren’t subjected to this sort of torture.”
“The other students are not you. Which makes this disappointment far...graver. I thought I did better than this.”

“It isn’t always about you, Sev.”

She heard his voice inside her head. “Then tell me what it is about.” Ana bit her lip and shook her head.

“If you refuse the help when it is offered, then you cannot hold others accountable for your short-comings. Do with her as you see fit; my displeasure is known,” Sev said to Lupin. Then, with a swish of his cloak, he turned to leave.

Again, Ana didn’t know why she did it, but she did.

“Have you ever done something...said something that you regretted?” she asked, trying desperately to hold back the flood of emotions that wanted to spill. “And you wished, more than anything, that you could take it back? But you know you can’t. And then the damage your words caused slowly begins to tear you apart.

“What do you do? How do you cope? Can you cope? Is there such a thing as moving on? Or moving past it?

“There must be some way, some trick to forget it at least. A variation of the forgetfulness potion perhaps? A sprig of lovage or a dash of octopus powder. Because forgetting is the only solution I can think of, but I’m not sure how to make it happen.”

Sev stood silent. Ana’s words picked at an old scab. He was immediately reminded of the desperate pleas of his sixteen-year-old self, begging his friend to forgive him. There was no way to forget. Forgetting was impossible. There was only a way to survive.

Instead of forgetting, Sev learned to lock away all the emotions associated with that dreadful day. The guilt, the pain, the sense of loss were gone, inaccessible for years. A skilled Occlumens could do it with ease, but to do so fundamentally changed a person at their core. It could be undone, sure, but it was slow and agonizing work.

The question was not if he could teach Ana how to do it; she had the potential, the foundation for being just like him. The question was, could he subject her to that lonely sort of life? To that agonizing pain that came with trying to right a grievous wrong?

“No,” he said simply. “There is no quick fix to solve your problems. No easy solution to drink, not for you. Those are the sentiments of a fool. You must make a choice, Belladonna, to be better than a fool, to be stronger than your weakest self, to be not as other would dictate you to be. It does not do to dwell on past happenings. You and you alone must accept what has been done, and simply rise above it. Do you understand?”

Ana lost the battle with her tears somewhere in the midst of Sev’s encouragement. She wiped unceremoniously at her eyes with the sleeve of her robe and nodded her head.

“Yes—yes, Sir. I—I won’t fail you again.”

“I do not believe you ever have, but see to it that I am not called to one of these again.”

“I wouldn’t dream of it, Sir.”

For a moment they stood and stared silently at one another, saying things, in their own
way, that were often left unsaid. Then Sev turned once more to leave. Ana followed after him.

“What are you doing?” he asked, stopping suddenly so that Ana nearly ran into his back.

“Sir?”

“You still have a detention to serve.”

“But, I thought… Yes, Sir.” Ana wisely decided against her protest at the look on Sev’s face. Then he left at last, and Ana turned to face Professor Lupin. He looked nearly as surprised as she was.

“Right. Well then…”

Professor Lupin looked around, quickly trying to find something for Ana to do. He didn’t want to be the sort of Professor who simply issued lines. Lines were boring, and he hated doing lines in school. His eyes landed on the grindylow in its tank. He’d been in possession of the creature now for a little more than a week. And its tank was filthy.

“The grindylow tank needs cleaning. I should still have the travel case it came in. You can transport it to there while you de-scum the tank.” As he spoke, Professor Lupin waved his wand and all the supplies Ana needed appeared on the table near the tank.

Ana did not attempt conversation while she worked, and neither did Professor Lupin. He couldn’t have if he wanted to. This was the first time he’d been alone with Ana, and he had no idea what to say to her. Harry had been easy; he was just like his father. But Ana… Ana was different.

Lupin wanted to see an inkling of her parents influence in her, but if it was there, it was overshadowed by Snape’s. Lupin wondered what her parents would think of her now. He knew they’d be proud, but would they have wished for something different—apart from the obvious, of course.

Would they have wished that someone else had raised her? Someone like him perhaps? Of course, that notion was ridiculous. Someone like him couldn’t possibly raise a child; the risk was too great. Then he wondered if perhaps…

“Professor Lupin?” Ana’s voice broke through his runaway thoughts.

Lupin blinked his eyes several times in succession to shake away the thoughts of Ana, and her parents, and what could have been. He glanced briefly towards the Grindylow tank and saw that it was clean. Ana, meanwhile, stood in front of his desk and it looked like she’d been trying to get his attention for some time.

“Yes? My apologies, Ana, I was lost in thought. How can I help you?”

“I…I finished the tank and I didn’t know if you wanted me to do anything else.” Her voice was hoarse and her eyes red, like she’d still been crying.

“No, I… I think that’s all for tonight.”

“Oh…” She sounded disappointed almost, and Lupin didn’t want her to be disappointed.

“I…I still have some work to do. I was going to finish grading these papers.” He pointed
to the stack on his desk. “You’re welcome to stay and work on some things yourself. I happen to know for a fact that you have homework.”

Ana’s lips twitched slightly. “You…you’re sure you wouldn’t mind?”

“Mind you doing your homework? Absolutely not.” He smiled. “Help yourself to any seat you’d like.”

Ana looked towards the door, and for a moment Lupin was sure she’d decline, change her mind and leave. But then she grabbed her bag and headed to her traditional class seat. Lupin smiled a little more as she settled in and began working. There, at last, he could see a bit of her mother’s influence; her father was never one to do his homework when told.
Retribution

Belladonna 23
Retribution
11 November 1993

Somewhere between wrangling the water demon into its transport case, draining the old murky water, scrubbing the slime-encrusted tank, and refilling it, Ana found the distraction she was looking for. She had hoped that Professor Lupin might have something else for her to do. She was not yet ready to face Flora, and hear her praises for being wicked towards a Professor. But Professor Lupin claimed he did not.

Then he offered to let her stay and work on her homework. So Ana went to her desk, which was neither up front with the suck-ups, nor in the back with the rebel-rousers, but rather along the fourth row. She took out her defense book and worked first on that day’s homework. When that was complete she moved to the assignment that she missed.

She lost all track of time as she worked. As it turned out, doing homework was a good distraction too. She had completed all her defense and history assignments, and she’d taken a few preliminary notes for her charms essay when Professor Lupin announced it was time to leave.

“It’s nearly curfew,” he said. “And I don’t imagine you’d find my company more enjoyable than that of your friends.”

“You might be surprised,” Ana said as she began packing up. “Flora would have interrupted the silence every ten minutes to share the latest gossip, or simply because it became too quiet. Sadie would have pinned for one of her French boys. Hestia would have chastised them both and insist that they let me get back to work, while she enjoyed her magazine. So, without all the interruptions, I got quite a bit done.

“Speaking of,” Ana reached in her book and pulled out a stack of papers. “Here are the assignments I missed. I have no expectation of you actually grading them, in fact, there’s the bin if you wish, but that does not excuse me from having to do the work.”

Lupin smiled. Definitely, like her mother; he supposed that could have been Snape’s influence as well, but he chose to believe otherwise.

“Thank you, Ana. I will look over these.”

“You will?”

“Sure. We all have our rough weeks. I certainly had my fair share in school. Bunked off a few times too.”

“You? Really? But you’re so…I don’t know, Professor like.”

Lupin laughed. “Believe it or not, but I wasn’t always a professor.”

Ana considered it for a moment. “Nope. I’m not buying it.”

“Pardon?”
“I’m sorry, Professor. The title may not always have been official, but I bet you schooled all your friends. The subject didn’t matter. I bet you were even a Prefect.”

Lupin’s cheeks reddened slightly.

“How did you know?”

“Ha! I knew it!”

“Then I bet you’d make a fair Prefect yourself.”

Ana scoffed. “I’d very politely hand the badge back and say, ‘find another.’”

Lupin smiled even wider; now that sounded more like her father, and definitely not like Snape.

“Well, I guess I’ve got about thirty minutes before curfew. That’s just enough time to get down to the kitchens before heading to the common room. Thanks for letting me stay and study. Oh! And that tank should really be cleaned about once a week. I have a tincture that would work wonders on the slime. I could bring it next time.”

“Sounds good to me. Thank you, Ana.”

2 December 1993

Ana felt much better after her talk with Sev, and the study time with Professor Lupin was nice too. But after only one session Ana was not completely back to her normal self. She wasn’t really sure what normal was anymore.

Ninety percent of the school still hated her. Their disdain lessened, however, as Fred became more like himself, and Fred seemed to recover more quickly than Ana did. That only furthered Ana’s frustrations and proved that he clearly didn’t like her as much as she liked him. Instead of taking her frustrations out on the Professors and her schoolwork though, Ana directed them towards something else; rather, someone else.

Marietta Edgecombe was becoming impossible to deal with. This was, in part, due to the fact that Marietta harbored an unfiltered crush on Fred. She had admitted on numerous occasions that she had no interest in Quidditch, much to Cho’s dismay. And yet, Marietta had taken to venturing down to the pitch to watch the Gryffindor practice, for the sole purpose of admiring Fred in action.

Then, in class, particularly Divination where it was easier to talk without being caught, Marietta would tell Cho every detail of Fred’s body. She’d focus, almost explicitly, on the way his clothes would cling to him at the end of practice. Ana wasn’t really a friend of sweaty bodies, but she wasn’t daft either. Fred was an athlete, and Ana knew those beater bats weren’t light. She could easily imagine the type of physique that lay beneath the red and gold robes. The mere thought that Marietta got to see that physique, even from a distance, infuriated Ana.

But Ana saved her retribution for their next potions lesson.
“What are we doing over here?” Flora asked.

“We’re brewing the muffling draught today. This side of the room is a half degree cooler, making it the ideal temperature to brew the draught, and there’s better ventilation,” Ana said. “Besides, I thought you’d all want to be privy to a special surprise today.”

A group of Ravenclaw girls walked in; Marietta was among them. She took one look at Ana and her friends sitting where she and Cho usually sat, and Marietta decided to sit on the opposite side of the room, right where Ana wanted her.

Sev went about outlining that day’s potion before setting them all to work. They gathered the necessary ingredients and their cauldrons from the storage cupboard. Sev held everyone accountable for owning and maintaining their own cauldron, but he allowed them to store them in a cupboard while not in use.

“I thought you promised us something special,” Hestia said about forty minutes into the lesson.

“Patience, Hess,” Ana said. She glanced over at Marietta’s station. Her cauldron was emitting a green haze, and she looked befuddled as to why. Ana smiled.

“Any minute…”

Suddenly Marietta’s cauldron erupted, dousing her in a thick putrid tincture. Marietta let out a silent scream as large yellow boils began to erupt on her face and neck. Sev hurried over and vanished the smoke and fumes; there was little he could do about the smell, however.

“What have you done now, Edgecombe?” Sev asked severely.

Marietta tried to answer him, but she was rendered silent by the draught. And the boils, apparently rather painful, brought tears to her eyes. Her mouth kept moving, however, and she turned and pointed a finger at Ana. Sev turned and eyed her. Ana raised her hands in defense.

“Honestly, Professor, how could I have done anything? I’ve been over here working on my own muffling draught, which looks to be the perfect rose color if I do say so myself.”

“It’s true, Professor,” Graham Montague said. “Ana’s potion is the perfect rose color.”

Ana smiled under the praise; she couldn’t help it. Graham took her smile as an encouragement to seek further communication later.

“If I may, Professor,” Ana began. “It seems like Miss Edgecombe has neglected to properly care for her cauldron.”

“Let this serve as a lesson to all of you,” Sev said, “of the importance of maintaining the highest of cauldron standards. Miss Chang, please escort Miss Edgecombe to the hospital wing; Madam Pomfrey should have something to clear that mess up with. As for the rest of you, submit a vial of your potion, and I want one roll of parchment on the importance of maintaining one’s cauldron, due at the start of our next class. Now, leave.”

The class busied themselves with bottling up their potions and packing their bags. Most of them knew not to complain about the essay or Sev would have lengthened it to two rolls.

“Alright, Ana, how did you do it?” Flora asked once they were out in the hall.
“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” Ana said innocently.

“Rubbish.”

“That’s a lie,” Hestia and Sadie said.

“My guess is that it was powdered bubotuber pus, but I’m not sure how you got it in her cauldron,” Graham said as he approached the group.

“Why do you say that?” Ana asked.

“Because that side of the room is always half a degree warmer, and when powdered bubotuber pus is heated with crushed lionfish spines at precisely the right temperature, it makes for a volatile reaction that serves to concentrate the once stable pus.”

Ana had to admit, she was impressed. Most people didn’t know, or didn’t care to know, the intricacies of the standard potion ingredients.

“So how did you get it in there?” Graham asked. “Did you use a levitation charm? Though, you’d think she’d notice something extra falling in.”

“Well, this is Marietta we’re talking about, so maybe not.”

“Perhaps, but Professor Snape wouldn’t have missed it.”

“Well, that’s why I didn’t levitate it. I laced her cauldron with it while it was in storage.”

Graham laughed. “Brilliant. I’m surprised more people haven’t tried that.”

“Well, no one knows potions like I do.”

“True.”

“Except… you must know a good deal about them too if you were able to deduce that it had to be powdered bubotuber pus.”

Graham smiled faintly but didn’t deny the assumption. “A little, but still not as much as you do.”

They paused a beat as Ana considered this. She hadn’t really noticed before, but Graham did always get rather high marks in potions.

“Say, I…” Graham began. “Well, that is to say, you know the next Hogsmeade weekend is coming up…”

“Is it? I hadn’t even thought of that. But I suppose it has been that long.”

“Two weeks,” he continued on. “So I was wondering if… if perhaps you’d go with me? If you wanted to of course.”

“Go where?” Ana asked. She’d been thinking of that day again.

“To Hogsmeade. With me. Ana, would you like to go to Hogsmeade with me?”

“Oh! I…”
“She’d love to,” Sadie said, popping in suddenly. Apparently, she and the Carrows had been lingering back, allowing Graham and Ana to talk “privately.”


“Really? Great! Wow! That’s…great. I promise it will be a date you won’t forget.”

Of course, it would be a date she’d never forget. It would be her first date.

Ana walked into the dorm, two weeks later, almost on auto-fly. It was late in the afternoon of the Hogsmeade weekend, and she felt numb. The date had been great. Ana really enjoyed the time she spent with Graham. Outside of Quidditch practice, Ana hadn’t spent much time with him before. It turned out that they had a fair bit in common.

Graham was also very enthusiastic about potions. He wanted to own and operate his own apothecary, after taking an internship in Diagon Ally. A workable knowledge of potions and a good business sense was essential for such a job.

“So? How did it go?” Sadie asked.

Ana looked around as though coming out of a daze. Sadie and Hestia were there, but Flora was still out with Bole.

“If she’s just now getting back, it must have been good,” Hestia said with a grin.

“I…I think I just had my first kiss,” Ana said.

“Well, that escalated quickly.”

“You think?” asked Sadie.

“Come on; tell us all about it.” Hestia jumped up and pulled Ana onto the bed with them.

“Well, we… we went down to Hogsmeade…”

“Oh obviously, Ana.” Hestia rolled her eyes. “And here I thought he took you to Paris.”

“No, she’d have more glimmer in her eye if that was the case.”

“The date went well, I think,” Ana said, hardly even hearing the girls. “He was kind, thoughtful…funny. But I don’t think he was really trying to be funny. I think he was nervous.”

“That’s sweet,” Sadie said.

“Now, tell us about the possible first kiss that you think may have happened.”

“We…we left the Quidditch shop…”

“Oh course you’d go there.” Sadie rolled her eyes.

“It was starting to snow again… I looked across the street, and…”

Ana froze, just as she had frozen after leaving the shop. She had seen Fred standing across the street, and he had clearly seen her too. For a moment they just stared at each other; Ana’s heart
dropped to her stomach at the sight of him. Then his eyes moved to Graham as he stepped up beside Ana.

“…And when I looked back at Graham, he just…kissed me,” Ana finished.

“And…did you kiss him back?” Hestia asked.

“Was it good? Did you like it?” Sadie asked.

Ana shrugged. “There wasn’t really any time. He pulled back before I knew what was happening.”

“What did he do afterwards?” Sadie asked.

“He…he smiled.”

“Definitely a kiss then—”

“—and not a fall,” Hestia and Sadie said together.

“Aww! Our precious Ana had her first date and her first kiss,” Hestia said.

“They grow up so fast.” Sadie wiped mock tears from her eyes.

Meanwhile, Ana felt like she wanted to cry for real. She was certain Fred had witnessed the kiss too.
Sadie knew about Ana’s crush on Fred. Sadie had known about it for some time, but Sadie didn’t know the full extent of Ana’s feelings. How could she when she’d never felt anything remotely close to it herself?

Sadie likened boys to ice cream. How could she know her favorite flavor, if she didn’t try each one at least twice? So for her, the logical solution to help her best friend over a heartache, was to throw her into the arms of another man. Her ideal choice would have been Adrian Pucey.

Adrian and Ana got along splendidly. He came from a good family, with good merits and good money. And perhaps most importantly, Flora would have approved the match. Then the four of them could have remained a tightly knit group of best friends. For whatever reason, though, Adrian showed no interest in being anything more than Ana’s friend.

So Sadie settled for Graham Montague. Sadie had noticed Graham staring at Ana with wide, glassy eyes on many occasions. It was clear that Ana had not noticed, but then again, she hadn’t noticed anyone apart from the Weasley boy. So Sadie saw it absolutely necessary to accept Graham’s proposal on Ana’s behalf.

And it worked!

Ana seemed happy. She was laughing, and smiling, and spending many hours with Graham over the holidays. They’d sit in the common room and talk about potions or Quidditch. Sadie even caught them snogging a time or two.

All Sadie wanted was for her best friend to be happy. She truly only had good intentions; surely she couldn’t be held accountable if those intentions turned to dust.

Ana was miserable.

It was nothing against Graham. He was a decent bloke, and Ana did enjoy spending time with him. She learned something new about him every time. But he wasn’t the one person Ana wanted to spend her time with.

Since her date with Graham, Fred was somehow more scarce than he was before. He almost immediately went out and got detention for snogging some fifth year; Ana didn’t bother to learn her name or her house. Ana supposed it was his way of getting back at her, and she had to remind herself that he had started this mess with his silence and open flirtation with Macavoy.

Graham was a good distraction. Other good distractions were cleaning the creature tanks in Professor Lupin’s class, and Quidditch. Ana spent a few hours each week in Lupin’s classroom cleaning cages and tanks of various creatures. He still had the grindylow, and he had obtained a red cap, a hinkypunk, and a few others. Since Ana was not there serving detention, she was allowed to use magic to speed up the process. And while cleaning, Professor Lupin often let her test her skills
against the creatures.

All through the Christmas holiday, the Slytherin team practiced vigorously. They had yet to have their first match of the season—due to an “injury” that Draco obtained during his first Care of Magical Creatures lesson—but they were set to have it the first weekend after the start of term. Ana was eager for the rush that came from winning, and she was sure they would. She and Graham worked together like magic. In the two years that he didn’t make the team, he studied Ana and Adrian and he knew their moves by heart.

The result of their first match wasn’t quite what Ana expected. Slytherin still won, but it was only a narrow defeat. Ravenclaw had caught the snitch, but Ana, Graham, and Marcus managed to score enough points to obtain a victory. Still, it was a win and a nice distraction.

The distractions helped Ana put on her mask each day. It was a mask that said she was fine, that she was happy, that Fred didn’t matter. It was a good mask; her closest friends bought into it, but it was a tiring mask. Ana had never worked so hard at occlumency before in her life. For some reason, however, Ana felt comfortable enough, even safe enough, around Professor Lupin to let her mask down. For this reason, she began spending time in his classroom simply to do her work and not just to clean.

“Are you sure you wouldn’t be more comfortable in the library?” Professor Lupin asked for probably the hundredth time.

Ana shook her head. “You remember me telling you about the distractions my friends would cause? That still applies in the library. Besides, I plan on camping out there next year so I want to avoid it as much as I can this year.”

“So, where do your friends think you are?”

“They think I’ve found some secret nook to do my homework in. That or…” Ana shrugged a shoulder, “…I’m off snogging Graham somewhere.”

“And where is Mister Montague?” Lupin asked after a slight pause.

Ana shrugged again. “In the library maybe, or with the guys. I don’t really know, but we’re meeting up later at dinner.”

As was typical, that was the extent of their conversation concerning Graham. Ana settled in at her desk and began working. An hour or so later, when she finished up some of her work, she packed her bag once more and moved forward to talk to Professor Lupin. This was usually how their afternoons went: Ana would spend a little time on homework, and then Lupin would quiz her on her defensive magic.

They were just finishing up a little practice on shield charms when Ana moved too close to an unusual trunk sitting on the floor. Ana noticed the trunk when she came in but didn’t say anything about it. Professor Lupin was always adding new creatures to his lessons. The trunk rattled as she neared it and Ana jumped away.

“What was that?” she asked.

“That…was a boggart.”

“A boggart? Why in Merlin’s name do you have a boggart in a trunk?”
“Why do I have a grindylow in a tank? Or a hinkypunk? For lessons.”

“Yeah, but those are different. They’re harmless.”

“A grindylow is hardly harmless in the Black Lake.”

“Well, any idiot who decides to go swimming in the Black Lake deserves to be caught by a grindylow.”

Lupin smiled. “Why is a boggart so dangerous in your opinion?”

“Because…because it becomes what we fear most, and everyone knows fear is the hardest thing to overcome.”

“How do you combat fear?”

“I don’t,” Ana answered simply. “I’m not some fool-hearty Gryffindor who runs head first into danger. I assess my options and choose the best one. Hiding, or denying, are usually some of the best.”

“You can’t always hide from fear. If confronted with a boggart, how would you ward it off?”

“You mean the spell?”

Lupin nodded.

“Riddikulus. You turn something scary into something comical. Easier said than done.”

“Perhaps. Have you ever tried it before?”

“We had Lockhart last year. His idea of a boggart would be a bad hair day or a facial blemish. Neither one of those is very comical, trust me.”

“I think they’re both quite comical actually.” Lupin smiled. “Would you care to have a go at it now?”

Professor Lupin moved to stand behind the trunk and placed his hand on the lid, ready to open it. Ana considered his offer for a moment; it would be excellent practice. She wondered what form the boggart would take. There really wasn’t anything she was particularly afraid of. There were creatures she strongly disliked, like the rat, but she didn’t fear them. She thought perhaps it might take the image of a disappointed Sev, but that didn’t feel right either.

Then the image of Sev began to morph in her mind. It grew a few inches shorter; its hair grew longer and wove itself into a braid until it was like looking in a mirror. There were subtle differences here and there. The eyes were a little darker, the grin a little more…wicked. Suddenly, Ana knew exactly what form the boggart would take, and she stepped back.

Ana shook her head no, but Lupin didn’t catch on to her change of mood.

“I could dare you too,” he teased.

“Please,” Ana’s voice shook lightly. “Please don’t, Professor. I know what form it would take; I’ve been that form before. And I don’t know how to make it funny; it isn’t funny.”

Lupin immediately dropped his teasing attitude. He recognized that look; he understood
that feeling all too well.

“Have you tried talking to him?” Lupin asked after a pause.

“What kind of fool do you take me for? Of course, I haven’t. What good would it do? Besides, I’m the last person he wants to see.”

“You sound certain of that.”

“Why would I not be?” Ana asked. “You heard Sev. There’s no going back. You can’t change what’s been done. I have to accept it and move forward.”

“Sometimes,” Lupin began with a sigh as he moved towards Ana. “In order to move forward, we must first take a few steps back and get on the right path. If you want my advice, Ana, talk to the boy. Apologize.”

“It isn’t that easy.”

“I didn’t say it was, but otherwise, that boggart will continue to keep its form.”

Ana considered Professor Lupin’s words for a moment. She tried to envision herself getting Fred alone and apologizing. What would he say? What would he do? Would he, could he forgive her? How? She couldn’t forgive herself.

Ana’s silent reflection was interrupted. “Ah—should I come back later?”

“Harry!” Lupin said brightly. “Not at all. Come in. Ana and I were just continuing a discussion from class.” Lupin lied; Ana was glad.

Ana didn’t have time to figure out her apologetic self just then, so she slipped into her old mask. All trace of emotional distress was gone. She was really getting quite good at hiding her true feelings.

“Potter,” she said with a slightly wicked grin as she turned around. Harry stared unblinkingingly back at her. He didn’t say anything, but Ana could see his defenses going up.

“Is it true?” she asked.

“Is what true?”

“Is Sirius Black really trying to kill you with a broom now?” Harry had been anonymously gifted a new racing broom over Christmas break. It was rumored to be from Black, and it was currently undergoing rigorous tests to make sure it wasn’t jinxed. Ana could see the flash of longing on Harry’s face and knew the rumor was true.

“How desperate he must be getting now,” Ana continued. “Pathetic really. It is a shame, however. A Firebolt. I can only imagine what Professor Flitwick must be doing to it. It should almost be a crime to strip apart such a masterful design. I doubt it will run the same when he’s finished.”

For all her teasing, Ana really did think it was shameful to treat a Firebolt the way Flitwick and McGonagall were.

“You’re just worried about losing the cup,” Harry said unphased by Ana. “Think of how good I was on a 2000. Now imagine how much faster I’ll be on a Firebolt. I can almost hear the school cheering for our victory now.”
“A good broom doesn’t make a good flyer. Give me a Comet and I’ll out fly you any day.”

Professor Lupin stood back and watched their exchange with avid curiosity. Ana and Harry’s interaction was more playfully taunting than out-right hostile aggression. Lupin smiled; it was just the way it should be.

“Thanks for letting me use your room for study hall, Professor, but I should get going now,” Ana said as she grabbed her bag. “And if you need a broom for the upcoming match, Potter, I’m sure one of the first years will let you borrow their training broom.”

Harry’s new Firebolt was returned to him just before the Gryffindor-Ravenclaw match in February. Ana wasn’t worried, but she could see it on the faces of her teammates, particularly Draco.

The morning of the match, Ana walked down to the pitch with the rest of the student body. Gryffindor was really anxious and excited about the match. They needed to win if they wanted to be in the running for the Quidditch Cup. If they lost, it would come down to Slytherin and Ravenclaw again. And everyone was excited to see a Firebolt in action. According to The Flyer, the Firebolt was set to be the official broom of the World Cup that coming summer.

“Did you see Fred this morning?”

It was bad enough that Ana’s ears still honed in whenever Fred’s name was mentioned; it was worse when it was mentioned by Marietta.

“Merlin! He’s fit!” she continued. “Did you see the way he ate that orange? I don’t care if his family is dirt poor; I’d marry him anyway just to wake up to that every morning.”

“Mother of Merlin, Hess! What is that?” Ana exclaimed.

“What is what?” Hestia asked looking around.

“That there, on Edgecombe’s face. What is that?”

“Ugh! It’s disgusting,” Hestia said without pause.

Marietta turned to look at Ana and the girls. “What are you talking about? There’s nothing there.” She touched her face despite her words.

“Blimey, it’s hideous.”

“I think I’m going to be sick.”

“What? What is it?” Marietta became concerned. She turned back to her friends and begged them to tell her what it was.

“Ana, Hes, you’re being awful to poor Marietta,” Flora said with sincerity. “You know she can’t help it. That’s just her nose.”

Ana and the girls laughed, but Marietta did not. Her eyes filled with tears as she turned and fled to the castle. Ana was not at all sorry to see her go; maybe that would teach her not to speak of Fred. As Ana turned back to her friends, however, she caught sight of someone watching
her: Professor Lupin, and he looked highly disappointed. He shook his head slightly and walked by Ana without saying a word.

Ana felt a lead weight drop to the bottom of her stomach. With one look, Professor Lupin made her feel more guilty, more ashamed, than all the times she’d disappointed Sev… combined.

“Sometimes, in order to move forward, we must first take a few steps back and get on the right path.”

Ana realized that she had just taken a few steps forward, but in the wrong direction. The resulting response from Professor Lupin was something Ana did not enjoy seeing. She didn’t know why his opinion of her mattered so much; she didn’t even realize it did until she let him down. Ana silently vowed, then and there, that she would seek to change the Wicked Witch. It wouldn’t be easy; she knew.

“I didn’t say it would be, but otherwise, that boggart will continue to keep its form.”
“You’re getting much better at that, Adrian,” Ana said as she admired his handiwork.

With all that Ana had going on between the incident, Graham, Quidditch, and her own course load, Ana barely had any time left to devote to Adrian. Their tutoring sessions dropped to once a week. This actually worked out well for Adrian however, because the closer he got to OWLs the more work the Professors assigned.

“I owe you so much, Ana,” he said. “I’ve learnt loads more from you than I have from Snape in four-and-a-half years.”

“I’m not sure that’s true.”

“It is.”

Ana smiled. She’d be sure to keep that to herself and not tell Sev.

“Now add those one at a time, stirring slowly three times in between. Twice…”

“Twice clockwise, and once anti-clockwise,” Adrian finished.

“Don’t get cheeky with me.”

Adrian laughed but proceeded to add the root accordingly.

“Alright, so now that needs to sit, undisturbed, for thirty minutes, and then we add… Wait! Where’s the salamander blood?”

“Er— I thought you were getting it,” Adrian said.

“I thought you were getting it. You had it in your hand.”

“I did?”

Ana nodded.

“I guess I put it back?” Adrian shrugged.

Ana bit her tongue to hold back the Wicked Witch. She was trying really hard to reform, but the less wicked she was towards Marietta, the more wicked she was to everyone else. She snapped at Sadie the day before for borrowing her hairbrush. And the week before she yelled at Hestia for taking one of her pain tonics even though she’s had them sitting out for everyone to take since second year!

Ana took a deep breath. “That’s all right. I should have some.” She dug around in her traveling potions case and pulled out a glass vial with less than a centimeter’s worth of liquid.
“Is it enough?” Adrian asked.

“No,” Ana shook her head. “Still, this has to stew so I’ll go get some now.”

“I could go…”

“No! I mean… I’m sure you have revisions to do.”

“Loads actually.”

“Then it works out perfectly. I’ll go. You’ll stay. And that will remain undisturbed, yeah?”

Adrian threw up his hands and stepped away from the table. “I’ll just sit in the corner and work on Charms.”

Ana made her way through the dungeons to Sev’s potions stores. Along the way, she took deep and even breaths. In. Out. In. Out. She was going to have to find an outlet for the wicked if she wanted to have friends left by seventh year.

“Hey, Sev, I…”

Ana stopped short in the doorway. The room was empty. Which was weird because the door was open and the light was on. Sev always closed the door and turned the lights off when he left. Always. Ana stepped back and looked both ways down the hall. Surely he’d be right back.

“Sev?”

There was no answer. Ana didn’t expect there to be one as she could clearly look around and see that he wasn’t there. Still…

“Professor Snape?” She tried, but there was still no answer.

“I’m going to borrow some salamander blood,” she said to an empty room. “I’m working with Adrian and we don’t have enough to finish.”

Ana moved through the room easily. It wasn’t uncommon for Ana and Sev to borrow from each other’s stores. As long as they replaced what they took, then all was well. So Ana knew exactly where Sev kept the salamander’s blood, and she went straight to it. She was about to head back to Adrian when she stopped to observe Sev’s workbench. There was a cauldron sitting on it full with a potion that was emitting a strange sort of blue smoke. Ana moved towards it as though hypnotized.

It was an unfamiliar potion, and Ana knew at once it must be the mystery potion that Sev had been working on all year. She glanced up quickly towards the door, almost expecting to see Sev standing there, but she didn’t. She did, however, really want to know what he was brewing; more so, she wanted to learn how to brew it, whatever it was. She tried asking him early on, but he brushed her off saying it didn’t concern her. Then this and that happened, and Ana had forgotten about it… Until now.

She glanced back at the door; he still wasn’t there. She looked back down at the bench. Sev had carelessly left some of the ingredients out, but Ana didn’t stop to contemplate why. She just studied them and made note of them.

There were some standard ingredients like frog toe and beetle eye juice. Then there were
some more uncommon ones like the stem of a belladonna flower, the petals sat in the bin at her feet, and she was fairly certain she saw the slimy residue of rat spleen on the table. Lastly, she found some rather rare ingredients like boomslang skin and monkshood.

Ana looked up at the door again; there was still no sign of Sev.

None of the ingredients Ana saw clued her in on what the potion was. There were too many variables still. There could be a dozen other ingredients already mixed in, or perhaps the ones she saw had absolutely nothing to do with the potion and were simply left over from something else. If they were used, however, then she needed to know their concentration to really figure anything out. Were there one or two stems? Six toes or eight? What was the ratio of rat spleen to water? There was no way of knowing…

…Unless she took a sample and de-formulated it. Sev had described the process to her once, and she was certain she could find a book on it in the library. She could do this. She would do this.

The first rule of being an exceptional Potions Master: always carry at least one empty vial on your person, because you never know when you might need to collect a sample. Ana reached into an inner pocket on her robe and pulled out a small glass vial. She un-stoppered it and was just about to scoop up the potion when she hesitated. What if this was one of those potions that had to sit undisturbed for a certain amount of time? What if by taking a sample now, Ana ruined the potion. Sev would be furious with her.

“Well… then he shouldn’t have left it unguarded,” she reasoned aloud.

She picked up the nearby ladle. She filled her vial, while the odor singed her nose hairs, and made a mental note to check her star charts at first chance. She knew that some potions could only be brewed at certain times of the month. Then she nearly left without scribbling a quick note about the salamander blood.

It took longer than Ana anticipated to de-formulate the mystery potion. First, she had to find the right book. Then, she had to gather the right equipment and set it up. Lastly, she had to find time in her schedule to even work on it, which became increasingly more difficult as Professors rushed to cram in the rest of their lessons and Marcus went on Quidditch overload; they now had practice six days a week and they were often fighting to stay on the field longer. And every day that went by, Ana was sure Sev would burst through the door and demand to know what she was doing and why she ruined a perfectly good potion.

But he never did.

Then, at last, nearly a whole month later, Ana finally had all the ingredients listed and she was 98% certain of their concentrations…if her calculations were correct. However, she couldn’t make any sense of it. The potion was still a mystery to her. She couldn’t even figure out what its primary function was. It had strong properties of both poison and healing potions, the consistency of both sleeping and reviving draughts, and small hints of a befuddling tonic. Ana was almost ready to give up on it…

Almost.

She had one day at the end of March where she could set aside some time to try and work it out, but it meant that she wouldn’t be able to spend study time in Professor Lupin’s classroom.
Instead of being a no-show though, she decided to stop by and tell him in person.

“Hey, Professor Lupin, I…” Ana stopped short. Lupin was already packing up his briefcase. He smiled faintly at Ana.

“Good evening, Ana,” he said weakly. “You are welcome to come in and stay, but I’m afraid I won’t be able to today.”

“Actually… I was coming by to say that I couldn’t stay either. I have this potions project I’m working on and today is the only day I have to work on it. All my schoolwork is done, except for an essay for McGonagall, but I’ll do that in history tomorrow; Binns will never know. And Graham’s off who-knows-where doing who-knows-what, frankly, I don’t care. And… Are you feeling all right, Professor?” Ana asked.

Professor Lupin came around his desk looking paler and sicklier than Ana could ever remember seeing him.

“I’m fine,” he said with a smile that looked more like a grimace. “Just a little off color.”

“Off color? No offense, Professor, but you look like total—”

Lupin arched a brow.

“—ly not yourself. I hear Madam Pomfrey has a perfectly adequate pepper-up potion in the hospital wing. Or, if you like, I have my own version. I found that if you store it at a cooler temperature, like those found in the Slytherin Girl’s dormitory in winter, then it reduces the amount of steam without decreasing its effectiveness.”

“That’s very generous of you, Ana.” He smiled weakly. “But I think just some rest will do wonders.”

“Well, I hope you get it, and if you change your mind, I won’t be hard to find.”

They walked out of the room together and parted ways. Ana half considered asking one of the House Elves to deliver some potion to him anyway simply because he looked that ill. But she decided if he felt he didn’t need it, then she didn’t want to push it on him. So she carried on her way down to the dungeons.

Along the way, she pulled out her parchment on the mystery potion and ran along everything she knew about it. When the light became too dim to read her handwriting, she moved closer to the window and borrowed the light of the fading sun. Ana allowed herself one moment to look out the window itself. The air was just beginning to grow warmer; soon, she knew it would be time for the final Quidditch match, and then summer. Ana would be more than halfway through her Hogwarts life, and what would she do then if she couldn’t figure out this potion? What sort of Potions Master can’t figure out a simple de-formulation? Ana had to solve this! Her life depended on it.

Ana turned away from the window and moved on with renewed vigor. Then suddenly she stopped. Her mind went blank for a moment before something like clarity came to it. She rushed back to the window and looked out it again.

She saw something so clearly, so plainly, so unbelievably normal that it was often overlooked: The Moon. It wasn’t quite full yet, perhaps a day, maybe two more, but…
Ana looked down at her parchment, then back at the moon, then down the hall from which she came, then back at her parchment again. The moon. The hall. The parchment.

Ana knew there was something strange about this potion, with its seemingly contradictory functions seeking both to poison and heal, sleep and revive, as though treating two different entities. And Ana knew this potion was for Professor Lupin. Professor Lupin, who only moments ago Ana saw looked so deathly pale and sick, and yet he refused a pepper-up potion.

“Oh, just a bit of rest will do wonders.”

A bit of rest? Perhaps like that found in a sleeping draught? Ana looked back out the window one last time as all the pieces fell into place.

“Mother of Merlin,” she whispered aloud.

Professor Lupin was a werewolf.
Perspective

Belladonna 26

Perspective

Ana ran to her dungeon hideaway and practically barricaded the door behind her. She backed up to the furthest wall and sank to the floor where she buried her head in her hands. Her heart was beating wildly, the blood rushing in her ears.

This couldn’t be right. There had to be some mistake. But Ana didn’t make mistakes, not when it came to potions. She pulled out the now crumpled parchment and laid it on the floor before her. There it was, in black and beige. Sev was brewing Wolfsbane for Professor Lupin, a werewolf.

Ana’s first instinct was to tell someone. But who should she tell that didn’t already know? Dumbledore obviously knew; he hired the thing. Sev, too, knew because he brewed the potion each month. And Ana was certain the other Heads of House were in on it.

How could they go along with this?

Every wizarding child knew the tales of horror surrounding werewolves. They were outcasts in decent society. They were disgraced, despicable, and disgusting creatures that would attack their own kin without a second thought. They were not Ana’s favorite teacher.

Werewolves were not kind, understanding, or sympathetic to her pain. They did not encourage her to cast aside the wicked. It wasn’t in their nature; they were wicked and vile themselves. How could they be anything else? And what could Ana do about it?

Nothing. She could do nothing but avoid him at all costs. And she did. Or, well, she tried to at least.

6 April 1994

The bell rang shrilly, signaling the end of class. Ana quickly threw everything into her bag and attempted to flee before he could stop her. She failed.

“Ana, if you could stay, just a moment please,” Professor Lupin asked.

Ana quickly grabbed Hestia’s arm. “Stay with me,” she whispered urgently.

Hestia pinched her brow in confusion but stayed none-the-less. Ana stood and positioned herself and Hestia so that the desks stood between her and Professor Lupin. He seemed a little surprised by her actions.

“I… I just wanted to inform you that I’ll be taking delivery of another creature today that I rather think you’d enjoy seeing. If you wanted to come by around…”

“I can’t!” Ana said quickly. “I…I’m busy today.”

“Tomorrow then?”
“I have Quidditch tomorrow.”

“Ah… I see. Well, I’ll have it through the end of next week if you find some time.”

“I don’t think I will.”

Professor Lupin smiled politely. “I understand. You’re free to go then; I wouldn’t want to keep you from your busy schedule.”

Ana turned and nearly drug Hestia out of there. She stopped at the doorway, however, and looked over her shoulder for a moment. Professor Lupin’s head was bowed, and the pain of her rejection was written all over his face. Ana felt even more confused than she was before.

“What was that all about?” Hestia asked.

“Nothing! It… it’s nothing,” Ana replied.

Ana needed perspective, but not just any perspective. She needed it from a sensible source, someone who could look at both sides and tell her like it is. There was only one person Ana could think of, no matter how much she really dreaded the idea of it.

Ana knocked lightly on the office door.

“Miss Evans, do come in.”

Ana walked in slowly; there was still time to change her mind, but she needed to do this. She took a seat across from McGonagall’s desk and looked the woman in the eye.

“To what do I owe the pleasure?” McGonagall asked.

“I… I’m having a bit of a dilemma, and I would like your advice.”

“Oh? And why do you seek my advice in particular?” She arched a brow that verged on smugness.

“Because I want it from someone with a practical mind and I feel like Professor Flitwick would try to talk around it. I don’t feel like trying to decipher one of Dumbledore’s ultimate life lessons. And I know Sev—”

McGonagall’s brow arched even higher.

“I know Professor Snape quite well, so I already know what he’d say.”

“And what would that be?”

“He’d say that my calculations are without fault, that my assumptions are correct, and that my misgivings are warranted.”

“So you want someone to tell you you’re wrong then, is that it?” She looked smug again.

“No. I… Look, if you don’t want to help then fine.”

“Sit back down, Miss Evans, and tell me what’s on your mind.”
Ana took a deep breath before pulling out her parchment and sliding it across the desk. McGonagall picked it up, slid her glasses into place, and let her eyes scan over it quickly but they didn’t glean much from it.

“It’s been a while since I’ve had anything to do with potions, Miss Evans. Remind me, what am I looking at?”

If Ana hadn’t been so troubled, she would have been the one to smile smugly then.

“It’s a de-formulation of a potion I found Se—Professor Snape brewing. That shows all the ingredients and their concentrations, and the…lunar conditions required.”

McGonagall gave a single nod of her head.

“It’s Wolfsbane.”

“Ah. I see.” She laid the parchment on her desk and looked at Ana. “And you believe you know who this potion is for, is that it?”

Ana nodded. “It’s not the sort of potion Sev would do from the kindness of his heart. There’s only one new member on the faculty, though I suppose it could be a student, but the symptoms, the illnesses line up. And no one’s had a sudden change in personality.”

“And why would someone have a sudden change in personality?” McGonagall arched her brow again, but this time it was more of an inquisitorial challenge than anything else.

“Because…they become highly dangerous creatures.”

“At the full moon, perhaps, but they do not necessarily remain that way. Being a werewolf does not make them evil. You must keep in mind that they are human just like us.”

“But they’re not though,” Ana argued. “I mean, they’re not classified as being human anymore. They’re beasts.”

“According to whom, Miss Evans? The Ministry? Because the Ministry has never been wrong, never misjudged someone before?”

Ana knew she meant Hagrid when they accused him of opening the Chamber of Secrets last year.

“Werewolves, Miss Evans, are only werewolves once, sometimes twice, a month. Any other day of the year they are just like you or me. They walk on two legs, they talk, they breathe and bleed; they teach even, and quite well I hear.”

“Yes, but…”

“But what, Miss Evans?”

Ana was struggling to find her reason any more. She knew Professor Lupin was a good professor and she knew werewolves were monsters, but she didn’t know how to reconcile the two. McGonagall hadn’t told her anything she didn’t already know.

“Your peers have a name for you, don’t they? I’ve heard them use it before,” McGonagall said.

Ana nodded. “Yes, Ma’am. The Wicked Witch.”
“And The Wicked Witch, is that who you really are? Is that what you are?”

“I… I’m trying not to be.”

“So, that’s just a title, a classification if you will. Do you see where I’m going with this, Belladonna? Or do I need to spell it out for you a little more?”

“No, Ma’am. Just… Just because sometimes I’m The Wicked Witch, doesn’t mean I’m always that person. I’m not always a monster.”

“Neither is Professor Lupin. You knew the kind of person he really is long before you knew of the werewolf he sometimes is. Has this helped you?”

Ana shrugged. “A little. I still find it hard to separate the two.”

“Then don’t, Miss Evans. Do not try to separate the man from the monster but take them both as they are, as one being, and trust in what you already know to be the stronger, more accurate representation.”

15 April 1994

Ana had a choice to make. It wasn’t an easy choice; quite possibly it could be the hardest choice she’d ever have to make. But that didn’t keep her from having to make it.

Who would she be?

Would she be the sort of wicked everyone came to expect from her? Or would she be something else? Would she be stronger than her weakest self, or give in to the fear that permeated her core? Would she be not as others dictated her to be?

Yes.

And that’s why Ana found herself once again in Sev’s brewing room. The full moon was approximately a week away, and Ana knew Sev would be working on the potion again. She just hoped she wasn’t too late.

Sev saw her come in and he quickly stepped away from the bench. “Belladonna, what…”

“Show me,” she said, cutting across him. “Show me how it’s done, please.”

Ana handed him the crumpled and worn parchment.

“I know the ingredients. I know their concentrations. But I don’t know their order or the little intricacies involved. I’m sure I could find it somewhere, but you could teach me in half the time. Please, Sev; I want to know how to brew it.”

Sev’s face went long and pale. This was not the outcome he was looking for when he left everything sitting out two months ago.

“Absolutely not.”

“What?”

“You did the de-formulation. You know what this is. What it’s for.”

“It’s Wolfsbane, for… Professor Lupin.”
“Then you know he’s a werewolf.”

“He can’t help it,” Ana defended quickly. “He’s trying to fight being wicked the same as I am. This potion proves it if his behavior and actions this year haven’t.”

Sev scoffed and turned away, much to Ana’s confusion.

“I thought this is what you wanted,” she said. “Why else would you have left everything sitting out for me to find? I was too excited about finding it then to question it, but now…”

“Don’t be foolish, Belladonna,” he snapped.

“Wait! You… you wanted me to turn him in? To get him sacked?” When Sev didn’t try to deny it, Ana knew she was right. She couldn’t believe he tried to play her like a pawn, and she had to fight off her tears.

“Well, I’m sorry to disappoint. But I guess that what happens when you choose to not let others dictate your actions…someone’s going to be disappointed.”

Ana turned and fled in a furry. Sev tried calling out to her, but she didn’t turn back. She found herself, instead, in a flurry of tears outside the defense classroom pacing trying to decide if she should go in. She didn’t know that someone was already in there and on their way out.

“Ana?”

She jumped at the sound of his voice. It was so kind, so gentle towards her when it had no reason to be. She didn’t have the strength to put on her mask. So as she turned to face him the tears were still present in her eyes and still running down her cheeks as she tried to stop them. She was speechless at the sight of him, even though there were a hundred things she wanted to say to him.

It was the first time they’d been in such close proximity since October. Ana allowed herself a moment to look at him, really look at him without her mask on. He had been in the middle of a laugh when he left the room; Ana could see it fade from his face as he looked at her. There was something almost akin to an electric buzz flitting between them.

“A—are you…” he stammered.

“Fred, I…” she began at the same time, taking half a step towards him.

Their passing moment, though, was only a moment as his brother left the classroom and immediately took up a defensive position between them.

“What are you after, Evans?” George asked, arms folded over his chest.

“Nothing, I…” Ana choked on her own words as she looked over his shoulder at Fred again.

“Miss Evans, right on time. Please, come in. Fred, George, I’ll see you Friday night.” Professor Lupin nodded at the twins and held the door open for Ana. He was offering her away out, and she knew it, even if she didn’t deserve it.

She hurried past George as a fresh set of tears filled her eyes.

“Tea?” Lupin offered, closing the door behind them.

Ana nodded her head absentmindedly as she took a seat across from his desk. Lupin
busied himself with the tea and slid the finished mug to her. Ana sipped it slowly, allowing its warmth to seep into the deep depth of coldness she suddenly felt. Why did it have to be Fred standing there? And why did George have to be with him? Lupin and Ana were both silent until she finally looked up. She had to begin somewhere, with someone.

“I’m sorry,” she said.

“What for?” Lupin said with wide eyes as he tried to play it off.

“For…for my behavior. For my… I… I know, Professor.”

Lupin swallowed roughly as he tried to stay calm. “Know what? I’m afraid I don’t follow.”

“Please, Professor, I… I found the potion Sev was brewing. I… I figured out what it was. Who it was for. I know.”

Lupin set the mug down on his desk. “I see. So that’s… that’s why you…?”

Ana nodded her head, and Lupin ran his hands over his face.

“And your friends… have you…?”

“No. And I… I don’t plan to. I swear it.”

Lupin looked at her from around his hands. “Then why…why apologize?”

“Because, I…” Ana didn’t want to admit it to his face.

“Because you’re afraid,” he finished for her.

“I’m trying not to be. I don’t want to be. That’s why I went to McGonagall.”

“McGonagall?”

“I kept trying to separate the Professor I knew, the one who would save me from that,” Ana pointed towards the door, “and encourage me to be better, from the…”

“From the wolf.”

Ana nodded.

“And? Did you?”

Ana shook her head no. “McGonagall was right; you can’t separate the two. But I… I believe this,” she pointed to him, “is the real you.”

Lupin bowed his head in his hands.

“So that’s why…that’s why I went to Sev just now. I… I asked him to teach me how to brew the Wolfsbane.”

Lupin looked up quickly. “Ana, you don’t… that isn’t—”

“He won’t do it,” Ana cut across him in tears. “He won’t show me. In fact he… he wanted me to figure it out so that I’d react the way I did, so that I’d petition to have you sacked.
He… He used me.”

“Ana, I…I’m sorry. He shouldn’t have brought you into this. This isn’t your problem to handle. I don’t want you worrying about me, whatever happens next. Trust me, Snape’s reaction to my condition is nothing I haven’t felt before.”

“Is that supposed to make me feel better, Professor? Because it doesn’t. I don’t care if he won’t teach me. I’ll figure it out myself.”

“Ana…”

“I will. I’ll scour every potion text I can find if I have to, but I will learn how to brew it. If… If you can help me be more than wicked, then I can help you with this. Please, let me. We shouldn’t have to fight the wicked alone.”

Chapter End Notes

So, Ana's discovery actually happened much later than I had anticipated. I thought she’d figure it out much sooner and be brewing the potion all year. But then other things took precedence in her life and this just seemed like a more natural reaction. I hope you agree. (Also, Fred wasn't supposed to be in this chapter, but he popped his head in as though to say "don't forget about me!" As if that could ever happen, Fred.)

Thanks for all your love and support with this story so far. I do hope you all stick around for the long haul.
The Quidditch Final

Belladonna 27

The Quidditch Final

14 May 1994

“There you are! Hurry it up will you? We’ve been waiting,” Marcus Flint said with an exaggerated eye roll.

“Sorry. My hair wasn’t cooperating this morning,” Ana said while she and Sadie were still trying to tuck some of the more unruly strands away.

“Hair? This is why girls shouldn’t play Quidditch.”

“I dare you to try and find another chaser this late in the season who’s even half as good as I am,” Ana shot back easily, silencing Marcus.

It was the morning of the Quidditch final, and as was tradition, the Slytherin team gathered in the common room to go down to breakfast together. In the few weeks since Ana had made amends with Professor Lupin, she felt much more herself then she had all year. She now had a new goal, a new aim to strive for: learning to brew the Wolfsbane Potion. She never wanted Professor Lupin to go without it again.

“Why don’t you just cut it?” Bole said as they headed off.

“Are you mad?” Graham defended. “Her hair is one of the best things about her!”

“Actually,” Ana began, giving Graham a pointed look. “I’ve tried, but Sev won’t allow it.”

As great as things had become between Ana and Professor Lupin, they remained tense between her and Sev. She tried asking him only once more to show her how to brew Wolfsbane, and he refused again. Ana was not going to let that stop her.

When they entered the Great Hall, the Slytherin table erupted in tumultuous applause. They stood and either clapped or whistled their praise loudly and obnoxiously. Graham quickly reached down and took Ana’s hand, while waving with the other to his friends. Ana rolled her eyes but went along with it.

On a little pedestal on the dais sat the Quidditch Cup, shining in all its silver splendor. Ana broke away from Graham and the rest of the team to go see the cup up close.

“She’s a pretty little lass, isn’t she, Professor?” Ana asked looking right at McGonagall.

McGonagall pursed her lips. “She’d look prettier sitting in my office.”

“Nah, I don’t think so. We have this perfect shelf in the common room that she likes to sit on.”

McGonagall scowled. “Take a seat, Miss Evans. You’ll need a good breakfast this morning.”
“Don’t you want to wish me luck, Professor?”

“Not particularly, no.”

“Aww, come on. You know I’m your favorite Slytherin. No point in trying to deny it.”

Sitting next to McGonagall, Lupin laughed. “Someone’s rather chipper this morning.”

“Why shouldn’t I be? It’s a beautiful day for a bit of Quidditch. It will be even more so when we take this pretty lady back.”

“Careful now, don’t count your quaffle before it scores.” Lupin grinned.

“There are two things in this life, Professor, that I never doubt. The first is my brilliant talent and future career as the youngest Potions Master ever.” She gave a tight, pointed smile towards Sev, but he didn’t respond.

“And the second?” Lupin prompted.

“My phenomenal chaser skills, of course, second to none,” Ana answered proudly.

“Hmm…I don’t know. I knew a pretty good one in my day as well.”

“What? Fifty years ago? It’s time to get with the new age, Professor. I…”

Suddenly the whole hall, minus the Slytherin table, burst into loud cheers drowning out Ana’s next words. She turned around to see the Gryffindor team enter. They made their way down the aisle to their seats, but Wood caught sight of Ana on the dais and rushed forward.

“Oi! No tampering with the cup!” he said.

Ana rolled her eyes as she stepped down. “Don’t get your knickers in a twist, Wood. I didn’t do anything to it.”

“Yeah,” began a familiar voice. Ana quickly caught his eye. “She was just saying her farewells,” Fred finished with a smirk.

For a moment Ana couldn’t react. Fred was talking to her, and not just talking, but grinning at her. It was almost like it used to be.

Almost.

She could feel the tension mounting in the air around them as she didn’t reply. Ana quickly let a grin fall over her lips as well.

“More like ‘see you soon,’” she said. “Take a good look at it, boys; it’s the closest you’ll ever get to it.”

Ana sauntered over to the Slytherin table and took up the empty seat Graham had saved for her. All the while she tried to act as though she wasn’t freaking out inside. Fred had bantered with her. It wasn’t much sure, but it was something. Ana looked up at the high table and caught Professor Lupin looking at her. He smiled encouragingly, as though to say “See? Talk to him. Apologize.”
Ana bounced lightly on her feet as she stretched out her arms. Her confident excitement had turned to jittery nerves the moment she entered the locker room. Marcus’ speech did nothing to settle those nerves. He kept saying things like “win at all costs,” or “by any means necessary,” and even “whatever it takes.”

*By any means,* was not the speech March should be giving. *Whatever it takes,* would not play well for them. Presently, Slytherin led the league by 200 points. That meant that all Potter had to do was catch the snitch while Gryffindor led the match by fifty points. That would give them the 200 they needed to tie Slytherin, and then they’d win the cup because they won the match. All Ana had to do was make sure Gryffindor never led by fifty points, since the likelihood of Draco catching the snitch before Potter was slim-to-none.

Ana’s job was made harder by the fact that Gryffindor had not only one but three good chasers who rarely missed a shot, especially a penalty shot. Therefore, the more penalty shots Gryffindor was given the higher the chance of them getting a fifty point lead.

What Marcus should have been preaching was for them to play a match like they never had before: cleanly. Gryffindor would expect them to resort to dirty tactics. If they kept it clean, it would throw them off balance and give Slytherin the edge they needed. When Ana tried pointing this out though, she was quickly shot down. Not even Graham supported her.

Graham and Ana had been together for just under five months and Ana was growing weary of their relationship. He was always calling her things like “My baby,” “My lady,” or “My girl.” Ana didn’t much like the idea of being anybody’s anything like she was some sort of possession. And he was jealous of the time she spent helping Adrian study. Then there was the issue with his friends.

His best friend was Zacharias Smith, a third year Hufflepuff. Graham and Zacharias were friends from before their Hogwarts days, and they were thick as thieves. Graham was a different person around Zacharias. He joked about “snagging the Wicked Witch,” he was more vulgar, and he was extra affectionate. He was always trying to hold her hand, or put his arm around her, or kiss her around Zacharias; Ana wasn’t comfortable with the public displays.

When Ana took her concerns to Sadie however, Sadie only had this to say:

“*Of course, he is. You’re a very pretty girl, Ana; he wants to show you off. The boy adores you. You shouldn’t question it; you should manipulate it.*”

Ana wasn’t sure how to manipulate a boy, but now was as good a time as any to try.

“*Gear up; it’s almost time,*” Marcus said.

Ana moved closer to Graham and tried smiling sweetly.

“Hey baby,” he said with a smile before kissing her.

“Play a good match today,” she said.

“Thanks, you too.”

“No, I mean,” Ana looked around quickly. “Play a *clean* match today.”

“You heard Marcus.”
“Yeah, but you know what I said has merit too. They won’t expect a clean match, and we don’t want to give them any opportunity for more points.”

Ana could see that simply talking to him wasn’t really working. She'd have to change tactics. What would Sadie do? Or rather, what did she see Flora do last week when she wanted something from Bole? Ana bit her lip and tilted her head to the side. Then she placed a hand on his chest as though smoothing out his robes.

“Please, babe. Do it for me?”


“Promise?”

“I promise.” His eyes darted to her lips and Ana knew he wanted to kiss her again. Fortunately for her, Marcus announced it was time to go.

They walked out to more rapturous applause and met the Gryffindors in the middle. Madam Hooch gave her traditional “Good, clean match” speech. And then she blew her whistle. Ana kicked off the ground, allowing the wind to rush through her braided crown, loosening those fly-away strands.

“And it’s Gryffindor in possession,” Lee Jordan’s voice rang through the megaphone.

Alicia caught the quaffle a mere fingertip before Ana did, and she zoomed off across the pitch. Ana swirled around and began giving chase; Marcus and Graham were already flanking Alicia. During an attempted pass to Katie, Graham intercepted. He and Ana began making headway towards the Gryffindor posts when both bludgers came their way. Ana swerved and missed hers, but Graham wasn’t so lucky. Angelina picked up the dropped quaffle and returned to the Slytherin end.

“SHE SCORES! TEN-ZERO TO GRYFFINDOR!” Lee announced.

Angelina was circling back around the field when Marcus slammed into her. He claimed he didn’t see her, but everyone knew that was a load of rubbish. In retaliation, Fred chucked his beater’s bat at Marcus smashing his head into his broom and bloodying his nose. Both teams were issued a penalty shot. Alicia took the short of Gryffindor and made it.

“And that’s Evans coming forward to take the shot for Slytherin. She’s a wicked chaser—but Wood’s a superb keeper! Very difficult to get by. Very diff—Ahh! She scores. That’s twenty-ten to Gryffindor!”

And so the dirty game began, and it was one of the dirtiest that Ana’s teammates had ever sunk to. Ana had expected as much from the rest of the team, but she was wholly expecting Graham to keep his word. So when he went after Katie Bell, grabbing her head instead of the quaffle and giving Gryffindor another penalty shot (which she made) Ana was furious.

It became a game of pass the quaffle between Slytherin and Gryffindor. Ana did her best to get the quaffle past Wood as many times as she could, but even while she was in possession of the quaffle, Marcus, Bole, and even Graham found ways of giving Gryffindor penalty shots, which they made. Ana’s frustrations were growing.

“Evans in possession of the quaffle again! But that’s Alicia Spinnet hot on her tail! Come on Alicia! Give her a good kick!”
“For the last time, Jordan, keep it…”

“Ooo! Nice bludger work there by George Weasley!”

Ana only had a second’s notice to react to the bludger. She didn’t much feel like spending another night in hospital due to a head injury, so on instinct, she raised her hand to block it. Unfortunately, she dropped the quaffle in the process and punched herself in the eye.

Ana spun wildly in the air until she could gain control again. Her eye was already beginning to throb with pain, and her wrist was stinging fiercely. When she managed to right her broom again, she saw Graham fly up behind George and punch him in the back of the head. Fred then knocked Graham with his bat. Ana shot forward, flying between them and preventing an all-out brawl.

“Enough!” she shouted, making her own head ring. “Don’t be an idiot, Graham, and finish the match!”

Katie Bell took the penalty shot for Gryffindor and made it. Graham missed his.

“ONE HUNDRED TO FIFTY, WITH GRYFFINDOR LEADING!” Lee Jordan shouted.

Ana felt sick to her stomach. Gryffindor was leading by fifty points. Then her stomach twisted even more. Harry was speeding through the air; clearly, he had seen the snitch. If he caught it now…

But then Draco threw himself forward and grabbed hold of Harry’s broom. It slowed him down until the snitch disappeared again, but gave Gryffindor another penalty shot. Alicia missed. All Ana had to do now was score a few points to get them back to safety.

There was a problem with that, however. Her vision was slightly blurry and her wrist prevented her from holding the quaffle properly. The first time Graham passed it to her, she fumbled and Gryffindor caught it. Another time she tried throwing it with her left arm, and Wood blocked it.

“Angelina Johnson gets the quaffle for Gryffindor, come on Angelina. COME ON!”

Ana was flying after Angelina as fast as she could. Marcus and Graham were nearby; Bole and Derrick too.

“AAAAAAARRRGGH!”

There was a fierce battle cry. Ana looked around to see Harry speeding towards them. She swerved out of the way at the last moment.

“Are you mad, Potter!” she called after him. He just grinned before flying back to the center.

“SHE SCORES! ONE-TEN TO SIXTY!”

Then Ana saw something that delighted her. Draco was diving for the snitch!

“Come on, Draco. Come on,” Ana whispered furiously.

The game was forgotten as everyone stopped to watch the action. Harry was quickly gaining on Draco. Bole sent a bludger towards Harry, but he dodged it. Harry and Draco were side-by-side now, and Ana could almost see the next few seconds play out in slow motion. Harry took
both hands off his broom. He knocked Draco’s hand out of the way with one hand, as his fingers closed around something in the air. He came to a stop and held his hand high above his head. Ana didn’t need to see the snitch between his fingers or check the score to know that Gryffindor had won. Three-fourths of the stadium erupted with cheer.

The Gryffindor team dog-piled Harry in mid-air, while Ana clutched her wrist to her chest as she slowly descended to the ground. Her eye was now so swollen she could barely see out of it. The rest of her team landed nearby and swore profanities as they threw their brooms on the ground. Marcus laid into them, particularly her, about not being on the same page.

Ana said nothing; she just stood there and watched through her one eye as the Gryffindors celebrated. They had the whole team hoisted on their shoulders. Harry held the cup high above his head. Ana could feel herself almost wanting to smile, as much as she wanted to cry. She knew what she needed to do. Without looking back at her teammates, she walked forward. The cheering died down as she came nearer and the team was set back on their feet. McGonagall moved to step forward, but Lupin held her back. Ana came to a stop in front of Wood and the rest of the team. There was a tense pause before Ana spoke.

“No one likes a defeat…but I don’t mind when it’s deserved. You…You played a good match. Wish I could say the same about my team, but alas…”

Ana tucked her broom under her right arm and held out her left hand. The air was tense as everyone waited to see what Wood would do. Then, to everyone’s surprise, including Ana’s, he shook her hand.

“I don’t think your captain will approve of this,” he said with a short nod towards the Slytherin end.

“Well, my captain doesn’t have the brains to think. Otherwise, he wouldn’t have handed you half your points in penalties.”

“But alas…” Wood said with a shrug. “How’s the ah…” he pointed to her eye.

“Apart from the fact that there’s currently one-and-a-half of you? Brilliant. And the wrist? I don’t think it’s broken, but I can’t really feel it either, so…?” Ana grinned, then she stepped back to address the rest of the team. “Enjoy it while it lasts, because next year, she’s coming back home.”

As Ana walked away, the cheering started back up. Ana headed up to the castle; Graham was waiting for her along the way.

“What was that all about?” he asked irritably.

“What was what all about?” she replied.

“Are you conferring with the enemy now?”

Ana rolled her eye and tried to walk away. “I don’t have time for this nonsense right now. I’ve got to get to Madam Pomfrey.”

“Then make time.” Graham grabbed her arm and spun her around to face him, but he grabbed her bad arm.

“Ow! Mother of Merlin, Graham!”
“Did you plan this? Is that why you slacked off in the end?”

“What! Are you daft? It may have escaped your attention, but I’ve got one good eye and a bum wrist! But you want to look for blame? Fine! Let’s start with you!”

“Me? What did I do?”


“So?”

“So? So you lied to me! You told me point-blank that you’d play fairly, and then you did the exact opposite!”

“Baby, come on; you can’t seriously be mad about that. I wanted to win.”

“Yeah? And how did that work out for you? You know half their points were from penalty shots, right?”

By this point, the rest of the school had begun to make their way back to the castle as well. Ana, however, didn’t notice the approaching crowd.

“And I am NOT your baby. Not anymore.”

“What are you…”

“We’re done, Graham! I’m nobody’s trophy, least of all yours!” Ana walked away in fury.
The Wicked Witch had struck again. At least, that was the talk around the castle only this time they were praising Ana for it. The whole school had witnessed Ana play cleanly in the dirtiest match on record. And then a great deal of them saw her shake hands with the opposing team after losing, an action hitherto undreamt of. Finally, many of them had then witnessed her very public dumping with Graham Montague in more than one instance.

Her breakup with Graham didn’t take the first time, for Graham that is. Ana didn’t realize that half the school saw the first time, so she tried to be a little more discreet the second time around. By the third time, however, she didn’t care who saw; she just wanted to it be done with.

“For the love of Merlin, Graham, we are not together anymore. There is you and there is me. There is no we. I was not upset that we lost, and my brain is not addled. In fact, the only senseless thing I’ve done recently is ever agreeing to go out with you in the first place. Now please, stop begging like some flea-ridden dog. You’re embarrassing yourself.”

There was applause when Ana walked out of the Great Hall.

Ana felt strange being liked by the student body. Really, the only ones who probably didn’t like her were her own teammates. Still, the one person Ana wished would talk to her didn’t. So Ana chalked their moment of banter up to pre-match jitters and nothing more.

Fortunately, Ana didn’t have any time to contemplate Fred’s renewed silence or how she might be the one to end their feud. Final exams were upon them and everyone was bunkered down with homework and revisions. The fifth and seventh years were beside themselves with worry. The first years walked around in a blind daze having no experience with the rigorous Hogwarts testing. And Ana did her best to balance her own study time with helping Adrian prepare for his Potions OWL.

Then, at last, nearly three weeks into June Ana was done. She could wash her hands of endless studying for seventy-four days. She was ready for a bit of rest, and she was ready to dive into her Wolfsbane research. She was going to work really hard to have the potion ready in July because she knew Sev wouldn’t continue it during the summer.

Ana was in Professor Lupin’s classroom one day after all his exams were given, helping him pack up his creatures for transport and clean their tanks.

“How did your exams go?” he asked.

“I feel pretty good about them. The only questionable one might be Transfiguration.”

“Well, you did exceptional on your Defense exam, written and practical.”

Ana beamed with pride. “Thanks.”
“How’s…how’s the other assignment coming?”

“Really well I think.”

“Oh?” Lupin was surprised.

“Yeah. I found a book in the library that has a detailed patent for it and I sent in an OWL order for the instructions. I’ll have to go by Diagon Ally to get all the…”

Ana looked up from her tank and saw the confusion on Professor Lupin’s face.

“You…you weren’t talking about the potion, were you, Professor?”

“No, but that explains your answer.”

“Oh…”

Ana’s smile faded. Lupin had given her the “assignment” of talking to Fred before the end of the year. She hadn’t.

“That…that one’s not going so well.” Ana sighed. “I want to, it’s just… What if he doesn’t want to talk to me anymore? What if I mucked everything up? If he shut me out again, then I… I don’t think I could handle that. I couldn’t lose him like that.”

“By not talking to him and continuing on as you are, is that not the same thing as losing him?”

Ana shrugged. “I don’t even know what to say to him. Or where to begin.”

Lupin thought for a moment. “Try writing it down then,” he suggested.

“What? Like a letter?”

“Yeah, why not? It’s worked for me. I’ve written several letters to friends in the past. Sometimes I yell at them, sometimes I ask for their forgiveness, and sometimes I just…reminisce.”

“And how do they respond to the ones where you yelled at them?”

“Well, I… I’ve never actually sent them. You see, I…” He stopped suddenly as though strongly reconsidering his next words. Ana could tell that he chose to say something else. “It helps to get it out sometimes, and it’s a good place to start.”

“You know, Professor, I really hope you can be the one to break the curse. It would be a shame to not have you around for OWLs next year.”

“So I’m not just an incompetent placeholder?”

Ana grinned and rolled her eyes as Lupin smiled. “You bypassed ‘incompetent’ ages ago, Professor Moony.”

Lupin started coughing, choking on nothing but air. It took a moment for Ana to realize what she had said, and then the horror of it set in. Her face paled and her eyes swelled as though hit with an engorgement charm. Meanwhile, Lupin sat frozen in place as he studied her reactions carefully. For the first time in his life, he regretted not learning legilimency, though he doubted he’d have stood a chance against her.
“Mother of…” Ana’s mouth formed the shape of an “O” and she covered it with her hands. “I am so sorry, Professor. I… I don’t know why I said that. That was really insensitive of me. I should not have said that.”

Her eyes clouded with tears. “Even when I don’t intend for it to, the wicked still seeps out.”

“No, Ana, it’s all right. I…”

“No it isn’t, Professor. How can you say that?”

“It is, Ana…”

“You’re a terrible liar. I… I can see it all over your face. See this… this is why he won’t talk to me because he knows... I’m sorry. I’ll…I’ll just leave.”

“Ana, wait!”

Ana stopped at the door and looked back over her shoulder, but Professor Lupin didn’t know what to say and so he remained silent. Ana fled.

“Remus, you daft fool. You should have just told her.”

Lupin dropped his head into his hands and stepped back to lean on his desk. Truth was, Ana’s slip affected him a great deal more than he anticipated, but not for the reason Ana believed. It had been many years since he heard that nickname. And he had resigned himself to the fact that he’d never hear it again, least of all from her.

Lupin moved around to sit at his desk. He should have gone after her, he knew as much. No. He should have just told her; she deserved to know about her family, but he had given his word earlier in the year to hold his tongue.

For the rest of the afternoon, Lupin warred with himself. Did he tell her, knowing that if he told it would serve to drive a bigger wedge between her and Snape? Or did he keep his word? Really it came down to this, and it was so simple he felt like an idiot for not thinking of it sooner; where did his loyalties lie? With Snape, or with Ana’s father?

Lupin knew what he must do, consequences be damned—and really, Snape never should have kept this from her, so any fallout would be of his own doing. Lupin reached in a drawer of his desk and pulled out a relic of the past, The Marauders Map. He’d confiscated the map off of Snape after Snape had confiscated it off of Harry earlier in the year. Lupin muttered the incantation and the map came to life.

He searched for Ana among the dungeons first. She wasn’t in her common room, dorm room, or in her potions hide-away. She wasn’t in the library or the Great Hall either. It would take some time to search the whole castle for her, but then… He looked out the window.

It was a rather nice day out still, so he began to look for her on the grounds. It took a while, but he found her. She was sitting alone, likely in some private nook she found. There were four dots moving her way: Harry, Hermione, Ron, and…

“That… that’s not possible,” Lupin said to himself.

He picked up the map and brought it closer to his face. There had to be some mistake, but the map never lied. Then another dot began moving towards them. Lupin didn’t hesitate to act.
Ana didn’t know where to go after leaving Lupin’s classroom. She didn’t want to go to the common room because Graham was likely there. And she didn’t fancy seeing the girls either as they didn’t understand why she dumped Graham. So she wandered outside. For half a moment she considered going down to Hagrid’s. Then she recalled that he was having…issues…with his hippogriff. Ana never had any personal dealings with the creature, but she didn’t feel like looking it in the eye just before it was executed. So instead, she found a spot near a clump of rocks in sight of the whomping willow.

The name ‘Moony’ kept playing through her mind, giving her one of the worst headaches she’d ever had. She couldn’t believe she had called Professor Lupin ‘Moony.’ What sort of idiot calls a werewolf ‘Moony?’ He tried to say it was all right, but Ana knew otherwise. The shock and pain were etched on his face like a stone monument.

There was no way around it; Ana was wicked, and she always would be. It’s no wonder why Fred had resumed his silence. He wouldn’t speak to her so long as she was wicked. But how could she change that aspect of who she was when it seemed to be ingrained in her? It’s not like she could simply tell herself to be a better person. Could she?

She summoned some parchment and quill and began writing, not to Fred but to the Wicked Witch. In this letter she told the Witch everything she was feeling, holding nothing back. All the anger, the frustration, the grief and the strife she had caused, Ana let it all out. And…she did find it strangely therapeutic. So she started another.

This one was to Fred, and like the one to the Witch, Ana held nothing back. She started with how his silence had confused her, and how his distance had hurt her. His flirtation with Macavoy, though, had stung most of all and sent her into a blind rage where her instinct was to hurt as much as she’d been hurt.

Ana pushed on through her tears as she confessed that her actions only brought forth more pain and she didn’t know how to deal with it. Her quill scribbled furiously down the parchment as she stopped thinking about what to say and just simply wrote. Her emotions came out randomly and her words were erratic. They began to steer more towards a plea, not for forgiveness but for understanding, acceptance even.

_I lied, or rather, I was wrong. I didn’t know it at the time. Your friendship wasn’t nothing to me, it was everything. You were everything._

Ana looked up to brush the tears from her eyes. Nightfall was starting to set in, so she gathered her things to leave. She was just about to head inside when she heard voices approaching.

“What are you doing out here, snake?” Ron used the word with a demeaning tone rather than Fred’s usual endearing one.

“What’s it to you, Weasley? These aren’t your grounds. You don’t control who gets to use them and who doesn’t.” Ana tried to mask her unshed tears, but she wasn’t fast enough

“Wait! Have you been _crying_?” Ron pinched his face in disgust.

“Ron!” Hermione shrieked, smacking his arm and making his shirt squeal.

“What was that?” Ana asked.
“Scabbers! Stop squirming.” Ron reached into his pocket and pulled out one of the ugliest rats Ana had ever seen. It was bony thin with large bald spots.

“Ew! Why are you carrying that disgusting thing around? It’s diseased.”

“It is not!” Ron defended. “This is Scabbers, my rat.”

“It has a name? Are you seriously admitting to having a pet rat?”

“Yeah? So what? Least my family cares enough to get me a pet. I bet you don’t even have a toad.”

Ana would never admit how much those words really hurt.

“I’m not sure that’s saying much. It’s a rat. They’re filthy disgusting creatures not worth the time of day. They serve no other purpose but to lend their spleens and tails to potion making.”

The rat squealed and squirmed in Ron’s hands trying desperately to escape. Ana could see the thin red scratches it was leaving behind.

“Don’t listen to the nasty Witch, Scabbers. She’s wicked to everyone.”

Ana flinched uncontrollably at his words.

“Here, do us all a favor and bite her.”

Ron suddenly shoved the rat in Ana’s face. She gave a little shriek and side-stepped him. She slapped his hand out of the way. Ron lost his grip and the rat scurried away in the grass. He called after it and gave chase.

“Was that necessary?” Harry asked, a little exasperated. “He just got him back.”

“Well,” she shrugged. “He shouldn’t have shoved it my face.”

Harry consented with a slight nod.

“What are you three doing out here anyway? I thought you were banned from the grounds or something.”

“We went down to Hagrid’s,” Hermione said. “They just…” She trailed off, but Ana knew what she was going to say and she shook her head.

“I couldn’t have done that. Draco’s a real arse sometimes.”

“I thought you were friends,” Harry said.

Ana scoffed. “Only when it suits him and it hasn’t for the last three years. Good riddance. If I had to sit through another dinner with Lucious Malfoy, I think I’d be sick.”

It looked like Harry wanted to chuckle, but then he remembered who he was talking to; Ana too. They looked at each other in a sort of awkward silence as they tried to figure out what just happened. They quickly looked away and turned their attention to Ron. He had finally managed to catch his rat and was making his way back. He stopped suddenly and pointed to a space behind them.

“Harry! Hermione! Look out! It’s the Grim!”
They all turned around to look. A large black dog had just come over a little hill behind them.

“It’s not the Grim, you git. It’s just a dog,” Ana replied.

But it was a ferocious looking dog, and the largest one she’d ever seen. It began running towards them. It jumped on Harry, knocking him into Ana and they all fell to the ground. Ana struggled to right herself. When she did, the dog had already rolled off of them and gone after Ron. It tackled him to the ground and began pulling him away.

“Ron!” Harry yelled as he tried to go after him. Hermione grabbed his arm and pulled him back.

“Harry, no! Do you realize what tree this is?”

The dog was dragging Ron to the base of the willow, and its branches were swaying wildly.

“I don’t care! We have to help him!”

Harry darted forward and the branches began to beat the ground trying to ward him off. One of them caught him around the stomach and threw him back.

“Harry!” Hermione shrieked as she ran after him.

“Wait! Stop! You won’t get through!” Ana yelled after them, but they didn’t listen.

Harry and Hermione kept trying to duck and dodge their way through, while the swinging branches kept tossing them aside. Meanwhile, the dog had drug Ron to the trunk and had half-way disappeared down a hole hidden there. Ron’s foot caught around a root. With a sickening crack, his leg broke and he disappeared too.

“RON!” Harry yelled just before being thrown back again.

Ana stood back at a safe distance, watching the mayhem unfold before her. Suddenly an orange, furry blur darted past her. It weaved and bobbed expertly through the branches to the base of the tree. Once there it placed its paw on a knot and the tree froze in place.

“Crookshanks! How did he know?” Hermione asked, helping Harry to his feet.

“He’s friends with that dog! I’ve seen them together,” Harry replied. “Come on, and keep your wand out.”

They both ran forward through the still frozen limbs and climbed down through the hole.

Ana still stood in her spot. Where did they think they were going? It was foolish to go after that dog alone. Ana looked around for help. They needed a teacher, but there were none nearby. She thought about running to find one, but by the time she did who knows what could have happened to Harry and his friends. What sort of danger would they be in? Or…

How many points would they manage to scrounge up for Gryffindor?

“Bloody Gryffindors,” Ana muttered.

Then she too ran forward; the branches were just starting to wake. She crouched and slid headfirst down an earthy slope into a long, dark tunnel.
Beneath the Willow

Chapter Notes

I think this is longest chapter in this story so far. Hope you don't mind a little extra reading. :)

Belladonna 29

Beneath the Willow

Ana hurried down the dark narrow tunnel. She could see the faint bobbing of wand light ahead of her, but she didn’t dare to call out to them and alert the massive dog of their approach. More than once Ana questioned how wise it was to go along with this instead of seeking a teacher. But she had already gone too far to turn back.

At long last, the earth began to slope upwards. It twisted in a spiral and Ana could make out a faint patch of light at the top. She edged towards it, wand at the ready, and stepped out into a dust-covered room. The wallpaper was peeling, the windows were boarded, and there were broken bits of furniture scattered around the floor. Ana had a sinking feeling in the pit of her stomach, and half a mind to turn back and let the foolish Gryffindors deal with their own mess.

Then she thought of Fred. He may have teased his younger brother relentlessly, but Ana knew how important family was to him. Ron may be a pain in her arse, but Fred wouldn’t want anything to happen to him; so, neither did she. And Harry and Hermione were so bad, Ana reasoned.

Besides, the Wicked Witch would have turned back, so Ana couldn’t.

A loud bang echoed from upstairs. Ana followed a path in the dust up a creaking staircase. About halfway up she heard a door snap closed. She darkened her wand as she stepped onto the second-floor landing. The path led to a door at the end of the hall. As Ana moved towards it, she could see feet moving through a large hole in the bottom, and she heard a muffled voice.

“...Brave of you not to run for a teacher.” The voice was hoarse and raspy, as though it hadn’t been used in a very long time. “...it will make everything much easier...”

Ana took a deep breath to steady her nerves. She could see the talker’s bare feet through the hole, and she could tell he was positioned away from her. The others must have been at an angle where they couldn’t see her approach. Ana gingerly placed her hand on the doorknob, careful not to make a sound as she did so.

Then in one swift motion, she pushed the door open, aimed her wand at a thin, hallow man, and shouted “Expelliarmus!”

Three wands flew out of the man’s hand and into Ana’s waiting one.

“But I bet you didn’t count on me following them.”

“Ana! What are you doing here? Get out!” Harry ordered.
Ana rolled her eyes. “You three are always getting into trouble and somehow walking away with loads of house points. Slytherin may not be in running for the cup, but you better believe that I’ll do what it takes to secure second place.”

“Slytherin?” the man before her said with a disgusted sneer on his face, if man was even the right word for him.

Ana took in his appearance carefully. He looked more like a cross between a wild animal and a deranged corpse. His dark hair was matted and hung below his knees. His stripped robes were tattered and torn. His skin was pulled tight over his face, and his eyes were dark and hollow. Still, Ana recognized the face as the one that had been starring out of the Daily Prophet since that summer.

Sirius Black.

As Black stared back at her, Ana felt a twinge of sharp pain behind her eyes. She closed them against the onslaught and Black moved to take the wands back. Harry was faster though. He shot across the room and tackled Black to the floor. They tussled in a tangle of swinging limbs. Black tried to push Harry off, while Harry punched every bit of Black he could manage.

Hermione rushed towards Ana, pulling her further into the room and away from the brawl. Then she snatched the wands from her hand.

“Harry!” she shouted.

Harry had Black pinned to the floor, but Black had his hand around Harry’s throat; they both looked towards Hermione. Hermione tossed Harry his wand. He knocked Black’s arm away and caught his wand deftly with his other hand. Gasping for air, Harry jammed his wand into Black’s throat; Black ceased fighting. Harry slowly rose to his feet, keeping his wand pointed at Black’s chest.

“Are you going to kill me, Harry?” Black asked in a hoarse, almost mocking tone.

“You killed my parents,” Harry replied, his voice shaking.

“I don’t deny it. But if you knew the whole story…”

“The whole story? You sold them to Voldemort! That’s all I need to know!”

“You’ve got to listen to me,” Black pleaded. “You’ll regret it if you don’t… You don’t understand what happened…”

“I understand a lot better than you think! You never heard her, did you? My mum…trying to stop Voldemort from killing me…and you did that… you did it…!”

Ana flinched from the pain in her head; her headache was getting worse, but she couldn’t let Harry go through with this.

“Harry, stop…” she said, pushing past her pain and stepping forward. “You don’t want to do this.”

“This doesn’t concern you, Ana. Back-off.” His eyes never left Black.

“You think I don’t know what it’s like? My parents are dead too, Harry.” Harry looked up in surprise. “Do you think I live with Sev for the fun of it?” Now Black whipped his head towards
Ana.

“I didn’t know,” Harry stammered.

“You’re not the only orphan of war, Harry. I never knew my parents, and there isn’t anything I wouldn’t give just for the chance to know them. But killing the person responsible for their deaths won’t give me that opportunity. Just like killing Black won’t bring your parents back. It’ll…it’ll just condemn you; you’d be no better than he is.”

“Harry, please, listen to her,” Hermione pleaded.

“You have to fight against the wicked, Harry, or it will consume you. Trust me.”

Harry’s wand remained steady over Blacks’ heart, but Ana could see his convictions waiver slightly.

“What do you suggest we do with him then?”

“We… We caught him, so…we’ll take him to Dumbledore and let him sort out what to do.”

“But he’s an Animagus,” Ron said weakly. “He’ll turn on us and run.”

“There’s a binding charm. I read over it, but its OWL level. Oh! What is it?” Ana struggled to push past her still increasing headache to remember the charm.

“No!” Black shuffled away from Harry on the floor. “No. I won’t go until I’ve finished the job I came for.”

In an instant, Ana had her wand aimed at Black’s chest as well; Hermione and Ron too.

“I won’t let him murder you. But if it comes down to defending ourselves, make no mistake whose life we value more,” Ana said sharply.

Suddenly, that same orange cat that froze the tree for them ran forward and leapt onto Black’s chest.

“Crookshanks! Get off! Move!” Hermione urged, but the cat stayed put, digging its claws into Black’s chest. Even Black tried dislodging it with no success.

Then they heard movement down below.


“Are you mad, Granger?!” Ana spun around. “What if…”

Before she could say more though, the door flew open in a blaze of red sparks. Professor Lupin stood on the other side, his wand raised. He looked over the four of them before his eyes landed on Black.

“Professor Lupin! Thank Merlin, it’s only you. You can help us,” Ana said.

Lupin nodded solemnly. “Yes, Ana; I’m here to help. Well done, now… let me handle it from here. Give me your wands… I’ll cover you while you help him stand.”

“Professor?”
“It’s alright, Ana; trust me.”

Ana hesitated only a moment more before nodding and handing over her wand. She and Harry each took one of Black’s skinny arms and pulled him to his feet.

“Good. Now step aside,” Lupin said. Once Ana and Harry were safely away, Lupin could focus solely on Black.

“Where is he, Sirius?” he asked. Black slowly raised his hand and pointed it at Ron.

“What? He’s mental! I haven’t done anything!” Ron exclaimed.

Lupin didn’t acknowledge Ron. “But then...why hasn’t he shown himself before now?”

Ana looked at Harry who looked at her before turning to look at Hermione. Neither of them had any idea what Lupin was talking about.

“Unless...unless he was the one...unless you switched...without telling me?”

Black nodded slowly, and Lupin lowered his wand.

“Professor, what’s going on?” Harry asked, but Lupin had already moved forward to embrace Black.

“I DON’T BELIEVE IT!” Hermione screamed, pointing an accusatory finger at Lupin.

“Hermione, calm down,” Lupin urged.

“No!”

“Please, let me explain!”

“I didn’t tell anyone! I covered for you!”

“I trusted you!” Harry shouted. “And you’ve been his friend all along!”

“No, Harry. I have not been his friend, but I am now. Let us…”

“No! Don’t trust him, Harry!” Hermione said. “He’s been helping Black into the castle, he wants you dead too...he’s a werewolf!”

There was a deafening silence after all the yelling.

Ana stood back and watched in silence; she didn’t know what to believe. She’d nearly misjudged Lupin before, could she had done it again? It didn’t make any sense to her. If he was their friend if he was to be trusted, then why was he standing with a convicted murderer? All of this was making Ana’s head ring. She clutched at it, trying to make it stop.

“Not at all your usual standard, Hermione;” Lupin said. “Only one out of three. I have not been helping Sirius into the castle, and I most certainly don’t want Harry dead. But…” he sighed despondently. “I can’t deny that I am a werewolf. How long have you known?”

“Ages,” replied Hermione. “Since Professor Snape set the essay.”

“Essay? What essay?” Ana looked at Hermione before turning to Lupin. “Please...tell me he didn’t...”
“He did, I’m afraid,” Lupin replied. “He assigned an essay to my third years back in
October on the signs of identifying a werewolf. I’m sure he hoped one of them would figure it out
and report me.”

Ana closed her eyes and shook her head against the tears that wanted to fall. Did it make
her feel better or worse that Sev had been trying from the very beginning to undermine Professor
Lupin?

“Tell me, Hermione, did you check the lunar charts and discover that I was ill every full
moon? Or did you realize that my boggart took the form of a moon?”

“Both,” she replied, her cheeks going just slightly red.

“Well…you must be the brightest witch of your age I’ve ever met.”

Ana snapped her head up. “Excuse me, Sir? Care to try that again?”

Lupin grinned. “Well, you’re not the same age as her, are you, Ana?”

Ana looked at Hermione, and Hermione looked at Ana. They each gave a single shrug of
their shoulder and looked away.

“Enough of this, Remus!” Black suddenly shouted. “Let’s get on with it and kill him
already!”

“No! Sirius, wait…”

“I DID MY WAITING! TWELVE YEARS OF IT! IN AZKABAN!”

For a moment, Black looked every bit the deranged lunatic the Wizarding World was told
he was.

“They deserve to know why,” Lupin reasoned.

“I know why! He killed my parents!” Harry yelled.

“No, Harry, you do not know it all. Neither of you does.” Lupin’s eyes flickered briefly to
Ana before focusing back on Harry. “Your parents were not the only ones to die that night.”

Lupin looked back at Ana again, as did everyone else.

“Me? What have my parents got to do with any this? They didn’t kill the Potter’s,” Ana
defended.

“Kill them? How could they have? They…” Black began, but Lupin cut him off with a
look.

“You see, Sirius. Neither of them knows the truth.”

“The truth of what?” Harry asked.

“You’re not making much sense, Professor,” Ana added.

“Your parents, Harry, were betrayed by a friend and they were murdered by Voldemort,”
Lupin explained. “But…they weren’t just your parents.” He looked at Ana. “They were yours as
well.”
Lupin’s words hung heavily in the air around them. Hermione gasped and covered her mouth with her hands. Ron muttered, ‘Can’t be. That’s mad.’ And Harry and Ana just looked at each other. Ana looked away first with a shake of her head.

“No,” she said firmly. “No. It’s not true. You’re lying. You have to be. Why?”

“No…”

“No! No! He would have told me! Sev would have told me if I had a…” She looked at Harry again before turning away. “No.”

“Ana,” Lupin moved forward and Ana bit back the tears. “I know this is difficult, but…”

“Difficult? This isn’t difficult, Professor. This is impossible. I can’t be… He isn’t… He wouldn’t have…”

“Wouldn’t he, though? Yes, he should have told you. He should have told you long ago about your parents, but he didn’t.”

Ana couldn’t stop the tears anymore. Would Sev really hold back something as vital as Ana having a brother?

“Why should we believe any of this?” Harry asked.

“Because it’s the truth,” Black said.

“Here, if you give us a chance, we’ll explain everything,” Lupin said. Then he separated and handed back their wands before tucking his own wand away. “Now you’re armed and we aren’t. Will you listen?”

“No, let’s do this now, Moony!”

Ana’s crippling headache was back with a vengeance, knocking her to her knees. She cried out in pain. The name Moony was replaying over and over in her mind.

“Prongs, please reconsider.”

“This is how it has to be, Moony.”

Ana knew that voice from somewhere, but where?

“No go. Ana be good.”

“Yes. Ana is the best little girl. Daddy will come for his Little Flower soon.”

Ana looked up into the face of her father as he kissed her head. It was a face she knew…a face that looked just like Harry’s…but the eyes were wrong.

Someone was screaming in terrible agony. It took a while for Ana to realize it was her. She was crouched on the dirty floor of the shack, both hands digging into her scalp, screaming and crying furiously.

“Ana? Ana, look at me,” Lupin was kneeling on the floor before her, but Ana wasn’t responding.

“What’s wrong with her, Professor?” Hermione asked.
“She’s gone mental,” Ron replied.

“Ana!” Lupin tried again.

Ana slowly lifted her eyes to meet his. Her head was still throbbing. She was breathing heavily.

“Ana, what happened?” Lupin asked gently.

“There’s…there’s something there?”

“Where?”

She tapped her head. “Here. There’s something…blocking… I should remember…I’m trying, but…I…I can’t. Why can’t I? Oh, it hurts!”

“Ana… Ana, you’ve got to listen to me. Stop trying. Whatever it is, we can figure it out later, but right now, you need to stop fighting it.”

“I need to remember. If he’s really my brother, then why…? What did he do to me?”

“I…I don’t know.”

At that moment the door burst open again and Sev stood on the other side looking angrier than Ana had ever seen him.

“Get away from her,” he snarled.

Remus slowly stood and raised his hands over his head. “Severus, please…”

Without warning, Sev flicked his wand and ropes began to wind themselves around Lupin, binding his wrists, ankles, and gagging him. Lupin toppled over. Black rushed towards Sev trying to overpower him, but Sev held him off by jabbing his wand into Black’s throat.

“No!” Ana screamed. She crawled over to Lupin and tried to free him. The ropes held fast, and the more she struggled the tighter they held.

“Get away from him, Belladonna,” Sev demanded.

“Don’t speak to her like that,” Black threatened. Sev dug his wand deeper into Black’s neck.


“Oh, how I hoped I’d be the one to catch you,” Sev taunted, ignoring Ana’s pleas. “I’ve been telling Dumbledore for months that Lupin’s been helping you into the castle.”

“Once again, Snape, you’ve put your keen and penetrating mind to the task and have come to the wrong conclusion,” Black said. “Not much has changed then.”

“I could do it, you know. But why deny the Dementors? They’re so longing to see you.”

“Sev, please…” Ana pleaded.

“Sev, please…help us…”
Ana cried out and held her head again. Then she looked up at Sev through her tears.
“What did you do to me? Why can’t I remember?”

“Belladonna, stop.”

She could feel him trying to encroach upon her mind, even as he continued to hold Black off.

“NO!” She forced him out. “Tell me! Tell me, Sev!”

“Belladonna…”

“Expelliarmus!”

The shout rang around the room. Sev flew back into the wall with great force hitting his head hard as he fell. Ana looked around and found that Harry, Hermione, and Ron all had their wands directed at Sev.

“We attacked a teacher,” Hermione said. “We attacked a teacher.”

Lupin broke free of his restraints and focused on Ana first. Meanwhile, Ana couldn’t stop staring at the spot where Sev lay crumpled on the ground.

“Ana?”

“Is he…? Please tell me, he’s not…”

“Sirius, check on Snape!”

“What?”

“Now, Sirius. Check on him now!”

Black rolled his eyes but walked over to where Sev lay. He kicked Sev’s legs making him fall to the floor a little more. But the new position showed the rise and fall of his chest.

“He’s alive, Ana,” Lupin began.

“Pity,” Black mumbled under his breath as he made his way back over.

“He’s just knocked out,” Lupin continued. “He’ll be fine when he comes to, though he’ll be sore and in a very foul mood. Are you all right?”

“I… No,” she said simply.

“He wasn’t going to tell us anything, Ana. I’m sorry; I had to,” Harry said.

“Thank you, Harry,” Lupin said as he stood and rubbed his wrists.

“I’m not saying I believe you,” Harry added, his eyes lingering on Ana. “Any of it. But… I’ll give you a chance to explain.”

Ana went over and sat on the bed Ron was on. She felt exhausted and drained, while her head continued to throb. Meanwhile, Lupin divulged in a story of his past. He told them all how he never thought he’d be able to attend Hogwarts because of his condition. Dumbledore thought otherwise and set up precautions to protect both Lupin’s secret and the other students: the shack,
Lupin went on to tell them how he’d met and befriended three boys at school: Sirius Black, Peter Pettigrew, and James Potter. The three boys noticed his frequent absences and eventually discovered his secret. But instead of defriending him as he thought, they became Animagi to help him each month. They had even given each other nicknames. Lupin was Moony, Peter was Wormtail, Padfoot for Black, and James was known as Prongs.

All the while, Ana kept having little flashes of memories. She could see a man that looked like Harry but wasn’t. She saw a woman with beautiful red hair and soft green eyes. And she could just barely make out the faces of three others. One was short and round and prematurely balding; he had a squeaky, unpleasant voice that Ana didn’t like. Another had gorgeous black hair and he liked to tease Ana relentlessly. The third looked vaguely like Professor Lupin only there were fewer lines on his face and less gray hair.

“...All this year I’ve been battling with myself,” Lupin continued with his story. “Wondering if I should tell Dumbledore Sirius was an Animagus, and wanting to tell you and Ana that...”

“Uncle Moony,” Ana cut across Lupin breathlessly. Everyone turned and looked at her. Her eyes were hazy, and she appeared to be swaying slightly. “That’s... that’s what they wanted us to call you. Uncle Moony... they... they...”

Ana could say no more. The effort took to remember just that much was proving too much for her. Her vision blurred. She could feel herself falling, but she didn’t have the strength to stop herself. She caught the faint sight of Lupin and Harry moving towards her just before she was swallowed by the darkness.
When Ana came to, she thought—she hoped—it had all been a terrible dream. She hoped she’d open her eyes and she’d be in her dorm surrounded by her friends, or maybe even napping on the grounds. Professor Lupin would still just be her Professor. Harry would still be Potter. And Sev wouldn’t have been lying to her for twelve years.

Instead, when she opened her eyes Ana found she was in the hospital wing. Her head was still buzzing lightly, but otherwise, she felt fine. It was quiet in the hall, as it should be because it was barely dawn outside. In the bed, across from her lay Ron. His leg was bandaged and propped up. Next to him was Harry, and Hermione was in the bed beside her; they were all asleep.

Ana couldn’t sleep, not anymore. Not that she’d slept much in the first place. Her dreams…her flashes of memory kept her mind too active to rest. She needed answers. She needed the truth, and she needed to hear it from Sev. So, she threw the blankets off of her and left.

Ana wasn’t expecting to find anyone in the corridors this early, so she was surprised when she came across Professor McGonagall.

“Miss Evans, I thought you’d still be recovering,” she said.

“I’m recovered,” Ana replied shortly. McGonagall arched a brow. “I’m sorry, I just…”

“Rough night?”

Ana wasn’t sure what to say; she didn’t know how much McGonagall knew, so she said nothing about the night or what happened.

“Do you know where Professor Snape is?” she asked instead.

“I believe he is with Professor Dumbledore, in his office.”

“In the Headmaster’s office?”

McGonagall nodded. Ana thought about it for a moment but didn’t believe she had any other choice.

“Will you take me there, please? I need to speak to Sev.”

“I…”

“It’s urgent, Professor. I wouldn’t ask if it wasn’t. I need… I need to…I just need to speak to him.”

McGonagall hesitated for a moment before turning down a hall and instructing Ana to follow her. Ana was sure this went against McGonagall’s better judgment, but perhaps Ana’s distress was more plainly evident than she realized. They walked in silence, and Ana was grateful.
for it. Her mind was still too chaotic for small talk. They finally stopped before a stone griffin sitting in an archway.

McGonagall turned to Ana. “Be sensible, Miss Evans. You may be hurting, but that is no reason to lose one’s mind. And keep in mind… he is your father.”

“He’s not my…”

“He raised you like a daughter, didn’t he? He fed you, clothed you, saw to it that you had all the necessities you needed. He may not be Father of the Year, but he did what he could. Remember that. Honor that. And find a way to forgive that.”

“After what he did…I’m not sure I can.”

“Then all I ask is that you try.” She turned back to the statue. “Licorice wand.”

Ana rode the revolving staircase to the top landing, wondering the whole way, again, just how much McGonagall knew. Ana was quickly permitted entrance into the office at the top, where she found Sev talking to the Headmaster. Sev was clearly upset over something, but Ana didn’t care. At the sight of him, all the anger and hurt she felt from the previous night came rushing to the surface.

“Miss Evans, I am glad to see you awake this morning. How are you feeling?” Dumbledore asked, looking at Ana over the rim of his glasses.

“I’m sorry, Sir, but I’m not really sure how to answer that…seeing as how ‘Evans’ isn’t really my name. Is it?”

Sev’s face hardened like stone.

“I see quite a bit of information was shared last night,” Dumbledore replied.

“Yes, but not by the one person who should have shared it.” Ana gave a hard, pointed look to Sev. “But he won’t be holding his tongue anymore. I want answers, and I want them now.”

Sev’s lip curled. “Still as petulant as ever. You do not get to demand anything of me, child.”

“Today. I. Do.”

Sev took a step towards her and Ana could feel him trying to pick at her mind.

“NO!” She shoved him out again. “You do not get to waltz back in there and fix whatever it is I broke through.”

“Belladonna…”

“They were my family! And you kept them from me! They’re gone, because of you! And I want to know why!”

“Listen here…”

“Severus,” Dumbledore said gently but with great authority. “Perhaps this has gone on long enough. You cannot undo that which has already been undone.”

Sev was beyond livid, and it was with great disdain that he complied.
Later that day, Ana sat in Professor Lupin’s office as he packed. Due to the excitement of the Shack, Lupin had forgotten to take his daily Wolfsbane. So when he transformed that night, he nearly attacked Potter, his friends, and an unconscious Ana. He would have succeeded if it had not been for Sirius turning into his Animagus form and fighting him off. In the mayhem, Pettigrew, who really had been Ron’s rat Scabbers, escaped.

But Ana didn’t go to Lupin’s to talk about any of that. She went to talk about the impossible fact—that was somehow possible—that she was the forgotten child of James and Lily Potter.

“…It’s like… I’m the Potter that doesn’t exist. How can that be?”

Lupin sighed and paused what he was doing. “That’s because…no one knew about you.”

“Gee, thanks, Professor. I feel loads better now.”

“No one knew about Harry either, not until…”

“…He became The Boy Who Lived?”

“Yes, actually. When you came around, Ana, the war was already in full swing. Voldemort had numerous people on his side; we never really knew how many. And no one, apart from Dumbledore, and perhaps Mad-Eye, knew everyone who was on our side. Only Sirius, Peter, and I knew about you.

“James and Lily adored you; we all did. We took turns watching you, helping in any way we could. But… we were young, and none of us knew a thing about parenting. Oh, if you could have seen James in those first days…” Lupin laughed lightly as his voice trailed off in thought.

“You, Ana…you were this ray of light in the darkness; the reason we fought so hard for a better world.”

Ana didn’t really know how to respond to the sheer adoration in Lupin’s voice. It was something she wasn’t used to hearing.

“Then, when Lily became pregnant with Harry, the war took a turn for the worse. They went into hiding, and you along with them. So no one had a chance to find out about you.”

“Why…why wasn’t I found in the house with Harry?”

“You were already with Severus.”

“Why…? Why did they give me away?”

“Give you away? Is that what you think happened?”

Ana shrugged. “Why else would I have not been there with them?” She wiped the tears from her face as Lupin moved a chair around to sit across from her.

“Ana, they didn’t give you away. They were trying to protect you.”

“Protect me from what?”

“I…I wish I knew. I wish I could give you all the answers you’re looking for, but all I
know is how much they loved you both, Ana. James and Lily went to great lengths to make sure you were safe before they let Severus take you. It…it was only supposed to be for a short time, but then…” His voice faded into nothing, and they sat in silence.

“It’s strange, you know,” Ana began softly. “Yesterday, I didn’t know anything about my parents, not even their names. They weren’t anything to me but a couple of dead people; no big deal, I mean… you can’t really miss what you don’t know, right?

“And I was fine with that. I was happy with my life…for the most part. But now… Now I know their names, nothing more, and I feel…like there’s something missing. It’s like there’s this giant hole I didn’t even know existed, one that can never be filled.

“How much sense does that even make?”

“Considering who your parents were, quite a bit actually,” Lupin replied. “James and Lily had that effect on people. It didn’t matter if they knew you for a day or if they knew you their whole lives, they treated everyone like a best friend. And if you were lucky enough to be considered family they were devoutly loyal to you. Their death left a gaping hole in all who knew them.”

“Then how could Peter have done what he did?”

Lupin sighed deeply. “I don’t know, and we may never understand why.” His eyes drifted to a spot over Ana’s shoulder, and he smiled softly. “Harry, come in.”

“You’ve been sacked?” Harry asked in a confused tone.

“No,” he sighed. “I’ve resigned.”

“Why?”

“Because,” Lupin cast a wary eye towards Ana. “Someone let slip the nature of my condition this morning.”

“Don’t pretend like we don’t all know who did it, Professor,” Ana said.

“You mean Snape did this?”

“Of course, Pah—” Ana stopped abruptly as she turned to look at Harry and came face to face with the face that now plagued her few memories. But the eyes were wrong.

“I…I’m sorry; I can’t do this right now.”

“Ana, wait…please, don’t leave,” Lupin urged.

Ana looked back at him briefly, tears beginning to cloud her vision again. She knew he wanted to help her and Harry reconnect. When she looked back at Harry though, she just didn’t have the strength.

“I’m sorry, Sir. I can’t right now.”

Ana spent the last few days of school avoiding Harry and not talking to Sev. Her friends attributed her anger towards Sev to the fact that he’d kept Lupin’s lycanthropy from her all year; she didn’t correct them. When the Owl Order for the Wolfsbane instructions arrived, she kept it a
secret from everyone. Then she spent her last Hogsmeade trip in J. Pippin’s Potions trying to stock up on what she could. She’d still have to find a way to make a trip to Diagon Alley.

All the while, she contemplated what to do about Harry. The idea that she was someone’s older sister was absurd, and yet… didn’t she used to dream of having a younger brother? She remembered once, when she was younger, waking up form a rather vivid dream in which she had a brother. She told Sev about it and laughed it off like it was the most ridiculous thing ever. Her occlumency lessons had started not long after that.

Had that actually been her sub-conscious at work, fighting against Sev’s magic to remind her of Harry? If so, then Sev had been presented with an opportunity to tell her the truth then and he chose to continue the lie.

22 June 1994

Ana slid into the compartment. She quickly shut the door and closed the blinds behind her. She cast the muffliato charm so that no one passing by could hear their conversation. Then she turned around to find three very confused faces staring back at her. A snowy owl gave a little hoot in its cage.

“Are you hiding from someone?” Ron asked.

“Umm… yeah,” Ana answered as though it was obvious. “Only everyone who’s not in this compartment.”

“Well, go hide somewhere else. We don’t want you here.”

“Ron!” Hermione scolded while Harry remained silent.

“This isn’t exactly a pleasure flight for me either, Weasley,” Ana began. “A week ago I was an only child, Sev was bitter and prejudice but not a liar, and my parents were simply dead and insignificant…”

“Don’t talk about my Mum and Dad like that!” Harry shouted, suddenly leaping to his feet. “They are not insignificant!”

Ana rolled her eyes. “You’re missing the point, Potter. To me they were; they were nothing and they had no names. Now I learn not only their names but that they were the Potters of all people, praised for their heroism and sacrifice in defeating Who-Know-Who! Now what? Am I expected to live up to their example, their daring nerve and fool-hearty recklessness? As a proud Slytherin, I have no experience with that. We don’t rush into things. We’re calculating and more measured; we think things through before acting. Which is why…”

Ana sighed and took a deep breath before sitting on the seat next to Hermione.

“Which is why I’m so out of my element here.” She leaned forward, resting her elbows on her knees and burying her face in her hands. The compartment went silent as Harry retook his seat.

“This was not how this was supposed to go,” Ana said softly.

“Do… do we even know it’s true?” Harry asked. Ana looked up at him. “I mean…I know what Lupin and Sirius said, but…”
“Sev said it too,” Ana said softly, looking away. “Dumbledore was there. Plus I… Since
the shrieking shack… I remember bits and pieces, and… I remember his face mostly, my father’s
face.” Ana looked up and met Harry’s eye again. “It looks a lot like yours, but the eyes…”

“I have my mother’s eyes,” he finished.

“Of course you’d look like them both,” Ana said with a scoff. Then she grinned slowly. “I
guess I just got their brains.”

Harry huffed playfully and leaned back in his chair.

“Right, and that’s why you went completely mental in the shack,” Ron mumbled.

“Ron!” Hermione chastised again. “What’s wrong with you?”

“Me? It’s her.”

“You have no idea what happened in the shack,” Ana said fiercely.

Harry, Ron, and Hermione all exchanged a look, while Ana focused on the floor.

“What…What did happen in the shack?” Harry asked.

“If you don’t mind telling us, that is,” Hermione added quickly. Ron said nothing and
sulked in the corner. It was a while before Ana answered.

“Do any of you know what legilimency and occlumency are?” she asked.

“Er—no,” Harry replied, looking to Ron for confirmation.

“I…I read about them,” Hermione replied. “Occlumency is the practice of shielding one’s
mind from outside invasion; whereas, legilimency is the practice of invading the mind of another.”

Harry and Ron shared a blank look. “And that means…what exactly?” Harry asked.

“Legilimency allows a person to see inside the mind of another,” Ana explained. “They
can see thoughts, memories… When used in a duel it allows a Legilimens to know which move
their opponent will use next.”

“So they can…read minds?” Ron asked.

“That is an over simplistic and very rudimentary explanation of it but…” Ana sighed.
“For the sake of time, yes, it allows them to read someone’s mind. Occlumency protects against
that.”

“What does this have to do with the shack?” Harry asked.

“I am a Level 4 Legilimens and a Level 3 Occlumens.”

“What!” Hermione exclaimed. “That’s not possible! You’re only…”

“Fifteen.”

“Dumbledore’s a Level 6.”

“And Sev is a seven; the highest you can go. He’s been teaching me both since…well, I
guess since he’s had me. I thought it was just because it was a rare skill he wanted to pass on; his way of leaving a legacy. But his intentions were far more…sinister, as it turns out.”

Ana looked across the way at Harry. “He hated our father, you know. He truly hated him, with a passion to rival you and Draco. So much so, that he couldn’t bear the thought of raising his daughter and having said daughter know who her father really was.

“So he did everything in his power to keep me from knowing the truth. He used legilimency to enter my mind and occlumency to gather every thought, every memory I had of my family and hide them from me. He buried them deep in my mind and built a barricade around them so I couldn’t access them.

“But my mind is strong and it fought back. I woke up one morning convinced I had a brother; Sev denied it and began my occlumency lessons. He used the opportunity to strengthen his wards. The Shack was me breaking through those wards.”

“Isn’t that dangerous?” Hermione asked.

Ana nodded. “Extremely so. Messing with someone’s mind like that could cause irreparable damage. And breaking through like I did could have been… Well, let’s just say that the only reason I’m probably not sitting in the Loony Ward at St. Mungo’s right now, is because I’m an Occlumens myself.

“You know, I… I always thought the reason I couldn’t remember my family was simply because I was too young to have formed any memories. Instead, he… he took them. Sev took my family from me all because of some stupid childhood rivalry.”

“Ana, that’s awful,” Hermione said. “I’m so…”

“Please don’t say you’re sorry, Granger. I don’t need pity; I just need time. We need time,” Ana said looking at Harry. “We need time to figure out what all this means, what it changes…because something has changed. And I think until we get it sorted then we should keep this between us. No one else can know about us.”


“Who am I going to tell? My parents are Muggles; they would neither know nor care about the difference.”

“And you?” Ana asked Ron. “You can’t tell anyone either; not even your brothers.”

“Worried about a little retaliation, are you?”

“Ron won’t tell anyone either,” Harry said. “Because I’m asking him not to.” He looked pointedly at Ron, who slumped under his gaze but finally nodded.

“I won’t tell.”

“Thank you,” Ana said earnestly. Then she stood. “Well, I’ve been gone long enough, if I don’t hurry back, Sadie or Hes might come looking for me.”

She moved towards the compartment door but turned back around before removing the charms.

“Are you allowed to receive owls where you stay?” she asked Harry.
“Er—not really, but the Dursleys have learned there’s not much they can do about it. Hedwig usually brings any letters to me at night.” Harry pointed to the snowy owl.

“Hedwig…” The owl opened a single eye and focused it on Ana. “I’ll be staying with Sadie Baldock in Dover all summer. Should you find me, I might have something for you to deliver.”

Harry looked confused.

“We have to begin somewhere, Potter, and a letter’s a good place to start.” With that, she left.

“I thought she’d never leave,” Ron grumbled. “Rotten luck that is. I thought I was unlucky, having Fred and George for brothers. Imagine having the Wicked Witch as a sister.”

“I don’t have to imagine it,” Harry said. “And don’t call her that.”

“Why not?”

“Because… I don’t think she likes it.”

“That’s the point, Harry.”

“What did she ever do to you, Ron?” Hermione asked.

“She’s a Slytherin, ‘Mione. She didn’t have to do anything; that’s enough.”

“Oh honestly, Ron…” Hermione rolled her eyes in exasperation and turned her focus out the window, where a tiny owl was bobbing in the wind stream.
“Are you sure about this, Ana? It can’t be undone,” Sadie warned.

“Just do it, Sae. I’m tired of him controlling every aspect of my life,” Ana replied. Then she braced herself for what was next.

Ana spent the lazy days of summer with Sadie and her doting father, who allowed them to do just about whatever they wanted. They lounged on the sunny beaches by day and enjoyed the taste of the enchanted nightlife by night. Ana honed her flirting skills on the unsuspecting tourist who didn’t stand a chance against her charms.

In late July, a snowy owl arrived and Ana sent it off with a letter and a Quidditch playbook.

Life was good.

21 August 1994

“Are you sure this is the right way, Georgie?”

“I think I know how to get back to the campsite, Freddie.”

“Really? Because I’m pretty sure we were supposed to take a left at the fork back there.”

“Nah, we…” George stopped suddenly and looked around. “We…Bugger! I hate it when you’re right.”

Fred smirked. “Beauty and Brains, some of us have it all.”

“Speaking of beauty, look at that bird.”

Fred looked in the direction his brother indicated and saw what was possibly the most beautiful girl he’d ever seen. She was facing away from them, so Fred had a good view of just how well her jeans hugged the length of her long legs. Her dark hair stopped above her shoulders giving him full access to gaze at her pleasantly round backside. And her gray jumper hung loosely on her shoulder, exposing just the slightest bit of sun-kissed skin.

Fred’s mouth ran dry.

“What do you think? Durmstrang?”

“No. No, with a body like that she must be Beauxbatons. One thing’s for certain, though—”

“—they don’t make ‘em like that at Hogwarts.”
Fred gave a devilish sort of grin. “But why should that stop us?”

“No harm with a little international fraternization.”

“Exactly, Georgie. Now, stand back and let a master show you how it’s done.”

“Master?”

“Beauty and brains, remember?”

Fred put on his best swagger as he made his approach. He combed out his hair with his fingers, and double even triple checked his breath. Perhaps he shouldn’t have had that third flaming dragon pie, but there wasn’t anything he could do about it now. The girl had moved away from him a little, so he had to weave in and out of the crowd. Fred had always been more of a leg guy than bum a guy, but he wasn’t altogether unappreciative of the view as he followed her. He was narrowing down his choice of chat-up line when he heard something that made his heart stop.

A laugh.

It was a simple laugh, a pleasant laugh. There was nothing ostentatious about it, and he could tell it was genuine, albeit polite. But it was a laugh he knew well. It was a laugh he was trying to forget. And it was a laugh that had come from the girl in front of him.

The girl began to turn her head slightly. In his current position, she would have spotted him easily, so Fred dropped out of sight behind a nearby tent.

Why did it have to be her of all people? Fred spent most of the last school year wondering what he did to upset her so much because he honestly had no idea. Then the letter had shown up at the start of summer. It was addressed to him, incomplete, and unsigned, but he knew who it was from; he recognized her handwriting. He wrote her several letters this summer, but she hadn’t replied to a single one.

So, he gave up on it. He figured he must have missed his opportunity with her and he tried to move on; he tried to forget about her. There was this Muggle girl in the village who was rather fond of his magic tricks, but she was a poor substitute. Still, Fred thought he had accomplished his goal…until now. Until he saw her again. Until he heard her laugh again.

At that moment, Fred wanted nothing more than to drown in her eyes, to taste her sweet lips—surely they had to be divine, with a smile like hers—and to hear his name escape in her laugh.

Life was good…until she came back into it and reminded him of what he didn’t have.

XXX

Ana couldn’t believe she was finally here! The Quidditch World Cup! Sure, she would have preferred to be in better company, but the girls had no interest in the sport. Still, she was there and she intended to enjoy every moment of it.

That’s why she went for a walk around the various campsites; she loved the atmosphere that felt as excited as she did. She stopped at a little stand that sold memorabilia. When the older wizard said something a little inappropriate, Ana laughed softly before turning to leave. She thought she saw a flash of something red in her periphery, but when she went to inspect it, someone called her name. She turned to find Oliver Wood heading her way.
“Oh! Umm… hi, Wood,” she said unsurely.

“Can you believe this? This is amazing! In’it?”

“Yeah, it’s great.”

“I can’t believe you actually got Professor Snape to come to something like this.”

“Are you mad? He wouldn’t be caught dead here.”

“You’re not… You’re not here alone, are you?”

“Is that concern I hear for me or for others?” Ana grinned.

“Bit of both actually,” he admitted. “But really, you shouldn’t be out here alone. It could get dangerous.”

“I’m not. I came with the Malfoys, but the air was getting a bit stuffy in the tent.”

“I can’t imagine why.”

“It’s the mystery of the century.”

Wood laughed. “Well, here, I’ll walk with you, if you don’t mind?”

“Are you sure you don’t mind being seen with a Slytherin?”

“All that house rivalry stuff shouldn’t mean anything outside of school; it really shouldn’t mean that much inside school. Besides, you proved yourself to be more than just a snake last year. You’re all right by me, Evans.”

“Thanks, Wood. You don’t know how much that means to me.”

“You’re welcome, and its Oliver.”

“Ana, then,” she replied, holding out her hand as though meeting for the first time. She was surprised by how soft his hand felt.

Ana couldn’t sleep; she was too wired from the excitement of the night. The match was spectacular. The Irish won, just as Ana predicted. The Trio of Troy, Mullet, and Moran, or TMM as the fans called them, were unstoppable. Aiden Lynch took not just one but two face plants, but Krum of Bulgaria caught the snitch in the end.

The match was brilliant; sitting in the top box was not. Sharing the box with the Malfoys was bad enough, and unfortunately, they were not the only ones there. Harry, Hermione, Ron, and all of Ron’s brothers were there too. So, Ana spent much of the match staring at the back of Fred’s head while he pointedly ignored her and she pretended it didn’t bother her.

Ana thought she was fine. She spent the better part of summer flirting with other boys and putting Fred and the Wicked Witch behind her. Life was good… until she saw him sitting in the top box with his family. Until she was forced to stare at the back of his head all night—he’d let his hair grow out and Ana wanted nothing more than to feel it between her fingers.

Ana tossed and turned all night. Even so, it was a while before she realized that the chaos
in her head had begun to manifest outside their tent. A few fans were still celebrating loudly. Their shouts grew more vibrant and Ana began to think the shouts sounded more like screams.

About the time she realized this, a house-elf came rushing through the curtained patrician.

“Up! Up! Young Miss must wakes up!”

“What’s going on?” Ana asked groggily.

“There is bad wizards out. Young Miss and Little Master must gets somewhere safe.”

Ana quickly stepped into her shoes and slipped into her robe. She reached behind her to pull her hair into a braid. It wasn’t until it slipped through her fingers that she recalled it was now too short to braid.

In the main tent hub, Ana found Draco being groomed by his mother; his father was nowhere in sight. When he saw Ana, he pushed away from his mother and scowled. Merlin forbid anyone found out how much of a Mama’s boy he really was.

“Good of you to join us. Took you long enough,” Draco sneered.

“I’m sorry, Milord,” Ana said with a thick low-class accent. “Does the little Prince need more time to be preened by his Mummy?” she added mockingly.

Ana knew he wanted to retort, but his mother returned with his cloak and it was hard to feign innocence when caught in the act.

“Follow the others to the forest; you should remain safe there. And stick together. I won’t make excuses to Severus should the worst happen,” Narcissa said. With a final bit of grooming Draco tried to refuse, she pushed them out of the tent.

Being a Malfoy meant getting the best of everything. That meant prime seats at the match and a prime campsite that didn’t sit far from the forest. Draco found a tree a few rows over from their camp and leaned against it. He watched as others rushed by in a panic.

“What are you doing? We shouldn’t stop here,” Ana said.

“Mother said to go to the forest, not in it.”

“A single tree does not make a forest.”

Draco’s lips curled. “Father didn’t have to bring you; I wish he hadn’t.”

“That’s not what I heard.”

“What do you know?”

“Lots of things you don’t. I overheard your parents talking this morning.”

“You were snooping!”

“I wasn’t snooping; I was eavesdropping, but really, with as loud as they were… discussing it, I can’t be blamed for overhearing it. I’m surprised the whole field didn’t hear it.”

“You didn’t hear anything.”
“Are you so sure of that?”

Draco stared at Ana as though he could force her to talk...or vaporize her on the spot one. Ana just grinned. Truthfully, she hadn’t heard anything, but she wasn’t about to admit that to him.

Ana was brought back to reality when the thing causing all the noise turned at the top of the row and started heading towards them. It was a grizzly sight that turned her stomach. A growing mob was flattening tents and starting fires, the center of which played home to a circle of masked men. Hoisted above them was the Muggle family Ana recalled meeting when they arrived; they were being paraded around in their night clothes, mocked, and humiliated. The mother was flipped upside down showcasing her white knickers.

“That’s disgusting,” Ana said.

“It’s hilarious. It serves them right.”

“For what? What did they do?”

“Nothing I suppose, but they’re Muggles.”

“You’re despicable. Come on; we should keep moving.”

“Hang on. I want to see this,” Draco insisted.

“You want to see an old Muggle woman’s dirty knickers?”

“You’re sick.”

“I’m not the one who wants to watch,” Ana retorted smugly.

“Careful, Evans. You wouldn’t want people to get the wrong impression of you.”

“And what’s that exactly?”

“That you’re nothing more than a filthy blood-traitor. We don’t let that sort play Quidditch.”

Ana gave a hard glare back. She refused to let Draco know how much that comment bothered her. School letters and Prefect badges had already gone out. Ana expected to receive the Captain’s badge since Flint left last year, but she didn’t get it. She wondered why.

When Ana didn’t reply, Draco grinned victoriously and turned back to watch the mob.

“Oh look! It’s Potter and the Mudblood.”

“Ron’s with them too,” Ana said.

“Yeah, but he’s a Weasley; they don’t count for anything.”

Ana bit back her response. The image of Fred’s fiery-red hair curled around her fingers was still present in her mind. She didn’t want to give anything away. Ana was so distracted by the image, she didn’t see Ron’s face plant.

“What happened?” Hermione asked as Ron picked himself up.

“I tripped over a tree root.”
“With fee like that, it’d be hard not to,” Draco teased.

All three of them quickly turned around. Harry’s eyes’ narrowed as he looked at Draco; they only registered mild surprise when he saw Ana. Hermione and Ron also did well not to react to seeing Ana.

“What are you doing here?” Ron asked. Ana wasn’t sure if his sneer was meant for Draco or for her.

“Draco enjoys women’s old knickers,” Ana replied.

Draco’s face turned red as he shoved off the tree and stared daggers at her.

“I do not!”

Ana grinned as Harry snickered.

“That’s not what I heard.”

Draco was fuming as he struggled to put his anger into words. “My father will hear about this!” Then he stormed off, leaving Ana with Harry and his friends.

“It’s good to know I can still shut him up,” Ana said.

“Still?” Harry asked.

“I used to do it easily when we were younger. He was little thing, not at all tall like his parents and it bothered him. He felt like he was falling short of the family name.” Ana grinned. Then she looked around them to see who might be nearby. They weren’t in the main thoroughfare, so they were oddly secluded from everyone trying to escape.

“So, how are you?”

“Fine,” Harry replied. “You?”

“I’m…fine,” she said lamely. “Did you get the playbook I sent you?”

“Yeah. Thanks.”

Ana nodded as an awkward silence fell between them.

“I… I’m looking forward to trying some of them out against Slytherin this year.”

Ana’s grin returned. “Yes, well, that’s a playbook; it’s not the playbook. I picked a few things up form watching Troy and Moran this evening. I can’t wait to share them with Adrian. With Marcus gone, it will be a whole new game this year, Potter.”

“I’m sure it will be. But you’re not getting the cup back…Evans.” Harry grinned and Ana breathed a sigh of relief. Perhaps having a younger brother wouldn’t be so bad if they just talked about Quidditch.

“Well, I…”

Just then there was a rustling in the bush nearby. A house-elf emerged with seemingly great difficulty. She was hunched over and panting for breath while she attempted to run. Ana recognized her as the same house-elf that sat in the top box, but she didn’t see who she was sitting
“There is bad wizards about!” the house-elf squeaked. “People high—high in the air! Winky is getting out of the way!”

“What’s up with her?” Ron asked. “Why can’t…?”

Ana didn’t catch anything else Ron or the others said. A buzzing ring sounded in her head, muting all outside noise. And suddenly Ana was somewhere else entirely. It was a forest still, but a very different forest than the one she was in. It was lighter out, earlier in the evening. Ana thought the forest seemed familiar, but before she could place it she was blinded by a bright green light.

“Ana…? Are you all right?”

Ana stumbled back slightly, as she stared at the spot where Winky the house-elf had disappeared into the thicket.

“Ana?” Harry called to her again.

Ana shook her head and looked at Harry.

“What just happened?”

“Nothing. I’m fine.”

“Are you…”

“I said I’m fine, Potter!”

“Right. Sorry I asked then.”

Ana sighed. “Look I…I should go find Draco. He’s my way home, and we were supposed to stick together. I’ll see you at school.”

Harry nodded. Ana waved to the others and turned to leave.

“Hey, Harry!” she called. “Be careful alright?”

“You too,” he called back. And then he left with his friends.
It was pandemonium on the platform; Ana loved it! Friends were reuniting, some for the first time since the start of summer. First years and Muggle-borns were stumbling around in a daze. And Ana had the perfect spot on the platform to watch for Fred.

Since the World Cup, Ana found herself thinking about Fred a lot. Not that she wasn’t thinking about him before, he was always on her mind, she was just better at holding him back. But since coming face-to-back-of-head, Ana just couldn’t push him aside anymore. She was determined to speak to him this year, even if all she said was ‘sorry.’

She told Sadie, however, that they were standing there to watch for the Carrows. Hestia walked through the barrier, spotted them immediately, and walked over. Flora walked through behind her, spotted them, and then walked off to search for Bole.

“Hey, Hes!” Ana greeted with a hug. “What’s up with Flora?”

“She’s been foul all summer. Mum caught her and Lucian practically shagging, so she cut her off. Wouldn’t let her see him all summer! It was brilliant; best summer ever,” Hestia replied gleefully.

“She and Bole were… eww!” Ana scrunched up her nose.

“Well, he is rather fit,” Sadie replied.

“Eh, he’s not really my type.” Hestia shrugged, then she winked at Ana while Sadie was distracted. “I love your hair, Ana. When did you cut it?”

“A few weeks ago; Sadie…”

“Dumbledore made you Prefect?” Sadie cut across Ana.

“Uh—yeah, but I’m not sure why,” Hestia said. “Here, do you want it?” She took the badge off and tried to hand it over.

“No! I mean, yes of course I do! Who wouldn’t?”

“I wouldn’t.”

“Me neither.”

“But you can’t just hand it off to someone like that,” Sadie continued, ignoring Ana and Hestia.

“Why not? You clearly want it more than I do.”
“Because…Dumbledore saw fit to give it to you over me. I…trust his decision.”

There was silence between the three of them before Hestia said, “That was really hard for you wasn’t it?”

“Ugh! Incredibly so!”

“Are you sure you don’t want to just take it then?”

Sadie gave her a look that said she’d love nothing more, but she couldn’t do it.

“No; I’ll just prove to him that he was wrong to do so.”

“Bugger! I was really hoping you’d take it.”

“Stop trying to tempt me.”

“Hey, look at it this way, Hes,” Ana began. “You got it and Flora didn’t.”

“I know!” Hestia exclaimed. “She wouldn’t talk to me for a week because of it!”

“Well then, should we board the train now?” Sadie asked. “The platform’s starting to clear out.”

“Oh! Um…” In the excitement of seeing Hestia, Ana forgot to keep a lookout for Fred. She quickly scanned the platform but didn’t see him anywhere. Had he already boarded the train?

“There he is,” Hestia said.

“What?” Ana spun around quickly but still didn’t see Fred.

“Adrian. That’s who you were looking for, wasn’t it? He’s right over there. Oh! And he’s coming this way.”

Hestia was right; Adrian was heading towards them.

“Ana! Hey, Ana!”

“We’ll leave you two alone, yeah?” Hestia whispered. “Just don’t be like Flora,” she finished with a laugh before quickly jumping out of the way so Ana couldn’t smack her. Adrian nodded and waved to them as he passed by.

“Hey, Adrian. Have a nice summer?” Ana asked.

“The best, thanks to you.”

“Me? What did I…?”

He held a piece of paper in front of her face. It took a moment for her eyes to adjust to what she was seeing, but when she did she saw that it was his OWL results. She quickly took the paper from his grasp and looked it over.

“An O! Mother of Merlin! You made an O in Potions!”

“We made an O, Ana. There’s no way I would have done this without you!”

“I told you you’d make an O with me!”
“My parents were thrilled!”

“That’s unbelievable! I’m so happy for you!”

In a moment of overwhelming joy, Ana threw her arms around Adrian’s neck. Though caught off guard, he quickly hugged her back. It was at that moment that a head of red hair passed through the barrier. And since she was still in a prime viewing spot, Ana had a clear view of when Fred saw her hugging Adrian. The smile that had been on his face faded and Ana almost thought it became a scowl. But was that because he saw her with Adrian, or simply because he saw her?

When he pulled back, Adrian was unaware of her distress. “So what are your plans for this year?”

“What do you mean?” Ana asked.

“Your plans for the team. I imagine you’re making big changes, oh Captain my Captain.”

“Me? I mean, yeah, I would, but I didn’t get the captain’s badge.”

“You didn’t?”

“No. Didn’t you get it?”

“No. I assumed Snape would have given it to you,” Adrian said as they boarded the train.

“Yeah, well, we’re not really on speaking terms right now.”

“Oh?”

“Long story. Wait! If neither of us has the badge, then who…? I swear, if he gave it to Bole, I’m going to…”

“Quit? Because that doesn’t really sound like you.”

“Good point. I’ll just poison him and take over.”

“Snape or Bole?”

Anna just grinned and Adrian laughed. As they passed by an open compartment, Ana saw Harry and his friends sitting inside. She called out to him, and he looked up in surprise.

“Who’s the captain for Gryffindor this year?” she asked.

Harry shrugged. “Dunno, but George said Angelina’s likely it.”

“Johnson, eh? I don’t know much about her other than she’s a decent chaser.”

“We share a few classes,” Adrian said. “She’s pretty decent there too. Quiet though.”

“It’s the quiet ones you have to look out for. You never know what they’re thinking.”

Ana and Adrian moved on down the train until they found Hestia and Sadie; Flora wasn’t with them yet.

“I’ll leave you here,” Adrian said. “Come on, Hestia, we have a Prefect’s meeting to get to.”
Hestia frowned and looked to Sadie. “This is your last chance.”

“Oh! Go on before I change my mind.”

“Alright then; I’ll try to escape as soon as I can.”

Ana moved in as Hestia moved out. “Cheer up, Sae. This means you get to spend more time with me.”

Sadie rolled her eyes. “Like I didn’t get enough of you this summer.”

“Well, go find Flora then.”

Sadie grimaced. “As fit as Bole might be, I’d rather not see Flora like that.”

Ana laughed and stretched out in the seat. It was a long ride to Hogwarts, and she wanted to be comfortable.

The Great Hall was buzzing loudly. Silverware was clanging everywhere as friends talked freely. Flora finally joined the girls, but only because Bole brought his friends along and sat next to her. While Flora seemed to cover hers up, Bole let his love bites show. Ana was relieved to see, or rather not see Bole sporting the captain’s badge. But her confusion only grew when she didn’t see Graham with it either.

“What did you do to Weasley?” Adrian asked.

“What are you talking about? I haven’t done anything to anyone…yet.”

Adrian chuckled a little. “Well, Weasley hasn’t stopped staring over here all night, and he looks quite upset.”

Ana glanced over at the Gryffindor table and found Fred just as Adrian described him. She held his gaze for a moment before his scowl deepened and he looked away.

“I have no idea,” she said, trying not to let the deep hurt she felt show through. “I guess he’s still bothered by last year.”

“Last year? Oh! You mean when you… Yeah, that was brutal, but it’s about time he got over that. You can’t hold a grudge forever.”

Ana thought of Sev and her father as her eyes lingered on Fred. Would his kids grow up to hate hers simply because of a few stupid words she said when she was angry?

The hall fell silent as Dumbledore stepped up to the podium. “Now that our stomachs have been tended to, it’s time for a few start of term notices. First, our Caretaker Mr. Filch would like me to inform you that the list of objects forbidden inside the castle has this year been extended to include screaming yo-yos, fanged Frisbees, and ever-bashing boomerangs. The full list comprises some four hundred and thirty-seven items, I believe, and can be viewed in Mr. Filch’s office, if anybody would like to check it.”

“Like anyone abides by that list,” Ana whispered.

“I don’t think anyone’s ever actually read it, other than Filch of course,” Adrian whispered back.
“Nor would they want to.”

“…of Hogsmeade, to all those below third year,” Dumbledore continued. “And lastly, it is my painful duty to inform you that the Inter-House Quidditch Cup will not take place this year…”

There was an outcry of protest from those who played, but none so loud as Ana.

“What?! You can’t cancel Quidditch!” she exclaimed, jumping to her feet.

“Ah, yes. I thought I might hear from you, Miss Evans,” Dumbledore looked at Ana over his glasses. “As it is, however, as Headmaster, I can cancel Quidditch. But I assure you, it is with good reason. If you’ll permit me to continue…”

“I might allow it.” Ana stared back at Dumbledore, arms folded over her chest.

“For the sake of Salazar, sit down, Ana!” Sadie said.

“Invoking the Great Salazar, Sae? Oh, wow! This must be serious then,” Ana teased as she took her seat; Sadie’s cheeks turned red.

“As I was saying…”

Before Dumbledore could say any more, there was a monstrous clap of thunder as lightning streaked across the ceiling, and the doors to the Great Hall flew open with a bang. A few girls screamed. Whether they screamed because of the jolting noise, or because of the man standing on the other side of the door, it was unclear.

There stood the terrifying and grizzly remains of what was once a great man. His hair was matted and grey. His face was badly scared with half his nose missing and a glass eye that swiveled freely in its socket. As he approached the High table, the click-clack of his wooden leg echoed throughout the silent hall and his dark traveling cloak left a trail of water behind him. The staff appeared unalarmed at his presence. He shook hands with Dumbledore and whispered in his ear before taking up one of the vacant seats.

“May I introduce our new Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher,” Dumbledore said. “Professor Moody.”

The only clapping that followed was from Hagrid and Dumbledore. Moody seemed unfazed by his lack of applause and merely took a long sip from a flask on his hip.

“Now, where was I…?” Dumbledore scratched his chin in thought. “Ah, yes. This year Hogwarts has the great honor of hosting the Triwizard Tournament…”

Ana didn’t catch any more of what Dumbledore had to say about the tournament. She was too distracted by the sudden sense of unease that settled in the pit of her stomach.

Ana woke up early the next morning in order to set up her private potions room. Over the summer she had managed to successfully brew Wolfsbane twice. She was nervous as anything the first time she tried it, double and triple checking every step. Several times she wrote to Sev asking for clarification on a step, only to tear up the letter before actually sending it. She could hardly breathe after sending the completed potion to Professor Lupin. And when she finally heard back from him, thanking her and telling her that it worked perfectly, she cried openly in front of Sadie
and her dad; they had no idea why.

She’d written to Dumbledore soon after and told him of her intention to keep brewing it, and she asked for a room in which she could set up. He consented, delightfully, and gave her a room in the dungeons. She would have just asked Sev, but she feared his rejection… and she hadn’t spoken to him since June.

Of course, Ana knew that their silence wouldn’t last forever. She felt his presence before she heard or saw him. His arrival sucked what little warmth there was from the room like a Dementor, and sent chills up her spine. Ana threw up her mental barriers, certain he was going to attempt to get in.

“I didn’t come here to test your occlumency,” he said lowly.

“Then how did you know I put up my barrier?”

“A great Occlumens always has a barrier in place. They do not wait for a warning.”

Ana grit her teeth and looked up at Sev with cold fury. A year ago she would have defended him and said he was only trying to teach her a valuable lesson; his brusqueness was just a part of his personality. Now… she wasn’t so sure, and that’s what truly angered her.

“You cut your hair.”

“How observant of you,” Ana said between her teeth.

“I don’t like it.”

“Funny thing, it’s not your hair; it’s mine.”

“You will watch your tone,” he said coolly.

The silence that followed was cold and bitter. Sev walked around the room examining each ingredient but being careful not to contaminate them.

“You went behind my back to learn Wolfsbane.”

“No. I came to you first. When you turned me down, I made it happen on my own merits.”

“And came out a better potioneer for it, I imagine.”

“Don’t try to spin this to make it seem like you were trying to do me a favor. You turned me down out of pure loathing; I saw the hatred on your face.”

“That hatred was not directed at you.”

“Well, it sure felt like it.”

“And that was my mistake.”

There was more silence, only this time it was different. Ana couldn’t ever recall a time where Sev had admitted to a mistake; it was unprecedented. She took a moment to really look at him and take in his appearance.

He looked just the same, as though their summer of silence had absolutely no effect on
him.

“Come to my office.”

“I can’t. I have class.”

“You have History of Magic; Professor Binns will not notice your absence.” He moved towards the door, fully expecting her to follow but she didn’t. “I am still your guardian, Belladonna. You will respect me as such.”

“Respect is a two-way street. You didn’t respect me when you tampered with my memories.”

“And now you will find out why, if you follow me.”

Sev left without another word; Ana hesitated before following him. She wondered if it would be worth sitting through Professor Binns’ class just to spite Sev. Then again, he said he’d tell her why he blocked her memories. She had assumed it was because he hated her dad, but he never actually said as much.

In the end, Ana took the turn into his office.

“What’s this?” she asked. Sitting on his desk was a large ornamental bowl.

“It’s a Pensieve.”

Ana looked at him curiously. “Since when do you own a Pensieve?”

“Dumbledore is allowing me to borrow it for the sake of our…talk. I have clearly lost your trust as you will not allow me to show you via legilimency, and as this is a topic I do not wish to discuss…”

“You’re going to show me your memories via the Pensieve,” Ana finished. Sev nodded, leaving her speechless. He had never offered to be so open before. Perhaps their summer of silence affected him more than she thought. Obviously, she couldn’t refuse now.

Ana had never used a Pensieve before, but she was familiar with how it worked. After verifying with Sev that it was ready, she took a deep breath and dove in head first. She emerged sometime later, unsure of how long she’d been under. She was certain Sev would have left to attend class, but the sound of movement behind her and the smell of hemlock told her he was still there.

“You were friends with her.” It wasn’t really a question, but Sev answered all the same.

“Since before we began school.”

“And you stayed friends, even after your sorting.” Again, it wasn’t a question.

“Yes.”

Ana turned around to face him. “Until…” Ana knew she didn’t need to say more to remind him of his incident. “She never forgave you, but you never stopped caring for her. So then… Why did you become a Death Eater? She was a Muggle-born.”

He waved his wand and vanished the Pensieve to, presumably, wherever Dumbledore kept it hidden. Then he took a seat behind his desk. Ana followed suit and took the vacant one in front.
“The simplest answer would be to say because all my friends did.”

“Not all of them did, though; she didn’t.”

“And she wasn’t speaking to me. If the Carrows and Miss Baldock enlisted for the cause today, would you follow them?”

“You-Know-Who is dead; so is his cause.”

“You are not that naïve. You were at the World Cup. You are aware of what happened afterward.” He wasn’t simply speaking of the attack on the Muggle family, but of the appearance of the Dark Mark as well, something Ana didn’t like to think about. “You know how many of your housemates think.”

Ana sighed and tried again. “If Sadie and Hes signed up to kill Muggle-borns and ‘cleanse society,’ then… No, I wouldn’t follow them. It’d be hard, sure, but the very notion of blood purity sickens me, and it’s completely ridiculous.”

“Then you are braver and stronger than I ever was.”

Yet again Ana was stunned by this side of him. It was a moment before she was able to continue. “So you joined them to fit in, to belong to something bigger than yourself… to forget about her. But…it didn’t work. And when her life was threatened, you tried to help her.”

“Yes.”

“And you did that by taking me in.”

“Yes.”

“But, then why didn’t you give me up after…? Why didn’t you send me off with Harry? Why keep us separated?”

“Because I couldn’t simply give you back, Belladonna. Before he handed you over, your arrogant father made me enter into an unbreakable vow with him to keep you safe.”

“Wouldn’t the vow have broken, though, when he died?”

“Not if he, in his conceit, insisted that it be made upon my life so that only upon my death may I be released of it, which he did.”

“That was the dream I had.”

“What?”

“The dream, a few years ago, with the swirling lights and you…after my Quidditch accident. It wasn’t a dream at all. It was a memory.”

“Yes.”

‘Daddy will come for his Little Flower soon.’ Her father’s last words rang again in her head.

“I still don’t understand why. Why did you take them from me? Why did you hide my memories?” Ana asked, swiping at her tears.
“Isn’t it clear?”

“No,” she said.

“You…you were very young and very frightened. You kept crying for your mother and father. You kept asking about Harry. You wanted to go home, but you couldn’t. I told you they were dead, that they were never coming back and you cried for hours. You wouldn’t stop; I didn’t know what else to do. I figured, if you couldn’t remember them, then you couldn’t cry for them. And it worked. You didn’t have to live with the crippling pain I felt for the loss of your mother. I did it to keep you safe, Belladonna.”

“Would….would you ever have told me? If I didn’t break through the barriers on my own, would you have told me the truth?”

“I don’t believe so, no.” Before Ana could get too angry, Sev continued. “Why have you not told anyone now? Why do you hide your family from your housemates?”

“Because…” Ana sighed, and just like that she understood. “Because it’s simpler. It’s complicated enough finding out I have a brother. I don’t need to add the complication of the whole wizarding world knowing it too.”

Sev nodded. “Do you have any further questions?”

“Hundreds I’m sure, but…I can’t think clearly right now to know what they are.”

“Then I suggest you head to your next class then. It’s your OWL year; I expect top marks in everything.”

Ana nodded numbly and made her way to the door. She paused momentarily and looked back.

“Sev?”

He looked up at her.

Thank you.
Ugh! I know! I'm late, and I'm so very, very sorry about that. I wish I could say it won't happen again, but...it probably will. This is a very busy time in retail, and I work in retail, fun fun fun... So I'm finding I don't have as much down time or mental time to write as quickly as before. And this week, for all those in America, is Thanksgiving and I will be having family arriving on Wednesday and staying until Saturday. So I likely won't be posting anything else for like a week. I'm sorry.

On the bright side (yes there is a bright side to all this,) this chapter includes a bit of Ana and Harry, a tiny bit of Ana and Sev, then there's Ana having fun with the girls and flirting with boys, and lastly, but certainly not the least, there's some Ana and Fred. I do hope you enjoy!

And in the spirit of Thanksgiving, I am so very, very thankful to all of you who read and/or leave comments. You guys make my day and rock my world!

Belladonna 33

The Triwizard Tournament

18 September 1994

The Triwizard Tournament is a showcase of skill and excellence between the three European schools. A champion from each school is selected to compete. One from Hogwarts, one from Beauxbatons Academy, and one from Durmstrang Institute. Delegates from the other two schools were set to arrive late October, just in time for the official start of the tournament.

But Ana had no time to think about that. It was the start of her OWL year, as Sev thoughtfully pointed out, and she was already swarmed with homework and assignments. For about one whole hour, she was actually glad she didn’t have to worry about keeping up with Quidditch practice. Then she wished she was a beater so she could beat the daylights out of the next person who said how important their OWLs were in determining their future.

Between classwork, homework, potion work—there was no social work—it was mid-September before Ana found time for a little breather. However, it was in the owlery.

“Oh!” Ana wasn’t the only one seeking a bit of refuge. “Hi.”

“Hey,” Harry replied. He looked as surprised to see her as she was to see him. “Are—are you sending a letter?”

“No,” she replied dryly. “I come here for the fresh air.”

Harry dropped his head to his chest and his owl ruffled her feathers in protest.

“Sorry, that was...”
“It was a stupid question. I deserved that,” Harry said with a grin.

“Yes, well, you’re a Gryffindor. No one ever accused your lot of being clever.”

“Don’t tell Hermione that; she’ll do whatever it takes to prove you wrong.”

“Whatever it takes, huh? How very… Slytherin of her.”

Harry gave her a sideways look and Ana laughed.

“Truthfully, though, I didn’t come here to deliver a letter.

“Don’t tell me you really did come here for the freshness.”

“No, it’s a potion not a letter, but I need a good strong owl. These all look….weak.” Ana scrunched up her nose. Hedwig hooted and shuffled her feet.

“You know, you kind of look like Snape when you wrinkle your nose like that.”

“I do?”

Hedwig hooted again and Harry nodded his head. “I should know; he looks at me like that every time he sees me.”

“No he doesn’t,” Ana said. “He looks like that every time he hears your name. I hate to break it to you, Harry, but he doesn’t really like you.”

“He likes you well enough.”

“If you haven’t learned already, you will soon enough: everyone likes me.”

Hedwig scratched her talons on the stone so Harry ran his hand over her back.

“I see you’re talking to him again, Snape I mean.” Harry said after a brief pause.

“It’s…complicated. I’m still furious that he didn’t tell me but…after seeing things from his perspective…I kind of understand why he did it. I mean, he thought he was helping; I couldn’t miss them if I didn’t remember them. What makes me maddest though, is that it actually worked; I never gave them, or you, much thought.”

Hedwig hooted and nipped at Harry’s fingers.

“Wow! She really doesn’t like to be ignored, does she?” Ana asked.

“Actually, I think she’s offering to deliver your potion for you.”

“Oh? Aren’t you sending something though?”

“Er—yeah, but…”

“Then I’ll just find another owl. Ow! Blasted bird bit me.”

“Because you offended her. Now, you’ll have to apologize and use her or incur her wrath forever.”

“I can’t tell if you’re joking or not. Oh, alright fine! I’m sorry, Hedwig. Will you please deliver this to Remus Lupin in Yorkshire? It must be taken to him directly; it’s time sensitive, and
dangerous so be careful not to spill any of it.”

She hooted indignantly and ruffled her feathers. Then she scratched her feet on the stone before taking the strap of Ana’s package in her beak.

“And once you’ve done that, find Sirius, wherever he is, and deliver this.” Harry tied his letter to her leg, patted her head affectionately, and watched her fly off.

“Thanks for letting me use her.”

Harry shrugged. “Yeah, sure. Any…you can use her anytime…if she’ll let you.”

Ana huffed a laugh. “So…” Where did they go from here? “You’re keeping in touch with Black?”

“As much as I can. He’s our godfather. Well, I mean, he’s mine at least. Is he yours too?”

Ana shrugged. “I don’t know. Lupin didn’t say and I didn’t really speak to Black much.”

“Except to threaten his life.”

“I thought he was a raving lunatic.”

“So you threatened to kill him?”

“No more than you did,” Ana said defensively, but Harry grinned.

“So, that potion you sent…was that Wolfsbane?”

“Yeah, and it is the most complicated thing I’ve ever brewed.”

“How…how does it work?”

“Taking a sudden interest in potions, are you?”

“Er—not really, just trying to talk.”

Ana smiled, a little surprised but pleased. “Well, simply put, it subdues the wolf and allows Professor Lupin to keep his human mind after transforming so he can sleep peacefully through the moon.”

“That doesn’t sound so complicated.”

“Yeah…except too much or too little of this ingredient or that one and…”

“And?”

“And it’d kill him.”

Harry’s eyes widened. “And…you’re ok with that? I mean you’re comfortable with brewing something like that?”

“Well… yeah. It’s what I want to do. I’m going to be the youngest potions master. What do you want to do after school?”

“I dunno. I haven’t thought about it really.”
“Well, it’s not too early to start, you know. Speaking of too early, I’m hungry. Are you?”

“Yes, actually.”

“Well, come on then. Let’s get out of here before we start to smell fresh too. Oh, and I think we need some way to communicate. We can’t expect to meet in the owlery every time.”

“Agreed.”

“Right, so any ideas then?”

“I thought you were supposed to be the clever one.”

“Well played, Potter. I’ll figure something out then; I’ll just add it to the millions of other things I need to do.” Ana paused and brushed some hair out of her face. As she did, she caught sight of Fred and George. They were just beginning to make their way up the path to the owlery.

“You…you didn’t really mean everything you said to him last year, did you?” Harry asked, sounding a little worried.

“What does it matter now?”

“It matters because Ron’s my best mate and his family is the only family I’ve known.”

Ana looked away from Fred and George and focused on Harry. She could tell he wasn’t being cruel; he was just being honest. Would it hurt to be honest with him too?

“No. I didn’t mean a single word of it. I was angry. But that doesn’t change the fact that I said it nor that he hates me now because of it.” Ana quickly swiped at her eyes as Fred and George made their final approach. Fred tossed his hair out of his eyes as George took a protective stance in front of him.

“Is she bothering you, Harry?”

Ana rolled her eyes. As much as she wanted to bite back a remark, she didn’t.

“No, she… She was just fantasizing about the cup,” Harry said easily. “I reminded her of where it’s currently sitting and where it will stay.”

Ana grinned, easily slipping into her smug Slytherin confidence. “A year off isn’t going to play out well for you at all, Potter. I have it on good authority that I would have been captain this year, which means I’m sure to be it next year. Just because the season is canceled doesn’t mean I can’t hold workouts and strategy sessions. It will be a whole new game when we meet again.

“Now,” she shook her head in a way that would have tossed her hair over her shoulder if there was still enough to toss. “If you boys will excuse me, I have someplace better to be.” Ana looked George firmly in the eye but he refused to move.

“Come on, Georgie; let her go,” Fred said as he pulled his brother back.

Ana took great care not to look at Fred as she passed. She knew if she did then she wouldn’t be able to look away and her indifferent mask would fail. And yet, the need to see him overcame her better senses. She turned around.

“Hey, Potter! Watch your back!”
Harry nodded briefly and Ana knew he caught her true meaning. Then her gaze landed on Fred at last; he was watching her even though George wasn’t. Just as she knew it would, her smile disappeared when Fred’s eyes met hers. She tried to convey her deepest apologies through a look alone. His brow furrowed momentarily before George pulled him into conversation with Harry.

12 October 1994

“What do you know about Professor Moody?” Ana asked, breaking the silence.

Ana was sitting on the cold floor of Sev’s office, pouring over several thick volumes of potions manuscripts. In addition to studying for her OWLs, Ana also had to begin preparing for her Masters. Becoming a Potions Master required more than just a solid knowledge of potions; there were several steps Ana had to complete and examinations she had to pass. Not to mention, she also had to either make an already existing potion fundamentally better or create her own. Ana knew that was going to be the toughest part and that’s why she was subjecting herself to the cold stone floor and dusty tomes.

“I know he is not to be trifled with,” Sev replied dully.

Since their reconciliation, Sev had tried to be more forthcoming, but he often forgot.

“Why?” he asked after a minute or two.

“No particular reason.”

“Belladonna…”

“I don’t like him,” she blurted out hastily.

“No one likes him,” Sev said after another pause.

Ana rolled her eyes. “It’s not an ‘I don’t like him’ in the same sense that I don’t like Bole because I think he’s a pretentious git and Flora could do so much better if she simply tried.” She took a deep breath. “It’s more like ‘I don’t like him’ in a sense that…every time I’m around him my skin begins to crawl, like every fiber of my being is telling me to run and not to trust him. I know he’s supposed to be this renowned Auror, and I know Dumbledore trusts him inexplicably so I should too, but… I just don’t, and I’m not sure why. I’m usually a good judge of character, you know, but this feeling is throwing me off.”

“Did he do anything in particular to incite this feeling?”

“No…not really.”

“Is it ‘no’ or ‘not really?’”

“Well… last week he put the whole class under the Imperius Curse.”

“The whole class?”

“Not all at once. He did it individually.”

Sev arched a brow.

“And he didn’t do it on me of course. I threw it off easily.”

“As you should have.”
“But he did it to my friends; it was unnerving. And I think it angered him that he couldn’t get me.”

Sev seemed to think for a moment. “It is good that you know what it feels like so you can be aware of it.”

“Good?”

“Yes. And if he casts it again, pay close attention to the eyes of the cursed. It is important to recognize that as well.”

“Again?” Ana was in disbelief. “But it’s an Unforgivable.”

“And he is your Defense Against the Dark Arts professor. How can you expect to defend against it, if you don’t know what it is?”

“But…” Ana couldn’t argue against that. “All right, fine. That may justify him casting it on us, but we don’t need to know how to cast it on our peers.”

“What do you mean?”

“Yesterday he said something about having us try next week.”

Again Sev paused for a moment. “I will speak to him on that matter alone. Now, hurry along or you’ll be late for class.”

Ana looked up at the clock. “Mother of Merlin! I’ve got to get all the way to the east tower!” She quickly began gathering her things and packing up.

“Hey, Sev, do you think I can borrow these?”

“Did you find something for your thesis?”

“Not exactly, but I think I found something with potential.”

“Then by all means.”

30 October 1994

Ana bounced her knee impatiently until Sev gave her a look.

“Sorry,” she, uttered under breath. “This is time I could be working.”

The whole school was lined up by house awaiting the arrival of Beauxbatons and Durmstrang.

“Have you found a thesis then?”

“No, and I’m not likely to standing out here in this weather.”

“Look!”

“Up there!”

A couple of kids shouted out and pointed to a growing black speck in the sky. As it neared, it became clear that it was a massive carriage pulled by a line of massive winged horses.
From it emerged and even more massive woman. This was Madam Maxime, Headmistress of Beauxbatons.

“Oh, look! It’s Pierre,” Sadie said, nudging Ana’s arm as the students began exiting the carriage. They all wore sleek satin robes of a silvery blue.

“Pierre? Isn’t he one of your French boys from two summers ago?”

Sadie nodded. “Oh! And there’s Louie…and Frances…”

Ana looked at Hestia and they started giggling.

“They never told me they went to the same school.”

“Well, did you ask?” Hestia said.

“We didn’t really talk much.”

“Why am I not surprised?” Ana teased.

“Oh, hush. You didn’t do much talking with Darek this summer.”

“I wager that Ana talked more with Darek than you talked to all three of them,” Flora said.

Ana and Hestia burst out laughing until Sev silenced them with a glare.

The Durmstrang students arrived via a boat rising up in the middle of the lake. They disembarked wearing thick fur coats. Their Headmaster was tall and lean with long greying hair. After shaking hands with Dumbledore, everyone began filing in the castle. The Durmstrang Headmaster and Sev met in the Entrance Hall.

“Severus,” said the Headmaster.

“Igor,” Sev replied in an icy tone. Though the two men knew each other, it was clear that they didn’t particularly like one another. Neither one of them anticipated what came next though.

“Ana?”

Ana looked around her. She wasn’t expecting to hear her name in a thick European accent. Then she found a face amongst the Durmstrang boys that was almost unrecognizable behind the thick fur and wool hat.

“Darek? Is that you?”

“Yah, it’s me."

“How are you?” she asked with a friendly smile.

“Good. Good. How are you?” he asked, rolling his r.

“I’m… wait, I remember this one. Umm…” Ana attempted to say ‘I am well’ in his native tongue, but her accent was wrong.

“I’m sorry. That was horrible,” she said.
“It vas not…vonderful,” he admitted.

“Honesty. I like it.” Ana felt Sev glaring at them so she turned to explain. “I met Darek in Dover this summer.”

Sev just grunted and walked away.

“He does not seem happy ve are here,” Darek said.

“Oh, trust me. His temperament has nothing to do with the fact that you’re from Durmstrang. It’s simply because you’re a boy.”

“A boy?”

“You see… Professor Snape is my guardian.”

“Ah. My fader is the same way wiff my soistra.”

“Soistra?”

“It is how you say…sister.”

“Oh! Then I bet she finds it as annoying as I do. Do you have anywhere to sit? Because you’re welcome to sit with us.”

“Dat sounds good.”

Ana led Darek, and with him the rest of the Durmstrang students, over to the Slytherin table while everyone else was still filing in. The students from Beauxbatons took seats at the Ravenclaw table on the other side of the hall. As the Durmstrang students took their seats, they removed their cloaks to reveal robes of deep-red. And Ana noticed, for the first time, another semi-familiar face among them: Professional Seeker, Victor Krum. Of course, many others had noticed Krum too, including Draco who leaned across the table to talk to him.

“Hey, Draco, be sure to ask for a few pointers on the Wronski! Your tail lift is wrong; that’s why you keep spinning!” Ana called out.

Draco sneered at the comment, but Krum remained impassive as he looked down the table at her.

“You’re not wrong,” Adrian said, sliding into the seat beside her.

“Oh, I know. Just because he’s got a state of the art broom, he thinks he’s God’s gift to Quidditch.”

“His broom was state of the art two years ago.”

“You play?” Darek asked.

“I do; Adrian does as well. We’re both chasers for our house team,” Ana said. “Oh! Umm, sorry. Darek, this is Adrian. Adrian, this is Darek. We met this summer.”

“Nice to meet you, Darek,” Adrian said, shaking the other boy’s hand across the table.

“You boyfriend?” Darek asked, making Ana choke on her pumpkin juice and her eyes water.
“Ah… Uh… No” Adrian coughed.

“Oh. But you wish to be.”

Ana started choking even more as Adrian continued to fumble for a response. Ana couldn’t look at either one of them and chose to focus her attention elsewhere. Of course, with her luck, it landed on Fred and his perpetual scowl when it came to looking her way.

Fortunately, Dumbledore stood up to the podium giving her an excuse to look away. He gave a short welcome to the guests after which the feast started. There was no more talk of Ana and Adrian dating and really very little talk with either Adrian or Darek.

When they finished eating, Dumbledore called forth Barty Crouch and Ludo Bagman and they finally got to the specifics of the tournament. All interested, and eligible, parties were to write their name and their school’s name on a piece of parchment and place it in the goblet of fire. Then the goblet would choose one champion from each school to compete. Once chosen, the champion enters into a binding magical contract and they cannot withdraw their name. They would compete in three tasks throughout the year and be judged on their magical skill and execution. The champion with the highest ranking would win the Triwizard Cup and one thousand galleons.

The only catch was that you had to be at least seventeen years old to submit your name. An age line would be placed around the goblet to prevent any illegal entries.

XXX

Fred could hardly eat for staring at Ana all night. He’d ask if it was just his imagination or if she had become even more fit since the World Cup, but he knew the truth. She had. Of course, she had. She was prettier every time he saw her. The bad thing about that was, he wasn’t the only one who noticed. He hated how Pucey hung all over her; it sickened him every time he saw them flirting. He didn’t blame Ana for it; he couldn’t, no matter how hard he tried.

He couldn’t begin to count the number of times he’d heard another bloke talking about how fit Ana looked in the last two weeks alone. He probably heard something ten, fifteen times a day and at least twice that on the weekends. He supposed it had something to do with her haircut. He had been a big fan of the long hair, but there was just something about the shorter cut that seemed to make her eyes brighter, her smile wider, and her legs longer.

Fred figured, or rather he knew, that the only reason Ana hadn’t been asked out by a hundred different blokes already was that they were all terrified of Snape. Except for Pucey, it seemed; he was at her side every meal time. There were rumors going around, but Fred knew a guy like Pucey wouldn’t be able to keep from bragging about having a girl like Ana; no one could. Then there was the Durmstrang lot. They didn’t know Snape and therefore didn’t know to fear him. So, of course, they were hanging on to Ana too.

Fred felt like being sick.

“You need to let it go, Freddie,” George whispered so that only he could hear.

“There’s nothing to let go,” Fred lied.

George knew it was a lie, but he didn’t push the matter as Dumbledore stood up to the podium. Fred’s heart lightened and his excitement grew with each word until Dumbledore released them for bed.

“An age line!” he exclaimed. “You’re joking!”
“A simple aging potion should be enough to get by that!” George added.

“And then, once you’ve put your name in—”

“—The goblet can’t tell if you’re seventeen or not!”

“I don’t think anyone under the age of seventeen will know enough to complete the tasks,” Hermione reasoned.

“Speak for yourself.”

“You’re going to try too, right, Harry?” Fred asked.

“Uhh…”

“He can’t!” Ana interjected, having overheard Fred’s proposal. “He’s not seventeen, and neither are you.”

Fred almost thought she sounded worried, or maybe she was simply angry.

“Don’t listen to her, Harry,” George said.

“That’s your philosophy is it then? Don’t listen to someone older and wiser?”

“You’re not older than me.”

“But apparently wiser.”

Nope. She was definitely angry.

“You heard Dumbledore, didn’t you?” she continued. “People have died in this tournament. Is that really how you want to be remembered, Harry? As The Boy Who Took On More Than He Could and Died in a Fit of Foolish Recklessness All in Pursuit of a Few Measly Galleons?”

“A thousand galleons aren’t measly,” Ron argued.

“Life isn’t measured by the number of galleons in your vault, but by what you do with the knutts in your pocket.”

“Why do you care what we do?” Fred asked.

“That’s not the question you should be asking, Red.”

“Then what is?”

“Whose life do you really risk when you gamble with your own?”

Fred didn’t think Ana ever looked as beautiful as she did when she stormed away from them. And he couldn’t forget the fact that she had called him Red.
P.S. Has anyone seen Crimes of Grindelwald yet? I have. What did you think? There are highs and lows for me, but I'm still super excited about the series.
Ana couldn’t sleep for a series of bad dreams. In the first, the Goblet of Fire spat out Harry’s name and then Fred’s. Their first task followed immediately in which they each had to wrestle a giant. In the second dream, Ana was in defense class and Professor Moody had her under the Imperius Curse and he forced her to mis-brew the Wolfsbane Potion. There were several dreams that followed, but they were all variations of the first two.

The final dream ended with Ana sitting bolt upright in bed at six in the morning. She was wandering around in the Forbidden Forest. She was lost and desperately trying to get back to the castle, but she wasn’t entirely sure why. When she passed a puddle she caught a glimpse of her reflection, only it wasn’t her. It was Mr. Crouch. Before Ana could contemplate this, she was awoken by a bright green light.

The girls were not awake yet, but Ana couldn’t get back to sleep. Her heart was pounding and her limbs felt like she really had been running through the forest. And her head was buzzing. So, unable to sleep, Ana got dressed and left the dormitory. The common room was empty and cold, so she kept walking. She didn’t really know where she was heading until she arrived in the Entrance Hall. The Goblet of Fire was sitting in the center of it, a white smoky line drawn around it. Ana turned away from the goblet and moved towards the Great Hall.

It too was mostly empty, but there were a few bodies in there, most notably Dumbledore and the Durmstrang lot. Ana stood at the doors trying to decide if she wanted to eat this early or keep walking. That’s when she felt the pricking of someone trying to invade her mind. Since Sev’s slight about the practices of a good Occlumens, Ana had been attempting to keep a barrier in place permanently. It was nothing as strong as it could have been, but just enough to dissuade any Legilimens. The moment she felt someone trying to pry through, she shut them down forcefully.

She turned and found Professor Moody standing behind her, leaning heavily on his cane, both eyes were fixated on her. She stared right back but he didn’t back down. She continued to push, forcing them into a dark, empty space.

“Leave,” she commanded.

Moody stood tall so she pushed harder.

“Leave this mind.”

He began to shrink in size.

“Leave. You will not attempt to invade this mind again. It is protected against you.”

Ana continued to push him back. Instead of simply pushing him out though, she pushed until she was on the brink of his mind. Flashes of blurred and broken images passed by her eyes: a broken stained glass window, a bottomless trunk, a cold damp cellar and the feeling of
helplessness. The images made no sense to her and left her feeling as though she was in a foggy haze. A bright flash of green light however, stirred her from the images.

She pulled back with great force and slammed the door shut behind her.

“I see you have found the talents of young Miss Evans,” Dumbledore said.

Ana and Professor Moody were standing in the entry to the Great Hall once more. Moody’s good eye looked towards Dumbledore while his glass one remained on her. Ana was hesitant to look away and only allowed herself a quick glance. Dumbledore was smiling.

“She’s an Occlumens?” Moody questioned as though he didn’t already know.

“A level three, I believe.”

“Hmpf. Feels more like a four,” Moody grunted.

“Oh?” Dumbledore turned his attention to Ana.

“A great Occlumens is always improving her skill,” Ana replied stiffly. She was still uneasy with Moody’s glass eye on her.

“Snape’s ward, you say” Moody asked. “I don’t recall Snape having any kin.”

“She’s not related,” Dumbledore said. “An orphan from the war; I thought she would help with his rehabilitation. As it is, they have both been beneficial to the other.”

“Hmpf.” Moody grunted again. “She’s talented. Shame she’s been stuck with him all this time.”

“She’s standing right here and she’d very much appreciate it if you stopped talking as though she wasn’t,” Ana said testily.

Moody grinned, somehow making his face even more unappealing. Then he nodded towards Dumbledore before hobbling away. It was only after he’d put quite a bit of distance between them that she finally relaxed.

“My apologies, Ana,” Dumbledore said. “Alastor is a particular and unique individual, but he is a good friend to have.”

“I am sure you think so,” she replied. “I just…Tell me, does he often make a habit out of invading another’s mind? Or is it just mine he’s fixated on?”

“Yours, I believe. He heard of your skill and he wanted to test it. He wouldn’t have done any harm to it, I assure you.”

Ana tried not to roll her eyes in front of Dumbledore; she didn’t want to show him how little that assured her.

“Severus told me of your concerns,” he continued. “And I have spoken with Alastor. His practical lessons on the curses have been suspended, but he will continue with the theory. Now, I happen to notice that you are up a bit earlier than usual. Any reason why?”

“I couldn’t sleep,” she said with a shrug. “Bad dreams.”
“Ah. I often find dreams are the mind’s way of working some of our most difficult problems.”

“Problems like how is Harry supposed to wrestle a giant in the tournament?”

Dumbledore’s brow rose.

“Yeah, these weren’t very helpful dreams. They were…stress related I’m sure. It is my OWL year; the most important year in my schooling, right?” She didn’t sound convinced. “There really should be something on hand to help students cope with the stress.”

“I believe Madam Pomfrey has a well-supplied cabinet of calming draught on hand.”

Ana pulled a face. “Yeah, but a calming draught isn’t specifically geared towards stress. Not to mention it leaves a bitter aftertaste and a sense of drowsiness. I can’t really focus in class if I’m falling asleep.”

“A valid point. It is quite alarming how many of our potions have bitter side effects. Sometimes I wish one could simply wear them like a cloak.”

“Wear them? That’s…. That’s it!” Ana exclaimed suddenly with excitement. “I’ve been so focused on potions that we consume that I completely neglected the topical ones, like so many do.”

Thought after thought began to race through her mind. How could she make a calming draught that could be absorbed through the skin? Was such a thing even possible? What sort of equipment would she need? She had no real solutions yet, but for the first time she felt optimistic about finding one.

“Thank you, Professor.”

“What for?” Dumbledore asked, but his eyes twinkled merriment.

“For being you.”

“Well, I’m not sure how to be anyone else.”

“Oh! There’s so much to do now. I need to get started right away.”

“Ana!” Dumbledore called as she began to leave. “Perhaps nourishment first, then study?”

Ana relented, almost reluctantly. As she walked towards the Slytherin table, she noticed a renewed buzzing in her head; she wondered how long it had been there.

“Professor Dumbledore?” she called as she turned back around. She fully expected him to have left already, but he fortunately he hadn’t. “Out of curiosity, what level Occlumens is Professor Moody?”

“A level five, I believe. Why?”

“I just… I wasn’t even trying to get through and yet I did. I thought it should have been harder to get by his barrier. He… he must not have been trying to keep me out, I guess. That’s got to be it. Thanks again, Professor.”

Ana tried to shake the encounter from her head as she approached the Slytherin table. Of
course Moody wasn’t really trying to keep her out. He was probably just testing her legilimency skills too. No other explanation made since. Still, there was this nagging, unwelcome feeling of unease that remained.

“Ana!”

Ana looked up at the sound of her name. Darek was sitting at the Slytherin table with his friends, Krum among them, and waving her over. She smiled as she joined them.

That night, one of the worst things Ana could imagine happening actually happened. After the three champions were selected—Krum from Durmstrang, Fleur Delacour from Beauxbatons, and Cedric Diggory from Hogwarts—a fourth champion was selected: Harry.

Ana was furious when his name was announced. How could he be so reckless? Was he really as arrogant as Sev claimed he was? Then her anger turned to confusion when she caught a glimpse of his face; he was surprised and confused as well. Ana’s confusion quickly turned to a worry that she couldn’t show. She wanted to stay behind and wait in the Great Hall for him to return, but Sev made her leave with the other students. Needless to say, that night was another night of ill rest.

All day Ana tried to find a way to speak to Harry without others knowing. Then at lunch she overheard Draco complaining about having potions with Gryffindor next. Finally she had her chance. She wouldn’t dare try to speak to him before and risk making him late for Sev, so she’d just have to wait for him afterwards. It would mean missing class herself, but it was Care of Magical Creatures and Hagrid loved her. Plus, it gave her time to research topical potions for her thesis.

She was so absorbed in her research that she missed the dismissal bell. Instead she heard the sound of disgruntled fourth years passing by her room. She jumped up and rushed to the door to look out, but she didn’t see Harry. She caught sight of the back of Ron’s head, but none of the boys he was walking with were Harry. Then at last, among the last to leave, she found Harry with Hermione. He caught her eye and followed her into the room. Ana quickly shut and silenced the door behind them.

“Make this fast, we have to get to History,” Harry said, a little on edge.

“Slip in the back and Binns will neither know nor care,” Ana said with a wave of her hand. Hermione scoffed. “Oh like you haven’t already read the whole book, Granger. So, about the…”

“I didn’t do it,” Harry said, cutting her off.

“What?”

“I know what you’re going to say, but I didn’t do it. I didn’t put my name in the goblet. I don’t know who did or why, but it wasn’t me.”

“I know.”

“I didn’t…wait. You know? You mean, you believe me then?”

“Harry, I was raised by Severus Snape, the coldest and most emotionless person in the world. Which means I learned at a young age how to read the fine tuning of body language and
facial expressions. I saw you last night. I saw the pallor of your skin, and the stiffness in your shoulders. Even now your eyes are a fraction larger than they were before. You’re afraid.”

“I’m not…”

“Then you should be. Or are you telling me that you really did do something as idiotic and ill planned as submitting your name?”

“I didn’t do it.”

“Well then, what are you going to do about it?”

“What do you mean?”

“Are they still making you compete?”

“Yes.”

Ana closed her eyes and let out a shaky breath. She was hoping the rumors had been wrong about that.

“What’s the task?”

“Don’t know. They won’t tell us. Mr. Crouch said it was designed to test our daring. But it’s on the twenty-fourth of November, and we’re only allowed our wands.”

“They twenty-fourth? That’s only a few weeks away.”

“Yeah, I know.”

There was silence that followed. Hermione broke it. “Do you have any idea as to what he should do?”

“Not without more information, no,” Ana said. Hermione looked disappointed by Harry didn’t really look surprised.

“You said you’re allowed your wand?” Ana asked, Harry nodded. “Then…review every spell you know, no matter how insignificant it may seem. You never know when the simplest spell might be useful. And I… I’ll try to find out what I can?”

“How?” Hermione asked.

“I’m a Legimimens, right? I’ll browse minds until…”

“No!” Harry said firmly.

“What do you mean no?”

“You’re not reading someone’s mind to…”

“It’s not mind reading.”

“Whatever! You’re not doing it!”

“Even if it makes the difference between surviving or not?”

“Yes! We’re not allowed to ask a professor for help.”
“I’m not a professor, and you’re also supposed to be seventeen to compete! You may not have put your name in the goblet, Harry, but someone did and I’m not convinced it was all in good fun! I…” Ana took a deep breath to try and calm down. “I’m just trying to help.”

“I get that, I do, but not like this. I don’t want you messing with someone else’s mind on account of me.”

“Ever the noble Gryffindor, huh? Fine. I won’t use legilimency, but I’m afraid I don’t have much more to offer now. You should head on, as I have to get to Herbology.” Ana stormed passed him and Hermione not entirely sure who she was angrier with: whoever put Harry’s name in the goblet or herself for not being able to help.
In the days that followed, Ana tried to get information out of anyone she thought might know something about the first task without using legilimency. But it was hard, very hard, and she learned nothing. Then she began to drown in her own work and had to focus on that.

She did notice, however, that the whole castle seemed to turn against Harry. The Hufflepuffs wouldn’t speak to him, understandably so since Cedric was a Hufflepuff. But Ravenclaw shunned him too which was odd. Despite his belief, most of Slytherin was actually indifferent to him. Those that did oppose Harry though, like Draco Malfoy, Pansie Parkinson, and their cronies, did so with enough bravado to taint the whole house. Draco even passed out badges to everyone which read “Support Cedric” one moment and “Potter Stinks” the next.

Ana and the girls were in the library pouring over their collective notes from class and working on various essays and assignments. They worked in silence apart from the occasional, ‘Hey, have you see the notes for…’ and they’d fill in the blank. Ana refused to wear Draco’s stupid badge. Sadie and Hestia wouldn’t wear it either. Flora usually didn’t, but for whatever reason, she chose to wear one that day. It kept spinning and flashing Potter Stinks in Ana’s face until she just couldn’t take it anymore.

“Ugh! Will you take that off please?” Ana whispered fiercely.

“Take what off?” Flora asked.

“That stupid badge. Do you have to wear it?”

“Yes,” she replied with a grin. “There are a couple of Gryffindors back there and they keep scowling at it.”

Ana looked behind her and saw Katie Bell and some other fifth years.

“It’s hilarious,” Flora continued.

“Well I think it’s ridiculous,” Ana snapped.

Flora’s lip curled up. “Well, I didn’t ask for your opinion.”

“Obviously. Because I would have told you that the badge is garish and that it makes you look fat.”

Flora called Ana a rather foul name before gathering her things and leaving.

“Well that was rude,” Ana said, getting back to work.

“I agree,” Sadie began, “with Flora.”
“What?”

“Did you have to be so mean, Ana?”

“Me?”

“She was just having a little fun.”

“At Potter’s expense.”

“So?”

“So? He’s…” Ana hesitated for just a second before continuing. “He’s still a champion for Hogwarts and at a severe disadvantage already. He needs our support as much if not more than Diggory. I know we’re a prideful lot; shouldn’t that pride extend to all of Hogwarts and not just Slytherin House?”

“I don’t know what’s gotten into you this year, Ana, but I’m not sure I like it.”

Then Sadie packed up her things too and left. Ana looked to Hestia.

“Are you going to walk out too? She is your sister.”

“True. Which means I know better than anyone what a bint she can be. Can I see your notes on the softening charm?”

“Hes, you’re the best. Did you know that?” Ana asked as she handed over her notes.

“I know, but it’s always nice to hear.”

The days before the first task were running out; it was less than a week away and Ana still had no answers for Harry. She was beginning to doubt that she would find one. Then one morning at breakfast, she caught Harry staring at her rather intensely. He looked to the door, then back at her, before getting up and walking out.

“Bugger,” Ana whispered.

“What is it?” Hestia asked.

“I forgot to do something with one of my potions.”

“Just do it later,” Flora suggested.

“I can’t just do it later. Potions are finicky sometimes; you’re bright enough to at least know that,” Ana bit back. Things were still rather tense between them since the library. “No, I have to go do it now. I’ll just see you all in class.” Ana got up and walked out too, ignoring the face Flora pulled behind her back.

Ana walked a few paces behind Harry and followed him into a hidden alcove where she cast the muffliato charm behind her.

“Dragons!”

“What?”
“The first task is dragons. I don’t know what we have to do with them, but there’s one for each champion,” Harry elaborated, face pale.

“Dragons?”

Harry nodded.

“Mother of Merlin! How are you supposed to wrestle a dragon?”

“Wrestle?”

“What”

“I have to wrestle it?”

“What are you talking about?”

“You just said….”

A very clear image of Harry’s name being emitted from the Goblet of Fire popped into Ana’s head, followed closely by an image of him bloodied and wrestling a giant.

“…that I have to wrestle a dragon!”

“Don’t be ridiculous. You can’t wrestle a dragon.”

“But you said…”

“I know what I said, but it’s rubbish!” Ana shouted quietly. “Look, I don’t know why I said that, but it’s mad. You can’t wrestle a dragon any more than you can fight one. Their hides are too thick. Spells will just bounce off them.”

“Then what am I supposed to do?”

“I don’t know. ‘How to tame your dragon’ isn’t exactly a lesson covered on your OWLs. It’s NEWT level if anything.”

“What’s a newt level?”

“Never mind that now. Charlie!”

“What?”

“Charlie Weasley! He works with dragons in Romania. If anyone can help you with dragons, it’ll be him. Maybe Ron can help you get in touch with him?”

“Ron and I aren’t talking at the moment.”

“Then ask Fred; I’m sure he’d be willing to break a few school rules to help you.”

Harry nodded and agreed, but Ana thought he still looked disappointed.

“I’m sorry, Harry. I’ve tried for the last three weeks to figure out the task; I’ve used every tactic I can think of short of legilimency, but they keep their secrets close. How…how did you find out?”

“Hagrid,” he replied almost hesitantly.
“Of course Hagrid would know if there was a dragon in the vicinity. Do you think anyone else knows?”

“Yeah; I’m pretty sure Fleur knows.”

“The Beauxbatons girl?”

Harry nodded.

“How?”

“Her Headmistress was with Hagrid when he…uh…when he told me.”

“He told you about the dragons in front of her?”

“No, she…she didn’t know I was there. I was…hiding.”

“Hiding? You must have been hiding pretty well for a woman like her to miss you.”

“Yep.”

Harry pressed his lips together, refusing to say more, but it was clear to Ana that he was hiding something. When she tried to explore what it was, he stopped her.

“Don’t! Please…don’t.”

“Don’t what?”

“You were about to read my mind, weren’t you?”

“It’s not…”

“Whatever. I don’t want you in there.”

“Fine. Keep your secrets for now. I’ll find out sooner or later. So…do Pretty-boy and Over-hyped Seeker know?”

“Er—what?”

“Diggory and Krum, do they know about the dragons too?”

Harry still looked a little puzzled.

“If two of you know, then the other two should as well. It’s only fair.”

“Fair? I didn’t know a Slytherin knew the meaning of fair.” Harry grinned cheekily.

“Alright, smart arse, you tell Pretty-boy and I’ll tell the Over-hyped.”

“Can’t you just tell them both?”

“No. It will look better if you told Diggory. Perception goes a long way around here sometimes.”

The bell rang for class, making them both jump.

“Right. Wait, how will you tell Krum?”
Ana shrugged a shoulder. “He’s friends with Darek.”

“Who?”

“Just a bloke from Durmstrang. He’s a…a friend. Don’t worry about it. You just focus on telling Diggory and not losing your head to a dragon.”

“Gee. Thanks,” Harry said with an eye roll.

XXX

21 November 1994

Fred was listening outside McGonagall’s office while she scolded George on the inside. McGonagall had recently begun to berate them separately in hopes that a more personal approach would work better than lumping them together as a single person. So far, it had yet to make any difference at all. But Fred had to commend her on her effort.

So he was standing and listening when suddenly he caught the sound of another voice. His feet were carrying him towards it before his brain had time to tell them no, but since he was there he poked his head around the corner. Ana was with Krum and another Durmstrang boy—his sources told him the boy’s name was Darek—and Ana appeared quite angry with him. With a wicked gleam in her eye, Ana turned on her heel and stormed away…in Fred’s direction. He only had a second to think as she passed by. George was still in with McGonagall and likely would be for a while still, so Fred went after her.

“Ana!” She kept walking. “Oi, Evans!” Still nothing. Finally, Fred called, “Little Snake!”

“Look, I… Oh! It’s you. Sorry, I thought…” Ana shook her head as though to clear her thoughts and Fred noticed that her eyes gleamed a little more than usual.

“You all right?” he asked.

“Never better,” she replied stiffly.

“Because that seemed a little…intense.”

“That? Oh, that was just a boy being stupid. I’ve had about enough of stupid boys.” Ana refused to meet his eye as she bit her bottom lip. Fred knew it was so she keep from crying, and he knew he had to fix it.

“Yeah, sorry about that. We get that way sometimes; no one knows why. Fundamental flaw in our species, I think.”

Fred felt his stomach drop to his knees as he caught the full force of her honey-brown eyes when she turned her gaze back on him. Her reddened lips upturned in the faintest smile, and he was sure he was going to lose it. Then that smile was gone as her anger rushed to the surface again. Fred’s eyes widened at the sudden change.

“The bloody git was mouthing off about Harry!” she exclaimed. Fred let out the slightest exhale, glad that her anger wasn’t directed at him this time. “He kept calling him a liar and a cheat! He doesn’t even know him! Harry didn’t ask for this! He didn’t ask to be in the tournament! He didn’t ask to fight a dragon!”

“So it’s ‘Harry’ now is it? Wait! A dragon?!” Fred had to throw away the fact that she
was now calling Harry by his first name instead of Potter, to focus on the larger issue at hand. “Did you say a dragon?”

“Yeah, it’s a part of the first task.”

“What do they have to do with a dragon?”

“No idea, but it can’t be safe. It’s complete madness, and you wanted to put your name in the goblet.”

“Yeah, it may be madness…I’d still do it though if I could.”

Ana rolled her eyes. “You Gryffindors and your pathological need for risky antics. It isn’t as charming as you lot seem to think.”

“And yet you secretly love it,” Fred teased. Ana gave him a look that could rival a basilisk’s stare, but the corner of her mouth raised just enough for Fred to see.

They stood there in a moment of silence without a bit a tension between them. Fred could hardly remember the last time that happened, and he wished things could go back to the way they were. Ana seemed to be thinking along the same line because her eyes filled with sadness.

“Fred,” she began so softly it was almost inaudible and it made his breath catch. “About last year… I…”

Her voice trailed off as her eyes drifted over his shoulder. “Never mind. Here comes your bodyguard. I should leave. But first, tell your brother he’s a git for turning his back on a friend.” As she walked away, Fred was paralyzed, unable to stop her.

George stepped up beside his brother just as the Witch walked away. George didn’t know what they talked about, but whatever it was, it left a familiar pained look in Fred’s eye. It wasn’t the same look George saw there a year ago, but it was the same he’d seen Fred trying to cover up all summer. He knew what had caused it, and he knew the only way to fix it.

“I’m really going to hate this,” George murmured to himself. A little louder he added, “Go for it.”

“Hmm?” Fred looked at him as though coming out of a trance.

“You should go for it,” George repeated.

“What are you talking about?”

“Evans. You should go for it. Ask her out or whatever.”

“But you don’t like her.”

“And a blind old bat can see that you do, even if this bat doesn’t understand why.”

“Blind bat indeed,” Fred said with a smile.

“Mind you, I believe it’s a big mistake that will end in disaster, but… I’ll be here for you when it does in whatever sweet, revengeful way you need me. There are a few things I’ve been longing to try.”
Fred’s smile faded and George sighed. “You know, if you don’t try, Freddie, then someone else will beat you to it. Then what?”
Ugh! I am so sorry to have taken so long. I wish I could say it won't take as long for the next chapter, but I don't want to make any promises I can't be certain to keep.

Belladonna 36

Just a Dream

24 November 1994

Time was out. The first task was upon them and Ana was a nervous wreck, her friends seem to think it was just excitement, and she couldn't tell them otherwise. She'd never felt quite so alone.

The whole school was seated around a set of stands similar to those of a Quidditch arena, but the playing field was vastly different. Instead of grass, it was a rocky terrain. Instead of three goal posts at either end, there was a gated entry. And instead of catching the golden snitch, the champions had to retrieve a golden egg from a nesting dragon. If this was the first task, Ana dreaded to think what the other two would be.

It was a small comfort that Ana’s mind was too pre-occupied by a conversation she had with Sev earlier that day to pay much attention to the action of the first task.

“Dreams are just dreams, right?” Ana asked hurriedly as she entered Sev’s office. Without waiting for a response or even really giving him time to process her question, Ana pushed on.

“All of Trelawney’s rubbish about dream oracles is just that, right? Rubbish? Because a few weeks ago I dreamed that Harry’s name was emitted from the goblet and that in his first task he had to wrestle a giant! Now, I thought it was nothing, just a dream brought on by stress, because, yeah, I’ll admit it, I may be slightly stressed.”

She began to pace the width of his office as she wrung her hands.

“And it was followed by this really weird dream of Crouch that I can’t even remember, but I remember the feeling and it was weird. And trust me, I do not want to be dreaming about some old man with haunted eyes like his.

“Anyways, back to Harry. I had a dream in which his name came from the goblet and then IT DID! Mad, right?? Now I know he’s not wrestling a giant, it’s a dragon and Merlin! I hope it’s not a two-headed dragon like the one I had in my dream last night! This dragon was particularly disturbing as its heads were at opposite ends of the body!

“But, still, this all has to be stress induced, right? I was simply worried that something
Ana felt a jittery sort of embarrassment upon discovering that Dumbledore bore witness to her frenzied rant, but that paled in comparison to what happened next.

Sev closed the distance between him and Ana in three quick strides and took her chin between his thumb and forefinger. His lip curled in disappointment.

“You’re eyes are dilated. You’ve been experimenting without taking proper precautions.”

“What! No!” Ana pulled out of his grasp.

“Don’t. Lie. To. Me.”

“I’m not! I’m not experimenting. I’m stewing aconite and eucalyptus.”

Sev gave her a look.

“Not in the same pot! Don’t insult me for an idiot!”

“Did you set up proper ventilation between the two so that their vapors did not mix?”

“Did I…” Ana trailed off mid-protest. She had, in fact, not done that.

Sev gave an irritated huff and quickly began fingering through the various potions and bottles he had stored in the room.

“And for someone not as adept at the infinite intricacies of potions, what’s happened exactly?” Dumbledore asked.

“I…”

“Belladonna has acute aconite poisoning.”

“I’m not poisoned…not really.”

Sev was not pleased with this response. He quickly lit a fire under a cauldron, poured in water, and added the contents from three different vials.

“That doesn’t make it any better.”

“Doesn’t it! It was a simple…”

“Mistake.”

“Miscalculation.”

“Mistakes and miscalculation in potions can be deadly. Drink this.” Sev shoved a goblet in her face. On stubborn principal, Ana refused to take it. “Sit and drink.”

She grudgingly did as instructed.
“Sit.”

“I’m fiii—whoa.”

Ana fell into the seat behind her that Sev had conjured. Her head felt like it had put into a vice; an immense pressure was squeezing in on all sides. She felt nauseated and dizzy and there were spots flashing in her vision. All sound was muffled. One moment she felt so hot she began sweating, and then the next her teeth her chattering with cold. Her heart raced violently in her chest, each beat like a roaring thunderclap. It was the most unpleasant feeling she’d ever had.

Then as quickly as it came, it left. Her heart evened out. Her temperature steadied. Her hearing and vision returned to normal. And the nauseousness passed. Ana looked up at Sev.

“I told you to sit.”

Loud clapping aroused Ana from her thoughts. Fleur was walking off the field, having just retrieved her egg, her robes still smoldering. Ana couldn’t remember what had happened to Cedric, and as she waited for Krum to take the field, her thoughts drifted once more back to that morning.

Dumbledore had wanted to know more about Ana’s dreams. Now that Ana was feeling much more clear-headed than before, she really regretted ever mentioning the dream in front of him; she didn’t like the curious glint in his eyes. She tried to play the rant off as a spout of gibberish caused by the buzz, but Dumbledore wouldn’t buy into it. So, she repeated the story at a much slower pace, and the look Sev and Dumbledore shared afterwards told Ana that she was right to mistrust the glint.

“It was just a dream; it meant nothing,” Ana said in a desperate attempt to convince herself and everyone else.

There was a long pause, then Dumbledore said, “Of course. A dream is just a dream.”

“Right,” Ana nodded. “Can you do me a favor, Professor? Say that again, only this time try to be a little more convincing.”

Dumbledore said nothing, and Ana shot up from her chair.

“No. No, I’m not…” She shook her head. “I don’t want to be one of them. Things are complicated enough. I have my OWLs and my thesis to work on. I don’t want…whatever this is.”

“It may still be nothing,” Sev said. “These things are highly improbable and inaccurate.”

“And yet…”

“Dumbledore, don’t,” Sev warned.

“And yet, what?” Ana asked

“And yet you are of the age when these talents begin to manifest.”

“Talent? This is not a talent, Sir. Being an exceptional Quidditch player or a potioneer is a talent. Playing an instrument is a talent. Having dreams is not a talent,” Ana refuted. “And
besides, aren't there usually signs for this sort of thing? Proclivities or something?"

“It is my understanding that you have a certain proclivity for divination.”

“Ha! You’re joking, right? Divination is a joke. I didn't sign up for it because of some deep un-seated desire to divine the future. I signed up because I needed another class. Magical Creatures was a given from the start; there are so many horns, furs, bloods, and salvias used in potions, I knew the class could only help me achieve my goal. I was never very good at Muggle Maths and Arithmancy seemed to close to that. Ancient Ruins didn’t interest me at all, and a Slytherin in Muggle Studies doesn’t exactly go on well in the common room.

“So no, Professor, Divination is not a proclivity. This…this is nothing. It means nothing. A dream is just a dream; that’s all it was.”

Ana had let her words be the last spoken on the matter, and she left Sev’s office in a hurry. Since leaving, she repeated the mantra ‘a dream is just a dream’ over and over in her head. But as Krum left the field and Harry prepared to take his place, Ana couldn’t help but wonder what if it wasn’t? A dream was just a dream! Or at least, her latest one was. Harry faced off against a Hungarian Horntail, not a two-headed dragon. Not that the Horntail was much better, and Ana was not about to consider the metaphorical meaning behind the dream. For now, after a bit of fancy flying, Harry was safe.

XXX

The crowd was going wild! It was almost as though Gryffindor had won the Quidditch Cup all over again. Harry had tied for first place alongside Victor Krum, and Cedric had come in second. Hogwarts had a strong lead in the tournament.

So Fred was feeling pretty good; so good in fact, he thought ‘why not make today the day?’ While everyone else had kept their faces solely on the task before them, Fred had stolen a few moments to observe Ana. He was hoping to catch her eye and somehow signal for them to find some time alone. But she never looked his way; she seemed too distressed to see much of anything really. So Fred decided he’d have to make his own opportunity.

After Harry received his scores, the crowd began to disperse. Ana lingered behind her friends, and Fred sent George to the castle without him. It was now or never. He called out to her just as someone else did, only they were closer. Fred slowed down as Darek Kowalski stepped between him and Ana. He was too far away to hear anything, but after a moment Ana smiled at Darek. That was all Fred needed to see before walking away, and in doing so, he missed Ana looking his way at last.

XXX

6 December 1994
She swore, if one more person asked her what was going on, Ana would scream. Sev had called for a house meeting. All Fourth Years and older were piled into the common room because it was the only place in the dungeons large enough to house them all. A spot had been cleared away in the center and a weird device with a large horn-like apparatus sat at the front.

“Does anybody know what this is about?” Adrian asked as he took a seat near the girls.

Ana groaned and dropped her head into her hands.

“What’s up with you?”

“How twenty people stopped us on the stairs to ask her the same thing,” Sadie replied.

“Just because I was raised by the guy, does not mean I am privy to his inner-most thoughts,” Ana said.

“No, but being an Occlumens does,” Hestia added. Ana gave her a look.

“And technically, I didn’t ask you; I asked ‘anybody,’” Adrian said.

“Nobody likes a smart arse, you two, so watch it.”

“Ana’s right,” Hestia said. “Nobody likes us; they love us.” She and Adrian laughed so Ana pushed them off their chairs.

“Miss Carrow, Mister Pucey, show some decorum and sit in your seat like proper children,” Sev said lowly as he entered the common room.

“Yeah, Hes, we’re not animals here,” Ana teased.

“Unlike those filthy Gryffindors,” Flora added. Most of those gathered snickered, but Ana shifted uncomfortably.

“Tradition,” Sev began, ignoring the laughs around him. “As representatives of Slytherin House, we are all familiar with the term and on occasion its antiquated un-pleasantries. One such un-pleasantry of the Triwizard Tournament…is the Yule Ball…”

There was an excited gasp from many of the girls around the room; Sev carried on with a sharp glare and a bored tone.

“I expect all of you to maintain and uphold even this most abhorrent tradition with the dignity and pride that besets the name Slytherin. It is therefore imperative that each of you demonstrates a proper waltz before being dismissed.”

Ana had a sudden sinking feeling in her stomach as Sev revolved slowly.

“Miss Evans—”

“—No,” they said at the same time.

Sev’s glare turned dangerously icy, but Ana wouldn’t relent.

“No,” she said again. “Find someone else to single out. You’re not doing this to me.”

Sev held his ground as stubbornly as Ana did.
“Ana, go!” Sadie whispered sharply with a nudge.

“Yeah, you’re just making it worse,” Adrian added.

“Fine, then you’re coming with me.”

“Wha—what? No, I…”

Ana grabbed his hand and pulled him into the center before Adrian knew what was going on. Meanwhile, Sev’s voice rang in her head.

“What are you doing?”

“I thought it pretty obvious,” she replied. “I’m doing you a favor. You don’t really want to showcase your dancing skill here, do you? If you’re going to use me, then I’m going to use him.”

Sev remained quiet as he turned his icy glare on Adrian. Then he brusquely directed everyone else to pair off as well.

“How did you know that would work?” Adrian whispered.

And shrugged. “I knew it would come down to what he detested more: the thought of dancing or the thought of me dancing with you. You lost.”

“Or did I win?” Adrian smirked. “Shall we then, Miss Evans?” He held out one hand while tucking the other behind his back. He stood tall and squared his shoulders as though he was already at a proper ball and not merely practicing in the common room.

Ana smiled coyly and took his hand. “We shall.”

Music started playing from the strange contraption and Adrian spun Ana into position with ease. His hand on her waist was gentle yet firm as he led her in the simple dance, but it didn’t ignite anything. There was no spark of excited anticipation like there was with Fred. She didn’t eagerly hope for more; she was content with the way things were between them.

Sure, he was fit: academic and athletic. And they shared many common interests, but they were friends; that line was very clearly drawn in her mind. She’d dated Graham simply because he was a cute friend who’d asked. It had ended horribly and now she could barely stand to look at him. She didn’t want to repeat that same mistake with Adrian.

But, if he asked her to the ball, would she be able to say no?

“Adrian—”

“Ana—”

Adrian smiled and nodded for her to continue. Before she could, however, Sev came alongside them and pulled them apart.

“Enough!” he spat. “Miss Evans, you are free to go. Mr. Pucey, a word.”

Ana knew better than to test tone, so she stepped away and sought out Hes and the girls.
Sadie was standing near the dormitory halls, a brilliant smile on her face as she began to put boys in her preferential order.

“Ana! Ana! Isn’t this exciting? Of course, Lucian’s already asked Flora, and Hes is likely to go with Daniel…”

“Daniel? Who the bloody ‘ell is Daniel?” Hestia asked as she joined them.

“Oh! What’s his name from Ravenclaw?”

“Do you mean Duncan?” Ana and Hestia both asked at the same time.

“Duncan? Is that his name, really? I thought it was Daniel.”

“What’s it matter anyway? He’s got to ask me first.”

“Well he’d be daft not to,” Sadie insisted. “Who do you think you’ll go with, Ana?”

Ana looked back to the center where Sev was very clearly berating Adrian for no apparent reason other than the fact that he danced with Ana.

“I think I’ll be lucky just to have anyone ask me at all, especially with Sev standing by ready to terrorize anyone who even thinks of looking my way.”

Hestia and Sadie looked over to where Sev and Adrian stood as well, the later with his head bent and his shoulder slumped.

“Eek! I don’t think I’ve ever wanted to be in your shoes less,” Hes said.

“Maybe it won’t be as bad as all that,” Sadie tried. “I’m sure one of the Beauxbatons boys will be up for it, or perhaps that Durmstrang bloke you’ve been chatting with?”

“Maybe.” Ana tried to sound positive, but she knew she’d never say yes to any of them. The only person she’d want to go with wouldn’t be an option.
Ana ducked inside the potions shop just as a howling wind threatened to blow her away. When Sev asked her to pick up some supplies, boomslang skin, bicorn horn, and lacewing flies, in particular, Ana wanted to say no. But, she needed some supplies too and thought it would have been rotten luck to run into him on her free day. So while Sadie was fawning over the latest beauty charms, Ana decided to duck inside Olde Mac's Potions.

The bells on the door jingled at her arrival. She stomped her feet and brushed the fresh snow from her cloak as the shopkeep came around the corner.

“Ah, goo’ mornin’ to ya, Ana.”

Mac, or Flynn Macintyre, was an older wizard in his forties or fifties. He was Irish born but his family moved to Scotland in his early childhood, so his accent was an odd mixture of the two.

“Morning, Mac? It’s past noon,” Ana replied with a smile.

“Tha’ may be, but its mornin’ somewhere, I imagine.”

“Well, we’re not in somewhere. We’re in Hogsmeade.”

“Aye, but Hogsmea’ is somewhere to someone.”

Ana rolled her eyes playfully.

“What can I get for ya?”

“I need some supplies,” Ana said as she handed over a list. Mac reviewed it carefully before raising a brow in question. “Some of it is for Sev too.”

“Tha’ explains it then. While I get this together, why doncha check out my latest shipment of gillyflower. They’re all the rage somewhere.”

“Don’t mind if I do; I’ve been looking for something new to play with.”

Fred’s breath caught in his throat the moment he heard Ana’s voice. He knew she was alone; if her friends had been with her he was certain he’d have already heard Carrow or Baldock complain about the smell. A potions shop, a good potions shop, always carried an odor; it was inevitable really, with all the ingredients they stocked. A stronger odor was usually indicative of a better supply.

Fred remained hidden in the aisle, while Ana talked to Mac. He could hear the smile in her voice. And her laugh… oh! It was the sweetest sound. If he closed his eyes, he could see her
beauty as though she was standing before him. If he inhaled deeply he could smell her fragrance as though she was standing beside him.

“You know, just because you stand perfectly still and quiet it doesn’t make you invisible.”

Fred’s stomach dropped. It smelled like she was standing beside him because she was standing beside him.

Okay. Don’t panic, Freddie. Play it cool.

“Bugger! And here I thought I’d mastered that technique.” Fred grinned and opened one eye to look at her; she was smiling too but her eyes darted around quickly.

“George’s not here,” he said.

Ana’s shoulders relaxed slightly. “Oh. Good. I…. I mean… I didn’t…”

“It’s alright. I know what you meant.”

“Impressive, because I’m not sure I knew what I meant,” Ana said.

This made Fred laugh softly; Ana loved the sound of his laugh. She could stand and listen to it all day, but she knew that was unwise. George may not have been there at the moment, but there was no telling how long that moment would last. The boy seemed to have a radar that went off every time Ana was in close proximity to Fred.

She knew she shouldn’t stick around and risk George finding them alone together; he was probably already on his way. But the pull Ana felt for Fred, like a powerful summoning charm, was too strong for her to simply walk away. What’s more, she didn’t want to.

“So, what were you doing before I interrupted your invisibility?”

“So you admit I have mastered the technique!” Fred teased back.

“I made no such claim.”

“I was debating on what product to get. Hey! I have a hypothetical question for you.”

“Ugh! It’s Saturday. I don’t feel like thinking, hypothetically or otherwise.”

Fred smirked. “Fair enough, but it’s about potion making.”

Ana sighed. “You sure know how to charm a girl, don’t you? Go on then.”

“Alright, so say, hypothetically, you wanted to create a potion that would cause a nosebleed impervious to a simple staunching charm, what would you use?”

“How quickly do you want the bleeding to occur?”

“Instantly.”

Ana’s brows rose in surprise.

“Or…within five minutes at least.”
Ana still looked a little skeptical.

“No more than ten at the most.”

Ana smiled. “Anything I know that would work instantly is too unreliable for mixing and far too toxic for consumption.” She scanned the shelf before them and began pointing out different herbs and ingredients.

“You don’t want to use that; it’s been known to cause hives with prolonged exposure. This is very effective, but it causes severe skin discoloration and is thus highly identifiable. This? Ugh. Very bitter; no one would want to buy it. What you need is… No… No… No…”

Ana searched up and down the shelf and around to the next aisle before finding what she was looking for. Fred followed her obediently and enthusiastically. He loved watching her talk about potions. He loved the way her face would light up and how her eyes shone. This was her element and she was beautiful in it. It was a beauty that tore at his core.

“Aha! This is what you need.”

Fred held the twiggy-sprig she handed him up to his face. “This is used in pepper-up potion.”

“And do you know why?” she asked.

Of course, Fred knew why, but he wasn’t about to deny himself a little more time with her. He shrugged.

“Because it clears the sinuses. A dry nasal cavity is prone to bleeding upon irritation. So use that to dry the cavity, add…this to irritate; this will also act as an accelerant so use more or less to vary your timing. And this,” she added yet another ingredient into his hands, “will counter-act a staunching charm while adding a sweet but tangy flavor. Of course, then you’ll need something that would actually stop the bleeding.”

“Any recommendations?”

“I wouldn’t want to do all the work for you.” Ana smirked before quickly adding, “This is all hypothetical of course.”

“Oh, of course.”

Ana knew that every second she spent with Fred gave George more time to butt his nose in, but she still couldn’t bring herself to leave. Especially not after their fingers had grazed while she handed him the sprig. Her stomach was still doing its electrified dance. But Fred always seemed to know what she was thinking.

“He’s not coming, you know,” he said softly.

“Who?”

“George. He’s not coming in here. He’s busy securing a date for the ball; so I told him I’d fetch the supplies. We’re meeting up later at The Three Broomsticks.”
“So he’s consumed with ball-mania too?”

“Isn’t everyone?”

Ana grimaced. The Yule Ball was not a topic she wished to discuss. Her fears about Sev’s interference had been warranted. Her disappointment must have shown on her face, but this time Fred misread it.

“Don’t worry. I’m sure Kowalski will see to it that your night is just as perfect,” Fred said a little bitterly.

“Derek? Why would he do that?”

“Well, because he’s your date…isn’t he?”

“Well if he is then that’s news to me, and I don’t think Smith would appreciate it very much, seeing as he asked her last week.”

“Really?”

“Yeah; he told me about it himself, and Sadie confirmed it with her rumor mill.”

“Oh. So you’re going with Pucey then?”

“Guess again.”

“Not… Not Montague; he’s not right for you.”

“Eww! Mother of Merlin! No! I wouldn’t go with Graham if he were the last man on earth!”

“Then who are you going with?”

“Surely you’ve noticed the sudden influx of detention mates of the male variety? I’m not going with anyone. Well, I was going to go with Hes; I thought we were doing this whole girl-power-don’t-need-a-man-to-have-fun thing, but Duncan just asked her, so… There goes that plan.”

Ana didn’t mean to sound so bitter towards Hestia. Hes was her best friend and Ana knew she was terrified of anyone finding out the truth. She had to keep up pretenses. Ana didn’t necessarily like that she kept using Duncan as a cover, but she suspected Duncan had his own reasons for using Hes as well.

Fred didn’t know any of that, however. Fred couldn’t know any of that. All he knew was that Ana was some hopeless girl who couldn’t get a date to the most anticipated ball of the century. The way he was staring blankly at her proved that theory. Suddenly that electrified dance that her stomach was doing turned into something more unsettling. Ana had to get away.

“Ana!”

*Thank the Mother!* “That’s Mac. My order is ready. I should go,” Ana said quickly before leaving just as quickly. Fred was still staring after her.

This was impossible. Ana had to have a date for the ball already; Fred was certain of it. How could she not? Were the dingbats really that daft? Were they really going to let some greasy
Was he?

Fred dropped his items on a nearby shelf and took off after her, literally running into her just outside the shop.

“Umph! What…? Fred?”

“Shh. Come with me.”

Fred took her by the shoulders and gently led her down the alley beside the shop.

“What’s going on? What’s this all about, Fred?” After his silent stare, the last thing Ana expected was to be accosted by Fred outside the shop, but Fred didn’t respond until they were safely behind the buildings and out of sight.

“Gototheballwithme,” he said quickly. It actually took Ana a moment to process his request and when she did she felt embarrassed and slightly horrified rather than delighted.

“I am not a charity case,” she said.

“What?”

“Maybe I shouldn’t have gone off about the ball like that. I’m glad Hes has a date; I know how important it is for her. And yeah, it sucks that Sev has chosen this year to start his overprotective-father spiel; maybe it’s in some poor attempt to make up for the colossal mess he made of it every year prior with all his secrets and lies. But don’t for one bleeding second think that I’ll make good bait for a pity date because I promise you, I won’t.”

Fred blinked several times in rapid succession. How had he made such a mess of this? This wasn’t the reaction he wanted to cause. He didn’t mean to make her feel or even think he was taking pity on her. He had to make her see the truth.

He took her face in both of his hands and stepped in close. The action was enough to shock her into silence.

“You are not a charity case. You are nobody’s pity-date. You are…”

Fred’s voice caught in his throat as his mind finally processed just how close they were. The tips of their noses were touching. All he’d have to do is tilt her head a little to the side and he could kiss her. He wanted to kiss her. More than anything he wanted to kiss her; his hands were consumed with fire at the mere thought of it, but he wouldn’t do it until he knew she wanted it too.

“Ana,” he swallowed roughly. “You are the most amazing girl I’ve ever met. And I…I’ve been such an idiot for far longer than I care to admit. I don’t want to be that idiot anymore. I just want to be with you. Please…say you’ll take pity on me, and accompany me to the ball.”

“You’re…serious.”

“I don’t think I’ve ever been more serious.”

It was true; Ana could see it in his eyes. She’d caught glimpses of it in years past, but it was never this intense. It was stunningly beautiful and slightly overwhelming.

“Why?”
“Why?” Fred pulled back slightly to look into her eyes.

“I… I mean h-how? How can you look at me like that? How can you say something like that? After what I did to you last year, I… I don’t deserve it. I was horrible to you; I was wicked. I… I didn’t mean any of it, of course. It was all lies and I’m so, so sorry. You didn’t deserve any of it; you’re worth so much more…”

“Shh. Shh. It’s okay. I know.” Fred used his thumbs to brush away her tears. “I knew it wasn’t you then, and I know why you did it; your letter explained everything. We both made mistakes, so let’s resolve them now.”

“Letter? What letter?”

“The one you sent over summer holiday. I recognized your handwriting. It was you; I know it was you.”

“I… I didn’t send any letter.”

“No?”

Ana shook her head, which was still locked inside Fred’s hands.

“That doesn’t matter,” Fred said after a short pause while shaking his head too. “We’ll work that mystery later. The point is, I know you didn’t mean what you said. And I know you’ve been hurting ever since because I’ve been hurting too. Ana, I… I think I might be mad for you. So please, will you go to the ball with me?”
I just want to take a brief moment to say thank you. The response to this story has been incredible! I can't believe the love and support that all of you have shown me. "Thank you" can't even begin to convey my deep, deep, appreciation for all of you. This story has become far more than I ever could have hoped for, and we're probably only about half way through the story. WOW!

As the title suggests, this is the Yule Ball: Part I, meaning there will be a Part II. And yeah... these two chapters will be game changers for Ana. That's all I'll say. I hope you enjoy; and thank you oh so much for keeping up with me. :)
“I—I’m a Slytherin; you’re a Gryffindor.” Ana knew it was another lame excuse.

Fred didn’t let it discourage him. “Strip away the colors and I’m just a boy who fancies a girl, and you’re just a girl who, I hope, fancies a boy, this boy to be precise.” He smiled. “So, I’ll ask again, Ana. Will you go to the ball with me?”


Ana smiled as she let her fingers brush down the beaded hips of her skirt. Her dress was a deep green with an illusion neckline. Her hair was pulled up into a low, loose bun with a few soft curls framing her face—courtesy of Flora. Her jewelry was minimal with simply a pair of short chunky earrings.

“Adrian is going to lose his head when she sees you,” Sadie continued.

“Thanks, but I’m not going with Adrian,” Ana said.

“I know. And he’s going to kick himself for not asking you.”

Ana smiled again. Her stomach was now in knots; the ball was so close. But Ana knew that this might be their last care-free moment for a while. So she had to push past the nerves; her smile brightened.

“And you look utterly divine in blue, Sae. It matches your eyes so well.”

“She may have tweaked the color a little in that instance,” Hestia said.

“Guilty,” Sadie admitted. “Oh! But I wish I could wear purple as well as you do, Hes.”

“Well not everyone can be perfect.”

“It’s so tiring isn’t it?” Ana teased.

“A real chore,” Flora added as she left the loo.

“Oh! Wow!”

“Duh-dun-da-duh,” Hes sang. “Are we sure this is just a ball and not your secret wedding?”

Flora had chosen a solid white dress with a low-cut v-neckline, crystalline cap sleeves, and a sheer back with more crystalline accents.

“Just giving Lucian a little taste of what’s to come,” Flora replied.

“Wait, what?” Ana asked.

“Do you mean…?” Hes asked.

Flora nodded. “It’s official. His parents signed the contract this morning.”

Now Ana recalled. Flora had mentioned a few weeks ago that her Dad, Aunt, and Uncle were in talks with the Boles about a marriage contract between Flora and Lucian Bole. Apparently, both parties had reached an agreement.
“Oh! Congratulations!” Sadie gushed as she rushed over to hug Flora.

“Guess I have to get used to calling him brother then,” Hestia said with mild reluctance.

Ana was shocked by the very notion of it all.

“Oh relax, Ana. We’re not getting married tonight.”

“No. You just have a binding contract that states that you will marry him within a designated time frame. You’re fifteen; doesn’t that strike you as the least bit too-early?” Ana asked.

“It’s five years, Ana. I’ll be twenty by the time we have to get married. Can’t you come down off your high horse for one night and just be happy for me?”

“I…” Ana sighed. “It’s not that I’m not happy for you, Flora. I just… Do you love him?”

“He’s a good match, Ana. He’s a pureblood. His family have supported the cause for centuries, they’re financially stable, and he already has a promising career lined up. Plus, he’s attractive.”

“That’s not what I asked.”

“What’s not to love?”

“Come on girls. Please don’t fight tonight. We’re all too pretty to fight,” Sadie said.

“I’m not trying to fight. I just think the notion of a marriage contract is outdated. It’s 1994, almost 95; can’t a girl be free to marry whomever she loves?”

“Of course she can be,” Hestia said. “So long as she’s not from a proper pure-blood family.”

Ana saw the warning in Hestia’s eyes and heard the bitterness in her voice. She knew this was neither the time nor the place to push the matter further. She swallowed roughly and tried her best at a genuine smile.

“You look beautiful, Flora. And if you look half this good in five years, then… Lucian will be sure to lose his mind.”


“Great! Now that that’s behind us,” Sadie began, “I think we should all take a picture before we leave. And we better hurry or we might miss the ball altogether.”

“Don’t worry, Sae; they can’t start the night without the fabulous four,” Ana said.

“Hes, get the camera.”

“Already on it, Sis. Everyone smile!”

Ana was now so nervous it was hard to keep it from showing on her face, but she did the best she could despite the growing knot in her stomach. Bole had been waiting for Flora in the common room, so she immediately broke away from the group to walk with him. If Ana hadn’t been so nervous and still slightly disturbed, she might have noticed the look on Bole’s face for
Ana, Sadie, and Hestia were left to climb the stairs to the Entrance Hall alone where Sadie’s and Hes’ dates were meeting them. Sadie couldn’t decide which French boy she wanted to go with, so she said yes to all three. The moment she saw them they whisked her away. Hestia pulled Ana aside.

“Are you all right, Ana?” she whispered softly.

“What? Yeah, I’m fine. Why?”

“Because you look a little green, and I don’t mean the dress.”

Ana snapped her mouth shut with the protest she was about to deliver.

“Look, I feel awful about what I did last week. Leaving you dateless like that, it wasn’t very BFF of me. I know Duncan wouldn’t mind escorting you too; come with us.”

“He’d be the luckiest bloke in the castle to take us both.”

“Ugh! I know, but it’s worth the ego boost. Come on.”

“Thanks, Hes, but I can’t. I—I have a date; I just…” Ana trailed off.

“You didn’t want Sev to scare him off?”

“Yeah,” Ana lied. It was an easy lie.

“You could have trusted me with a secret like that, Ana.” She smiled before looking over her shoulder; Duncan was waiting for her by the door. “I’ll leave you to it then. See you inside.”

They hugged, and then suddenly Ana was alone. Alone in a crowd of people. She looked around at her classmates. The girls were all dolled up in their finery. The boys proved that they could clean up nicely in their dress robes. And everywhere she looked she saw house intermingling with house.

There were Hufflepuffs talking to Slytherins. Ravenclaws were laughing with Gryffindors. Wherever she looked, however, there was one match-up that she didn’t see: red and green. It appeared that even at the Yule Ball there was one line that no one was willing to cross.

“Are you ready to turn some heads?” a voice whispered softly in her ear.

“Do you mean am I ready to throw away everything I know and go forward blindly into the great scary abyss?”

There was a pause. “Yeah. That.”

“No,” Ana replied quickly and quietly. “I’m not like you. I don’t know how to rush in with reckless abandon.”

“Then it’s high time you learned how.” He offered his arm to her.

Ana looked up into a pair of soft brown eyes. “How can you be so casual about this? I’m freaking out inside right now. Everything we know is about to change.”

He shrugged. “I’ve already done the most terrifying thing imaginable: telling you how I
feel. What happens next, live or die, yes or no, it has no effect on what I’ve already done. I’ll have my answer and I don’t care what anyone else has to say about it. Do you?”

“Is that everyone?” McGonagall called out in a sharp tone before popping her lips. “Mr. Weasley! Leave Miss Evans alone so she can enter the feast.”

Fred arched a brow while Ana took a deep breath. Then she slowly slid her arm through his. The surprised look on McGonagall’s face reverberated loudly through Ana’s body.

The Great Hall was decorated differently than usual. The house tables had been replaced with several round tables that sat a dozen people each. And around each table the house colors were indistinguishable and the lines almost nonexistent. Upon entering the Great Hall, the reaction that Ana feared was…absent, at first. Most people were consumed with their conversations and anticipation for the ball to begin; they didn’t notice The Wicked Witch on the arm of the Weasley she degraded. But when they did, a hush slowly spread over them.

Then the whispers started.

“Is that Evans with Weasley?”

“Can’t be.”

“Is he mad?”

“What’s she getting at this time?”

Ana tried not to look around, for fear that they would see her fear. When she spotted a familiar white dress, however, she couldn’t help but turn her attention to the girls where they all sat together with their dates. Flora’s face was resigned to bitter anger, complete with her characteristic lip curl. Sadie looked worried, whether that was for Ana or, more likely, her own well-being, Ana couldn’t tell. Meanwhile, Hes just looked confused and slightly hurt.

“What do you say? Do we venture into the viper pit?” Fred asked, noticing what had caught her attention.

“Vipers are venomous. Flora’s venom slowly stripes away your senses, leaving you completely immobile but in excruciating pain before finally finishing you off. A terrible way to go. A lion at least will simply maul you to death. Messy, painful, sure, but quick.”

“The lion’s den it is then,” Fred said as he led Ana to a table predominantly occupied by Gryffindors.

George was there, of course, with his date, a Hufflepuff named Sarah. Angelina and Lee Jordan appeared to be there as a couple. Then there was Katie Bell and Alicia Spinnet along with their dates, a pair of Durmstrang boys. When Ana and Fred arrived at the table, he pulled out Ana’s chair for her and then gently guided her into place before taking his own seat next to his brother.

The table was silent. The Gryffindors eyed Fred warily, but he simply smiled brightly.

“Everyone, I believe you know my date, Ana. Ana, I believe you know everyone… except, you two. I don’t believe we’ve met.”

“Oh! Fred, this is Petro Shrieve and Henri Checkov,” Ana said to a stunned table. “We’ve, ah…already met.”
“Friends of you precious Kowalski?” George asked under his breath. The table came under an awkward silence.

“Firstly,” Ana began calmly. “There’s nothing about Darek that’s ‘precious.’ Secondly, the word ‘my’ infers possession, and the possession of another human being as property has been outlawed since the early 1400s. So I make no claim that Darek is, was, nor will he ever be ‘mine.’”

“And thirdly, Kowalski is an imbecile,” Henri added.

The awkward silence persisted over the table until Fred picked up his menu. With a casualness that was at odds with the tension, he said, “I think I’ll have the roast. What about you, Ana?”

Ana picked up her own menu before hastily ordering the chicken. Slowly the rest of the table began ordering too. Their plates appeared before them and Fred seemed to be the only one immune to the awkwardness. That is until Katie Bell spoke up.

“I can’t believe you actually used a History of Magic lesson in conversation.”

“Ugh! I know. It’s these OWLs. They have me up all night studying,” Ana replied.

“Tell me about it. I’ll be so glad when they’re finished.”

“Ah. You girls should just follow mine and George’s approach,” Fred said.


“Precisely.”

“And how many OWLs did you get with that technique again?”

“Three,” Fred said proudly.

“Really?” Ana asked, sounding a little impressed. Fred beamed.

“That was three between the two of them, mind you,” Lee clarified.

“Please tell me one of them was in potions at least,” Ana said. Fred smiled a little brighter. “Oh good. I thought we were going to have a problem there. I bet Sev was mad.”

“Infuriated.”

“Sev?” Alicia asked.

“Professor Snape,” Fred said with more respect than Ana expected of him.

“Hh, I think you mean Professor Greasy Hair…” Lee said before realizing his error.

Ana stared at him while another awkwardness crept in over the table. Then she shrugged casually.

“He could do to wash it a bit more,” she said. “It’s a product of excessive potion brewing.”

“But your hair never looks greasy,” Katie said. “How do you manage that?”
“I have a really good shampoo and a few beauty charms that Sae…” Ana’s voice caught in her throat a bit and she coughed. “That Sadie showed me,” she finished.

The rest of the dinner continued without an abundance of awkwardness. George remained relatively quiet, only talking to Lee, Fred, and Sarah in subdued tones. The rest of the table, however, carried on with easy conversation. And when Ana, Katie, Angelina, and Alicia started talking about Quidditch, the conversation became a little more animated. By the end of it, even Lee was joking and laughing along with Ana, much to the dismay of George.
The Yule Ball: Part II

Chapter Notes

Whew! You're in for a doozy of a chapter here. Longest one yet!

Belladonna 39

The Yule Ball: Part II

After the food had been consumed, laughs had been shared, and the spark of new friendships had been kindled, Dumbledore stood from his place at the champion’s table. He said a few words of thanks over the food, then he asked everyone else to stand as well. With a flick of his wrist, the tables lined up against the walls and a small stage appeared; the instruments were already on it.

“Wait! That’s Myron, lead vocalist for The Weird Sisters!” Ana said as the band stood up. “I heard that Dumbledore booked them, but I didn’t believe it.”

“Are you a fan?” Fred asked.

“Yeah, I am! Sev won’t let me listen to them at home, though. He says he can’t stand the wailing.”

“My dad says the same thing,” Katie said. “So I just play it louder.” She laughed.

“Hey, is that…Hermione Granger dancing with Viktor Krum?” Alicia asked as the champions swirled by them.

Ana smiled. “Good girl, Granger. But, who’s that with Harry?”

“That’s Parvati Patil; I saw her sister with Ron earlier, I think,” Fred said.

Ana looked up at him as he smiled down at her. Then, in a manner very reminiscent of what he did earlier that evening, he held out his hand to her.

“Are you ready to turn a few more heads?”

“If you promise not to drop me, or step on my toes.”

“Ye of little faith.” He grinned.

Ana took his hand and allowed him to lead her on to the dance floor. The song was that of a simple waltz, much like the one she and Adrian had danced to for Sev. And like that dance, Fred showed surprising skill.

“You know how to waltz?” Ana couldn’t keep the surprise from her voice.

“It’s a standard part of every pure-blood tutoring,” he answered smugly before leading her into a spin.
Ana studied his face carefully. “You charmed your shoes, didn’t you?”

Fred chuckled. “Me?” he asked innocently. “Why I… I should have thought of that first; it would have been much easier.”

Ana laughed. “What did you do?”

“We, ah, created a little something to help our fellow blokes charm the girls.”

Ana looked to where Fred discreetly pointed and she saw a Ravenclaw quickly down a small vile before asking a girl to dance.

“It doesn’t taste very well, does it?” Ana asked noticing the boy’s twisted face.

“Eh, it could use a little work still. What about you? What’s your secret?”

“I wish I could say I charmed my shoes or drank a potion, but I actually was subjected to that standard pure-blood tutoring.”

“Sounds awful.”

“It was.”

Fred spun Ana one last time before the song ended, and as he did, Ana noticed that the couples around them weren’t paying them any attention at all. No one seemed to care anymore; they were having too much fun themselves.

The band started their next song, one that was worlds away from the classic waltz, and the dance continued. Song after song Fred was at Ana’s side. In the few times that he wasn’t, he was talking to George and Ana was singing along with Katie and the band. Then Fred would slide back in, his hand sliding around her waist or taking her hand. Ana tried to look for Hestia or Sadie, even Flora or Bole; she knew if she found one she’d find them all, but the crowd was too thick around the stage to see far.

Ana had lost all track of time and count of songs that had been played when she turned to Fred and leaned in close to shout in his ear—because that was the only way anyone could hear what someone else was saying.

“I need a drink!”

Fred nodded and interlocked their fingers. Then he used his shoulders to push their way through the mob. There was an almost rush of cool air once they broke through; Ana took a deep breath and Fred smiled over his shoulder at her. In the corner, Ana caught sight of Harry and Ron sitting with Percy at a table; Harry looked up and caught her eye.

“Hey!” Ana tugged Fred back towards her. “Can you bring us something? I’ll just be over there.”

Fred looked to where she nodded and saw Harry and his brothers. He was curious about her choice of tables but decided not to push it now.

“Yeah. Sure. I won’t be long so don’t get comfortable.”

He grinned and squeezed her hand before walking off. Ana made her way to Harry. The closer she got the more it became clear that they were not having a good time. Ron was slouched
back against the table, arms folded over his chest, and a sour look upon his face. Harry, at least, was managing to keep the sourness from showing.

“Hi,” she said.

“Hey,” Harry replied. His eyes flickered over to Fred briefly before looking back at Ana.

“So… you and Fred?” he asked.

“Uh—yeah. I think so at least. I mean… he hasn’t dumped a vat of bubotuber pus on me yet, so there’s that.”

The twitch of Harry’s smile was minimal. “I don’t think he’d do that… not to you.”

Ana smiled.

“Couldn’t blame him if he did though,” Ron muttered. “Think I’d help him.”

“You and George can team up together then. Just be careful, when you prod a sleeping snake, you get bit,” Ana said. She returned her focus to Harry. “So, you and—ah—was it Parvati?”

“Yeah, and no. It didn’t… It was just…”

“Ah. I see.” Ana looked back at the dance floor and saw Parvati and a girl who was clearly her twin dancing with a couple of Durmstrang boys.

“Well, I’m sorry about that, but you know, there are plenty of other girls out there who’d be willing to dance with you. You just have to go out there and ask them.”

“Maybe we don’t want to dance with any of those girls,” Ron bit back.

“There are plenty of blokes out there too,” she offered.

Percy scoffed.

“You don’t approve, Perc? No, I don’t imagine you would. I, however, don’t judge on something like that. To each his own.”

“It wouldn’t matter. I… I don’t know how to dance, anyway,” Harry mumbled.

“Fred has a potion for that, apparently,” Ana said.

“Git never told us about any potion,” Ron mumbled.

“I bet you didn’t ask either.”

“Mother will not be pleased to find out that they’ve been experimenting again,” Percy said. “And they certainly shouldn’t be giving untested concoctions to students.”

“All the great potioneers became great by experimenting, and who should they test their concoctions on? Ministry twats?”

Harry snorted but tried to hide it as a cough, while Percy’s face turned red and he jumped to his feet. “Maybe they should give them to all the stinking snakes of this school; nobody cares what happens to them.” Then he stormed off.
Ana rolled her eyes as he walked off. Making nice with Fred’s brothers was going to be a lot harder than she thought; three out of five hated her, and the other two didn’t even know her.

“Hey look, Granger and Krum are heading this way,” Ana said. She noticed Ron shift out of the corner of her eye and somehow his face became even sourer.

“Hey, Krum, be careful with this one,” Ana said. “I’ve seen her spellwork first hand and I wouldn’t want to be on the wrong end of it.”

Krum said nothing but simply nodded before walking off to fetch their drinks.

“Hot isn’t it?” Hermione asked.

Harry shrugged and Ron grunted.

“Don’t mind the sour pants, Granger. They’re not interested in having fun tonight,” Ana said.

“Where’s Fred?” Hermione asked.

“Well, he was supposed to be getting us drinks but now… he’s communing with George.”

“It looks like they’re at the drink table at least,” Hermione said with a laugh.

“There is that, I suppose.”

“Ana! Hey, Ana!” Katie called out as she came over with Angelina, Alicia, and Sarah. “We were all going to the loo to freshen up a bit. Wanna come?”

“Sure. You in, Granger?” Ana asked.

Hermione looked down at the boys and sighed. “I might as well. Will you tell Viktor and Fred where we went, Harry?”

“Uh…sure.”

A group of girls left the bathroom just as Ana and company entered.

“Wow! They even decorated in here,” Sarah said.

“And supplied all the necessary products,” Angelina added as she picked up a bottle of perfume.

“Alright, so who goes first?” Katie asked.

“What?” Hermione asked.

“Aww, poor Granger. She’s spent too much time with thick-headed boys to know what this is. You didn’t actually think we all came here to gussy-up, did you?” Ana said. “Alicia will demonstrate. You and Henri, how’d it happen?”

Alicia smiled brightly before delving into her story. Then one by one each girl shared how their date asked them out.
“Alright, your turn, Ana.”

“Yeah, I want to know about this one.”

“There’s not much to it really,” Ana began, a smile on her face. “He took me behind Olde Mac’s, told me what an idiot he was, and that he was going mad for me and that he didn’t care what anyone else thought.”

“Wow.”

“Who knew?”

“Fred’s a closet romantic.”

“Any boy who can confess he’s an idiot is a keeper.”

“Now, Granger, your go. How did you land Quidditch International’s most eligible player?” Ana asked.

“Since Troy was taken off the market,” Katie quickly added.

“True.”

“Is that really a thing?” Hermione asked.

Ana and Katie shared a smile. “Oh, it’s a thing. Enough stalling now. Spill.”

Hermione sighed. “We…we were in the library together. Not together together, I mean…we were both there at different tables. Then he came over to mine. He said he’d been trying for days to pluck up the courage to ask me to the ball. He…he looked so nervous I couldn’t say no.”

“Why would you want to?”

“The boy can face down a full grown, nesting dragon, but he gets nervous asking a girl to a dance?”

“Tell me that doesn’t speak to our true nature,” Ana said.

“Woman: more fierce than a dragon. I love it,” Katie added.

The girls were in a fit of laughter when the door opened again. In walked a pretty blonde with an elegant braided crown and a stunning blue dress.

“Sadie!” Ana exclaimed before going over to hug her. Sadie remained stiff. “Where have you been? I’ve been trying to find you all night.”

“What are you doing, Ana?” Sadie’s voice was as cold and rigid as her hug.

“Right now… I’m trying to ask where my best friends have been dancing all night so can go say hi.”

“With him, Ana,” Sadie said with an impatient huff. “What are you doing with him?”

Ana’s shoulders tensed at the tone Sadie was using. For one fraction of a second, Ana was actually having enough fun that she forgot about her initial deep-seated worries.
“I hope you have something epic planned; something bigger than last year,” Sadie said.

“The only thing I have planned is fun,” Ana said tightly. She could sense the others bristling behind her.

“Ana, Flora is crazed with anger.”

“I don’t care how angry she is!”

“She’s ready to be done with you, Ana; she doesn’t know I’m here…”

“Done with me? Five years of friendship and she’s ready to be done with me? All because of a boy?”

“Not just a boy, Ana.”

“Oh? Is it because he’s a Gryffindor or a Weasley?”

“Take your pick.”

“Unbelievable!”

Ana threw her hands up in the air and shook her head as she tried to bite back the sting of tears. Sadie’s demeanor softened and she took Ana’s hand in her own.

“It’s not too late, Ana,” she said tenderly. “You can still come back from this. Just apologize. Tell us it was all for a laugh. She’ll take you back.”

When Ana looked back at Sadie, it was with tears still lingering in the corners of her eyes.

“Sadie,” she choked out behind half a sob. “You know what it did to me last year. You saw; you were there. You held me, all night. If I walk away now, there’s no going back. He’ll be gone forever. And yet…you still ask this of me?”

“I know.” Sadie almost sounded remorseful, guilty even. “It won’t be easy, but we’re here for you. We’re your friends.”

“Well, maybe she needs better friends,” Katie said, stepping up behind Ana.

Sadie’s lip curled, making her look like Flora for a moment.

“Don’t tell me you think you can be that friend.”

“Well, we’re certainly willing to try,” Angelina said. Ana could hear all the girls murmuring their agreement as they too stepped forward.

“You’ll never have what we have,” Sadie said.

“Maybe. But we also won’t make her choose between friendship and a bloke.”

Sadie rolled her eyes and looked back at Ana. “I trust you, Ana. I know you’ll do the right thing.” She gave Ana’s hand a few gentle pats before leaving, taking the breath from Ana’s lungs as she did.

“What a…” Katie began, but Hermione cut across her.
“Ana?” she asked gently. Ana had begun to pull away from the girls.

Without looking at them, Ana said, “I need some air.”

Fred was standing near the doors talking to George and Lee while keeping an eye out for Ana. He knew she’d hit it off with Katie and Angelina, and he was so glad they welcomed her in so easily. He wished George would be as welcoming, but he knew his resistance came from a good place; he’d come around eventually.

Suddenly, Fred caught sight of Sadie Baldock leaving the girl’s loo, her patent sneer in place. Fred felt a twinge in his chest; what was she doing in there with Ana and the others? That twinge intensified when Ana left in a hurry. She was clearly upset and didn’t notice him as she left the castle. What could Fred do but go after her?

Fred made it to the rose garden just in time to see the tail of her green dress slither down a winding path. He hurried to follow her. First down one path, then another, and another… Finally, he caught up to her at the end of one, staring off into nothing, her back towards him. He approached her with great caution.

“Ana?” Fred knew she heard him, but she showed no sign that she had. So, he moved in a little closer and tried again.

“I know this is about Baldock.”

Her head moved slightly, almost like she wanted to look over her shoulder at him but stopped herself.

“I saw her leave the loo just before you did. What… what did she say?”

Finally, she turned to face him, and the look he saw on her face nearly crushed him.

“They want me to choose…” she choked out. “To choose between the first friends I’ve ever had and a boy. And they are my friends, good friends. We have five years of secrets and stories and laughs and summers spent together. And… and all because of one night they want me to choose.”

Fred felt his happiness deflate a little more with each tear she shed. He knew she had been worried about what her friends would think, but he always thought she was over-reacting. They were her friends; they wouldn’t really de-friend her because of him, would they?

“I… I knew they’d be angry, but I didn’t think… I thought a cold shoulder here or there, an icy glare maybe. I knew our two circles of friends would never co-mingle, but I didn’t think they’d make me do this! To choose between them and you…”

“And I… I thought the choice would be impossible to make, you know? But it isn’t. There is no choice, Fred.”

Fred nodded slowly. “I… I understand, Ana.” He nearly choked on his own words. How could they be over before they even began?

“I… I understand.”

“No… No, I don’t think you do, Red.” Ana approached him this time. “There is no
choice because the choice is you. It’s always *been* you. It’s just…they’re my friends and I don’t
know how to let them go.”

Fred was immobile and speechless for a second as Ana’s words echoed through his head.

“What do you hear me, Red?”

“The choice is you. It’s always been you.” He jumped into action, wrapping his arms
around her and pulling her close.

“Then don’t.” He said. “Don’t let them go. The Little Snake I know is stubborn and
resilient. When Flint told her she didn’t belong on the pitch, she proved to everyone that she was
Merlin’s gift to Quidditch.”

Ana choked out something between a laugh and a sob.

“They’re trying to force you to choose, but you don’t have to choose, Ana. I know you’ll
find a way to have both.”

Ana nodded against him and clung to him as she wept.

Ana cried for a good while and Fred held her close. When the tears stopped, Ana wasn’t
quite ready to return to the ball, so they moved to a nearby bench and sat down. The rose garden
had been charmed against the cold, but Fred saw the gooseflesh on Ana’s arms. So, he took off his
jacket and draped it over her shoulders.

“Thanks,” she mumbled.

“Don’t mention it.”

Ana looked over and smiled faintly. “I think I ruined your vest. Sorry.”

“Meh,” he shrugged. “I didn’t much care for it.”

“Well, I thought you looked very sharp in it.”

“Looked? What do you mean ‘looked?’ I’m still rocking this vest.”

Ana’s smile grew. “Yeah. Yeah, you are.”

“Meanwhile, you… I look at you, Ana, and it feels like I can’t breathe.”

“Well, no wonder. If the mascara on your vest is any indication, then I look right
monstrous now; I’d scare anyone’s breath away.”

“Psh. Nonsense.”

“Hmm. I’ll be the judge of that.” Ana carefully reached up under her dress and pulled her
wand from her leg holster.

“Well, you come prepared.”

“Sev taught me never to go anywhere without it, or without one of these.” She twisted her
leg to show him an empty vial.
Fred laughed. “God forbid you find yourself on a snowy bench without an empty vial.”

Ana laughed too. “You never know.” She summoned a compact mirror from her dorm and used it to inspect the damage.

“Wow.”

“See. Not monstrous.”

“For all her flaws, Flora does know a thing or two about keeping your look pristine.” All of Ana’s curls were intact and there was only minimal smudging around the eyes that she rectified easily.

“Oh, Fred! You were right! I’m so pretty! Ooh, look at me!” Fred mimicked in a very prissy voice while he tossed his hair with his hands.

Ana simply stared at him for a moment before saying, “Look. I know I’m damn near perfect and everyone wants to be me, but…you’re going to have to do better than that, Love.”

“Love?”

“I didn’t mean…”

“Are we at pet names already… Sugar Plum?”

“Eww. No. Don’t. And I’m pretty sure we’ve been at pet names since day one…Red.”

“Ah. Touché, Little Snake.”

Ana loved the feeling of being able to talk to Fred like nothing had changed between them but knowing that everything had changed. She loved that simply sitting on a snowy bench with him was enough to make her forget about the troubles that awaited her in the castle. Most of all, she loved the mischievous glint in his eye every time he smiled at her, and it made looking away almost impossible.

“What do we have here? A pair of canoodling lovers?”

Ana and Fred jumped slightly at the sudden intrusion. They looked behind them to find Sev and Karkaroff standing there. At first, Sev looked surprised and then angry as his posture stiffened.

“Isn’t that your ward, Severus?”

Sev did not respond. Ana really didn’t feel like dealing with him right then. So she stood.

“Come on, Fred; let’s go back.”

“Oh! Alright, if you’re sure you’re ready,” Fred replied.

“I’m not, but it’s better than staying here with a pair of chaperones standing behind us the whole night.”

“Agreed.”

“Not so fast, Belladonna,” Sev said lowly.
“Not now, Sev, please,” Ana pleaded. “Whatever you’re about to say, whatever disappointment you’re about to express, please just…hold it for another day. I think I’ve reached my max for disappointed Slytherins tonight.” Ana saw the tiniest flicker of a questioning brow cross Sev’s face.

“You don’t really think that my friends are okay with this, do you?” she asked.

Sev was silent for the longest moment, his eyes studying Ana and Fred and Ana’s arm looped through his, before finally nodding and turning away.

“You’re letting her go?”

“Yes, Igor. For now.”

Back inside the ball, Fred and Ana danced until once again he helped her forget the troubles awaiting her. There was no sign of Flora and the girls still, only Katie and the Gryffindors. Together, they danced, and they sang, and they laughed, and they didn’t ask about the ultimatum Sadie issued. And when the last song played, a slower tune for couples, Fred held Ana close and told her with his actions, not his words, that everything would be all right.

Then, despite the threat of enemy territory, Fred insisted on walking Ana back to her common room.

“Alright…” Ana turned to face Fred. “This is where we say goodnight.”

“That’s not what we agreed upon. I said I’d walk you to your common room, not leave you in the middle of a dungeon corridor.”

“I’m not about to show you the location of our super-secret door; you might do something nefarious with the intel.”

“Ah. But you’re assuming I don’t already know it’s just around that corner.”

“Whether it is or whether it isn’t, this is as far as you go.”

“I’ll show you the Gryffindor common room one day.”

“Eww. Why would I want that? It’s probably high in a tower somewhere covered in red. I look awful in red.”

“I doubt that very much.”

“Doubt what exactly?”

“That you’d look awful in anything.”

Ana blushed; she couldn’t help it. “Charm won’t win your way through.”

“Damn! Well, it was worth a shot. Bye.”

He tried walking away but since he was holding her hand, he made a big show about being pulled back.

“You’re an idiot,” she said with a laugh. “You know that, right?”
“Was. I was an idiot. I left all that behind to be with you.”

“All of it?”

“Well… twelve percent of it at least.” He grinned and Ana rolled her eyes. Neither one of them were ready for the night to end, so they stood there fiddling with each other’s hand.

“I… I had a really good time tonight,” Ana said softly.

“As did I. I’m glad you said yes.”

“Technically, I didn’t; I nodded dumbly.”

“Yes, well, it was implied.”

They fell silent for another moment.

“I should go n—”

“—Breakfast me?”

“What?” Ana asked.

“I mean, will you have breakfast with me? Tomorrow? In the morning?”

Ana grinned. “When else would one have breakfast?”

“Well, breakfast for supper is always good in my opinion.”

“Yes.”

“Yes?” He furrowed his brow.

“Yes,” Ana repeated.

“Oh! You mean breakfast!”

Ana rolled her eyes and shook her head. Then she leaned forward slightly and kissed his cheek.

“Goodnight, Red.”

Even after Ana had turned the corner and entered the common room, Fred was still standing in the corridor, his hand pressed to his cheek where she had kissed him.

“Ten points from Gryffindor.”

Fred turned to find Sev lurking in the shadows behind him.

“You’ve missed curfew, Mr. Weasley. And it will be another ten points for every minute you’re late, and I will know.”

Fred smiled. “Completely worth it, Professor. Goodnight. Oh! And Happy Christmas, Sir.”
When Ana made it to her room, the curtains around the girls’ beds were closed. When she woke the next morning, their beds were empty. Some small part of her had hoped that their anger would dissipate over night, but she wasn’t surprised that it hadn’t.

The common room was never really warm, even with all the fires blazing, but that morning it was pure icy. The cold glares she got from the few occupants were bone chilling. Most simply stared, but a few of the fourth years jeered as she walked by. Ana did her best to ignore all of it, but ignoring and not hearing are two different things entirely. She left the common room as quickly as she could and missed the one friendly face.

“Ana! Ana, wait up!”

She slowed down just enough to allow Adrian to catch up to her.

“What’s up, hey?”

“I’m fine,” she said tersely. “I’m not going to let a couple of thick-headed idiots get to me.”

“Good.” Adrian nodded. “Good.”

There was a pause.

“Can I help you with something, Adrian?”

“No, I… I just wanted to say that what Sadie did last night wasn’t cool.”

“What do you mean?” How…? Ana felt a small panic begin to creep in. How many people knew about the choice Sadie issued? And who had told?

“I overheard her telling Flora about your conversation in the loo,” Adrian explained quickly. “They shouldn’t have done that to you.”

“Yeah, it wasn’t exactly her shining moment of friendship. I was hoping to talk to them, but they were asleep when I got in and gone when I woke up. Have you seen them?”
“No. Sorry. But I do know that they weren’t happy when you returned with Fred.”

“Yeah, I guessed as much.”

“But, you were…weren’t you?”

“Huh?”

“You looked happy last night, really happy.”

“Yeah,” Ana smiled at the mere memory of her night with Fred. “I was happy…am happy.”

“Good. You deserve to be happy, and if he’s the one to make you happy, then screw what everyone else thinks. If you’re really as good of friends as you seem to be, then the girls will come around…eventually. Don’t give up on them.”

“Fred said something similar.”

“Smart bloke. Hey, and look, about us…we’re still good too. You have one friend in Slytherin who won’t turn his back on you.”

“Thanks, Adrian. That means a lot.”

“Sure. I’ll see you around.”

Ana made the trek up to the Great Hall alone. When she arrived, she scanned the Slytherin table but saw no sign of the girls. She was distracted from her disappointment by Katie calling out to her. She looked at the table next to her usual one and saw Katie and the girls. Then she saw Fred; he smiled at her, and that disappointment slipped to the back of her mind.

“Hi,” Fred said as she sat down beside him.

“Hi,” she replied.

“Sleep all right?”

“Well enough. You?”

“Like an angel.”

“That’s the only time that ever happens, huh?”

“Oi!” He mocked offense.

“She knows you well, doesn’t she?” Lee said.

“Alright, enough with the googly eyes,” Katie interjected. “Sweet roll or cereal, Ana?”

“Umm…eggs and toast please,” Ana replied.

“Meh. Healthy.”

“There wasn’t much sugar in the house growing up. I learned to live without it.”
“Oh, you poor thing,” Angelina cooed.

“You see, Evans, the point of school is to break away from those rigid parental structures,” Lee said.

“I thought the point of school was to learn sh***,” Alicia countered.

“That’s what they want you to think.”

“Well, I can’t really break away, can I?” Ana asked, then she looked up to the high table and waved at Sev. “Oof. He’s looking particularly sour today.”

“You know, you come off so normal it’s easy to forget that you were raised by him,” Lee said.

“Umm… thanks?”

“Forgive him, Ana. He means well but he’s not all there,” Angelina said.

“You know, he was lurking in the shadows last night after you left,” Fred said.

“Lee?”

“Wha?” Leek perked up.

“No, Snape,” Fred answered. Ana’s eyes went wide.

“What did he do? A month’s worth of detention?”

“Not much really. Just took off ten points for missing curfew and another ten for every minute I was late.”

“Is that why we were sixty points short this morning?” Angelina asked.

“That’s all?” Ana said surprised. Fred nodded. “You’d think that would relax me, but it doesn’t. It only makes me more unnerved.” Ana stared past Fred towards the high table for a moment. “Maybe he’ll hear enough complaints from my housemates that it will inspire leniency and loyalty for his ward.”

Fred frowned slightly, a look that was out of place for him. Ana placed her hand over his.

“I don’t regret it. This is my choice.”

He nodded somberly. “I just hate the idea of anyone giving you a hard time because of me.”

“But one smile from you makes me forget all of that.”

He smiled faintly.


Fred’s smile grew a little. His eyes darted imperceptibly down to his plate where he had few grapes. He almost seemed to be asking, “Should I?”

“Do it.” Ana smiled back.
Fred didn’t have to be a Legilimens to decipher Ana’s look. He chucked a few grapes at Katie’s head with the precision of a professional chaser and smacked her square in her forehead. She gasped with surprise, and Fred grabbed Ana’s hand.

“Come on; we gotta move.”

Fred pulled Ana with him as they took off running form the Great Hall, Katie hot on their heels. Fred, however, knew many secret passages and he pulled Ana through them. Katie somehow managed to keep them in sight. That is until Ana revealed a few secrets of her own.

“No, no in here,” Ana whispered as she pulled Fred behind a tapestry.

“There’s no way out of this one.”

“Shh.”

Ana muttered a few spells, and then there was nothing to do but wait. They heard Katie running along the corridor and passing them. Then she turned and came back. She paced around a few times, circling their location, but never finding them. Then she muttered a few curse words and threats before giving up the chase. Ana gave a sigh of relief and turned her focus back to Fred. In the small alcove, their personal space was limited and they were pressed up against each other.

“She was tracking us. I threw her off.”

“I guess I should say, thank you; Katie’s got quite the arm,” Fred said, rubbing on old injury.

“I know; I’ve seen her play.” Ana was transfixed by the look in his eye. “But you’re surprised; you didn’t think I could do it. You know, you may think you and George have a monopoly on pranks in this school, but there’s a reason why I never get caught.”

Fred grinned, sending a shockwave through Ana’s body. “So, what’s your secret then?”

“Oh, Red, that’s cute but so far off. We’re not quite there yet; I mean, we haven’t even had our first kiss.” She patted him gently on the chest before leaving him in the dark.

He paused only a moment before chasing after her. “Oh? And what do you call last night?”

“That wasn’t a kiss.”

“No? I seem to recall a pair of lips on skin last night, right about...here.” He pointed to the spot she had kissed him.

“That was the cheek; it doesn’t count.”

“I don’t know; it was pretty close to the lips.”

“Pretty close isn’t close enough.”

“Alright, alright... say you’re right...”

“I am.”

“...then we can resolve that.”
“We could.” Ana looked up and smiled at him. “But these things don’t need to be rushed, do they?”

“Nah,” he shook his head. “They’ll happen when they happen.”

Ana smiled, glad he genuinely understood.

“Oh, look! Do you remember this room?” Fred asked as he stepped into an empty classroom, their empty classroom.

“How could I forget it?”

“It’s been a while since we’ve been in here. Why don’t we put it to use again?”

“How so?” Ana asked a little uncertainly.

“Talking, Little Snake. We used to be good at that.”

“Yeah…we were weren’t we?”

Ana followed him to the back wall where he used a softening charm to cushion the floor a little. Then they sat with their backs against the wall and their fingers interlaced between them, and they talked. Nothing too heavy at first. They talked about Ana’s thesis work; she got really excited when she told him of her recent breakthrough. And they talked about some of the things they missed talking about last year, like the world cup. That led to them talking about that day.

“I… I don’t really know why I did it. I guess…I saw you with Macavoy and it hurt, so much so that I had to make you hurt in turn.”

“I know; you don’t have to explain, Ana. Your letter already did that.”

“I still have no idea what letter you’re talking about.”

“Well, that’s why I have…hang on; it’s here somewhere.” He began searching his various pockets until he found what he was looking for. “This! I brought it along just in case it came up.”

He handed her a folded and crumpled piece of parchment before sitting back down. Ana carefully unfolded it and began reading. Though skeptical at first, her own written words soon came to her.

“Where did you get this? How did you get this?”

“This summer, by owl,” Fred replied. “You wrote it, right?”

“Yes, I wrote it, but I didn’t send it. I…I must have lost it, and with everything that happened at the end of last year, I forgot about it.”

“What do you mean?”

“There was a lot going on with Lupin and Black, I…”

“Lupin? Professor Lupin? What does he have to do with this?”

“Everything. He…he’s the reason I wrote this in the first place.”

Ana could see his confusion and curiosity. She sighed and decided to explain.
“He may have been one of your biggest fans,” she said. “From the moment it happened, he was there, encouraging me to apologize. And I wanted to; I did, but I was convinced that you’d never want to speak to me again. The few times I actually had the opportunity, the words would get lost between my brain and my mouth and I’d freeze. Then George would be George.”

“You mean, he’d show up and the opportunity would disappear.”

She nodded. “So, at the end of the year, Professor Lupin suggested that I try writing it all down. He said it worked for him, that he was able to work out his frustrations and grievances with his friends through letters he’d written over the years. And, he was right. At that moment, writing this letter was almost…therapeutic. There…there was another letter,” she recalled.

“Who was that one for?”

“The Wicked Witch.” Ana smiled. “I told her how she had ruined my life, and how I didn’t want anything to do with her anymore. And, I’ll have you know, I haven’t done anything untoward to Edgecombe since, and I think that speaks volumes to my character now.”

Fred grinned. “It does. I know what she was to you. So, Lupin convinced you to write this letter, but how did he make you lose it?”

“Well, it wasn’t him actually. It was Bl…” Ana bit her lip in sudden silence. She knew if she went into detail about Black and the Shrieking Shack, she’d have to go into detail about all of it, including Harry. One look in his eyes though, and Ana knew she had to go through with it.

“What did your brother tell you about the events that happened last year?” she asked.

His pinched brow and confused look told Ana that he didn’t know much at all. “You mean, about how he broke his leg doing some stupid move out by the Whomping Willow?”

Ana sighed. “More like underneath the willow.”

“What?”

“There’s a tunnel beneath the willow that leads to the Shrieking Shack. Ron’s leg broke while he was being dragged through there.”

“What?!” Fred still looked confused.

“So, he didn’t tell you anything about the shack, or Lupin, or… Black?”

Fred shook his head. “No, he didn’t. Ana, what’s my idiot brother gotten himself into?”

“Where do I even begin?” Ana paused to gather her thoughts. “Alright, so… I haven’t told this to anyone, and I’m surprised your brother hasn’t said anything in spite of me asking him not to, but then again…. Before I tell you anything, you have to promise me that you won’t tell anyone.”

“Ana…”

“Other than George, of course; I wouldn’t ask you to go behind him. But no one else, Fred. I’m not ready for a lot of people to know yet. We still haven’t really figured out what this means for us or what to do with it. Everything’s so complicated, and I don’t know how we’ll ever figure it out with everything going on. And…”
“Ana! Just…breathe, alright? Relax, and…. You only have to tell me if you want to, and I solemnly swear not to tell anyone.”

Ana nodded and took a deep breath before beginning. “So, it started the day I wrote this letter…”

And then she told him everything she could remember about the shack, everything that Harry had filled in on the train about Pettigrew, and everything concerning the fallout with Sev that occurred because of it.

“What… So you and…?”

“Yeah.”

“And Snape just…?”

“Yeah,” Ana replied.

“Wow, Ana, that’s….that’s almost too much for any one person to handle.”

“Like I said, everything is complicated. Every conversation we have is awkward. We feel this sense, this need almost, to connect; we’re family but neither of us remembers the other. It doesn’t help that his best friend hates me either.”

“Ron’s a git; don’t let him bother you.”

“Git or not he’s still a friend, and the opinions of friends matter even when you don’t want them to. To go against that opinion…I couldn’t ask Harry to do that.”

“So… change the opinion.”

Ana scoffed. “Have you met your brother? He’s a Weasley; they’re as stubborn as Slytherins sometimes.”

“Nagh!” Fred groaned while making a face. “You can’t say things like that aloud.”

Ana rolled her eyes and smiled faintly. “So, that’s my messy life. What about yours?”

“Well, let’s see… I’m dating the most beautiful girl in school and… Nope; that’s it. My life is pretty good.”

Ana’s cheeks flushed brilliantly and she fought a losing battle against it.

“What do you call this?”

“Umm…sitting in an empty classroom talking. Everyone does that.”

Fred laughed loudly. “They don’t typically sit in an empty classroom to talk, Ana.”

Ana’s red cheeks turned redder. “I know that, Fred. I’m not completely naive. But snogging isn’t dating; snogging is snogging.”
“And we’re not doing that either.”

“No, we’re not. Not yet at least…”

“No need to rush it,” he said with a smile. “So, we’re not dating yet and we’re not snogging yet; we’re… talking.”

Ana nodded. “Yeah. That’s it.”

Ana returned to her dorm after lunch to an unexpected encounter. Hestia was lying on her back staring up at the canopy above her bed. Flora and Sadie were deep in a conversation that ended abruptly when Ana walked in. Flora looked at her with an icy glare she usually reserved Muggles and Muggle-borns. Sadie’s glare was almost a perfect mirror of Flora’s but with a touch more tenderness and regret. Hestia paid Ana no mind whatsoever and continued to stare at her canopy.

Ana froze at the door. She hadn’t yet worked out how to react to them. And she never expected their first interaction to be a chance encounter during the middle of the day. She chose, in the spur of the moment, to act like nothing had happened at all.

“Last night was amazing, wasn’t it?” she said with a beaming smile. “I mean, who knew that Dumbledore could book The Weird Sisters! They were wicked last night. And did you see Flitwick’s stage dive?!”

Flora and Sadie continued to glare at her while Hestia’s attention didn’t stay from her canopy. Ana’s smile faltered slightly, but she pushed on and moved towards her bed.

“I came to get my gloves and scarf. There’s going to be an inter-house snowball fight on the grounds. I’ve been charged with helping to get some of Durmstrang to play. Sae, do you think Pierre and Louie will be interested? You all are welcome too, of course; it’s going to be epic!”

“We don’t want to participate in your childish snowball fight,” Flora snapped impatiently.

“Funny. You didn’t think they were childish last week when you wanted to start one,” Ana replied. “You should really consider coming. It’ll be fun. We only have a few days of holiday left, and…”

“I believe Sadie laid out your options pretty clearly last night,” Flora cut across Ana again. “You have a choice to make. Choose wisely.”

Ana shut her eyes and took a few deep breaths.

“Ana, please, just come back to us,” Sadie urged.

“You know… now that you mention it, I think I do recall Sae saying something about a choice to make. And I’ve made my choice.” Ana looked Sadie in the eye first and then Flora.

“I choose not to choose,” she said. “Just because I fancy some boy doesn’t mean we can’t still be friends.”

“That’s precisely what fancying this boy means!”

“Why? Give me one good reason that has nothing to do with his house or his name. Is he
a bigot? A womanizer? Is he daft or dumb? Or is he one of those American serial murderers from one of Duncan’s films? No! He’s a good bloke who’s been nothing but a perfect gentleman.

“And he makes me happy; he makes me smile, and laugh, and forget about this pile of dragon dung you’ve put me in! So, I will not let him go. But I won’t let us go either. I think our friendship is stronger than that. These last five years have to count for something. I won’t just throw them away.”

Flora and Sadie were silent, and for a moment Ana thought she had gotten through to them. She was wrong.

“Shame. We were friends, Ana. I almost thought of you as a sister,” Flora said coolly. “But you changed all that when you fell for a blood-traitor. If you lie with filth, you wake with filth. And if you’re not careful, Ana, then your blood will be as dirty as his one day.”

Then she turned and walked out; Sadie followed behind. Meanwhile, Hestia still hadn’t moved or looked away from her canopy.

“At least you’re still here. Thanks,” Ana said softly.

Hestia looked over at Ana then, and Ana saw an emptiness that had never been there before. Without speaking a word, Hestia got off her bed and headed towards the door.

“Hes? Not you too. I thought you would have understood.”

Hestia turned back to Ana, now looking angry.

“I would have understood, Ana, if you had told me. The thing is though, you didn’t tell me. I confided my biggest secret in you, and you couldn’t do me the same courtesy.”

“I…I couldn’t tell anyone,” Ana stammered weakly.

Hestia nodded. “Flora almost thought of you as a sister, Ana, but you were a sister to me. A sister, who I thought would have trusted me with anything, but it turns out I was wrong. You didn’t trust me with a damn thing. That’s what has killed this friendship, Ana, not your dating preference.”

And then, just like Flora and Sadie, Hestia walked out.
Fred walked into a mostly empty common room and found his brother and Harry sitting on the same couch he’d left them on.

“What do you want?” Ron sneered as Fred sat beside Harry.

Fred ignored him and spoke to Harry, “Ana never showed for the fight.”

“Good. Don’t know why you invited her anyways,” Ron said.

Again, Fred ignored him, “I was wondering if you knew where she might be.”

“Why would I know anything?” Harry asked.

“She told me, Harry.”

“She what?”

“She told you? I thought she didn’t want anyone to know,” Ron said.

“Well, I’m not just anyone.”

“Still, I…I don’t know where she is.”

Fred sighed. Then an idea came to him. “Do you have the map?”

“Uh…”

“He won’t give it to you. Don’t give to him, Harry.”

“Shut up, Ron,” Fred finally said.

“Yeah. I got it,” Harry said. “It’s in my room. I’ll go get it.”

“I’ll come with.”

The fourth year dorm was empty, mercifully, when Harry and Fred entered.

“Er—sorry for the mess,” Harry said as he rummaged through his things for the map.

“Pft. You’ve never seen mine and George’s room have you? It’s ten times worse here at school. I’m pretty sure the House Elves have given up on trying to clean our things.”

“Sorry. I’m sure it’s here somewhere.”

“This is Ron’s bed, isn’t it?”

“Er – yeah. Why?”
“He’s been a git lately. I should do something about it. Hmm, let’s see.” He took his wand out and tapped his chin in thought. “No, that’s too easy…That’s not good enough…Spi…”

“Here it is!” Harry exclaimed.

Fred turned in an instant. “Ah! My old friend.” He took the map gently from Harry’s hands. “Do you mind if I do the honors, Harry?”

Harry shook his head. “No. Go on.”

“I solemnly swear that I am up to no good…as always.” Fred tapped his wand to the parchment and the Marauder’s Map came to life before them. “That never grows tiresome. She’s a beauty, isn’t she?”

“Er –“

Before Harry could answer, Fred laid the map on the bed, tapped his wand to it, and said, “Belladonna Evans.” The map started flipping through its hidden folds.

“Wait! You can do that?” Harry asked.

Fred grinned in response. “I used to do this all the time.”

Harry looked at him curiously.

“I mean…not to your…not to Ana. I didn’t look up Ana.” Fred said quickly. “Well I did but it wasn’t all the time, which makes it sound like, I’m some creeper. I’m not. I just…you know how it is.”

Harry nodded, “Probably best not to tell Ana that.”

“Probably. It says she’s in the dungeons, but I don’t recognize the room.”

“That’s her potions lab.”

“Her lab?”

“Dumbledore set her up with one at the beginning of school.”

“Of course he did. Alright, well thanks, Harry. I owe you one.”

Fred tapped his wand to the map and said “Mischief Managed,” before heading to the door.

“Hey, Fred!” Harry called out to him. “You…you really like her, don’t you”

Fred considered the seriousness of Harry’s question before answering. “Yeah, yeah I do. Is…is that alright? I mean are we…cool? She is your sister after all.”

Harry thought about it. “Yeah. We’re cool.”

“Great! Thanks again”

Fred found Ana in the room the map had indicated. There was a pot of something brewing in one corner and something stewing in another, but Ana herself sat at a desk buried in books. She looked up at Fred as he entered; her eyes were red from crying and there were fresh tears in the corners. She didn’t have to say a word. Fred knew there was only one thing that could have upset her like
Fred didn’t have to say anything either. He just walked over and held one of her hands while she went back to reading.

Things didn’t improve much for Ana in the days that followed. Flora and Sadie continued to treat Ana with cold, distant anger, despite her attempts of a friendly smile and polite conversation. The majority of Slytherin House treated her with the cold shoulder and acted as though she was an outcast who didn’t exist. No one stopped to talk to her on the stairs or in the halls.

A few of the more vocal Slytherins would attempt to demean Ana by smearing her or Fred’s character. These comments stung, but Ana was working her occlumency overtime keeping that hurt from showing. The thing that easily hurt the most, however, was the haunted look that now plagued Hestia’s eyes. She looked hollow and empty. Ana could see that she was now feeling more alone than ever, and Ana feared what these feelings might make her do.

Fred, of course, was always in Ana’s corner and at her side as often as he could be. They spent breakfast and lunches together at the Gryffindor table, while dinners were spent with Adrian at the Slytherin table. True to his claim, Adrian didn’t turn his back on Ana. He was the sole Slytherin who would talk to her, and Ana often confided in him when she felt near a breaking point.

5 January 1995

George was rounding the corner where he was supposed to be meeting Fred when he came across Ana and Pucey. They were standing off to the side and standing very close together. The distance between them was made lesser still by the way Pucey leaned in toward her. She smiled at something he said, and then they hugged.

George had tried to discourage his brother against pursuing her. She was a snake and snakes couldn’t be trusted, it didn’t matter how fit they were. But Fred, the brave and daring fool that he was, was always willing to offer the benefit of doubt and he had insisted that she was different than the other snakes. It seemed to George that he would have to be his brother’s keeper yet again and clean up this mess.

George waited until Pucey walked away before approaching Ana.

“What are you doing?” George didn’t have time for false pleasantries. Ana blinked once, but her face remained devoid of any emotion. He didn’t trust someone he couldn’t read.

“Waiting for your brother; he asked me to meet him here. I’m guessing he asked you to do the same.”

“Stop sh**ing me.”

“What?”

“You and Pucey were looking pretty cozy.”

“We’re friends. We were talking.”
“About what?’

“That doesn’t concern you.”

“It concerns me when my brother’s heart is at stake!”

“I’m not playing this game with you, George. I’m tired and today is not the day to test me. Tell your brother I’ll catch up with him later.”

She began walking away, but George wouldn’t let her.

“No! No, I want answers!” He grabbed her arm to stop her. “You don’t get to hurt my brother again. Now, tell me what you were doing with Pucey just now, and I’ll consider not telling my brother what I saw.”

“Let go of me!” she warned. He released her arm quickly. “What you saw were two friends talking. What we were talking about, as I said, doesn’t concern you.”

Ana crossed her arms over her chest as she stared George down. “You don’t like me very much.”

“You’re a bloody genius.”

“Why is that exactly? What did I do to you?”

“Nothing to me, but what you did to my brother last year more than warrants my…dislike.”

Ana studied him carefully for a moment. “No.”

“No?”

“No. It goes beyond that. Even before last year, you’ve never liked me. And I can’t figure out why that is. I’ve never targeted you for one of my pranks, I’ve never outsmarted you in class, and in our match-ups, I’ve always played a clean game without even the slightest bending of a rule. You know, I don’t think chucking a beater’s bat at an opponent’s head is exactly without regulation. The only reason I can think of, which really makes no sense at all, is that it’s simply because I’m a Slytherin. Which, if that’s the case, then you’ve judged me based on my house alone and that makes you no better than the bigoted thickheads of my house who judge you by your name alone.

“My advice to you, George, is to check yourself before accusing me of foul play. Fred knows me. He knows all my secrets. He knows my mistakes and he’s both accepted and forgiven them. So right now, the only one at risk of hurting him is you. Because if you don’t think that hating his girlfriend won’t hurt him, then you’re only sh**ing yourself.”

Fried arrived a moment later, oblivious to the tension that floated between Ana and George.

“Good! You’re both here. Are we ready to go then?”

Ana pulled her eyes from George to smile softly at Fred. “Fred, I’m sorry, but…”

“I can’t go,” George said quickly. Ana looked at him curiously.

“What?” Fred asked.

“Sorry, mate. I can’t go today; I promised Sarah I’d do something with her. But…” George looked at Ana. “You two should go. Have fun. Make it a date.”
“You sure?” Fred asked.

“Yeah. I’ll catch up with you later.” George clapped his brother on the back before walking off.

“So…I guess it’s just me and you today. Are you ready?” Fred asked.

“Uhm…” Ana was puzzled by George’s sudden endorsement, but Fred seemed too cheery to be bothered by it. His cheerfulness was highly contagious.

“Absolutely,” Ana said. “I just have one question, though. What are we doing?”

“We have a free period. So we’re going to have some fun.”

“Sounds great, there’s just one problem. I don’t have a free period right now, and neither do you.”

“Meh,” he shrugged. “You have Binns and I have Snape, same thing.”

“I don’t know if I can actively participate in you bunking off potions.”

“It will be worth it, I promise. Allow me to demonstrate. Have you met Cye?” Fred pointed to the statue of a one-eyed witch that sat nearby. Ana glanced at it briefly before turning her attention back to Fred.

“Let me guess. She has one eye like a cyclops so you call her Cye.”

“You understand me so well.” He mocked tears.

“So, you want me to bunk off with you for a tour of the statues around Hogwarts? I think I’d rather sit through Binns.”

“You silly girl. Not statues, statue. One statue. One very special statue.” He took out his wand, tapped the witch’s hump, and said, “Dissendium.”

Ana watched with awe as the statue’s hump opened up to reveal a dark hole.

“Is that a…”

“…a secret tunnel to Hogsmeade? Why, yes it is. Now, if you still want to sit through Binns you might be able to make it if you hurry.

“Oh, stop yapping and let’s go already!”

Ana smiled before tossing her bag down the hole and stepping though herself.

That night, Ana lay on her bed. The dorm was empty and she was supposed to be doing homework, but all she could think about was her date with Fred.

The tunnel led to the stockroom of Honeyduke’s. Ana and Fred crept their way into the shop front where Mr. Flume showed no great surprise at seeing Fred there during school hours. After shopping around for a bit and picking up a few sugar-quills, it was a mad dash through the snow since neither one of them had their winter cloaks on. They went into Zonko’s for a bit and then into Olde Mac’s; Ana was running low on boomslang skin somehow. They finished their date with a few hot butterbeers at The Three Broomsticks, before heading back through the tunnel.
It was what happened in the tunnel that had Ana so enamored.

“So… I would consider that a date, would you? I mean, I even bought you flowers and food.” Fred indicated to her bag of gillyflower from Olde Mac’s.

“Yeah… yeah I’d call it a date,” Ana replied with a smile.

“Which makes two dates now. And that’s with an ‘s’ as in plural, as in more than one.”

“Hmm… so it does.”

Ana was having a difficult time forming coherent thoughts. She was too distracted by the presence of Fred’s hand on her waist, and the warmth of his body as they huddled close together, and by the look in his eye that said he wanted to kiss her as much as she wanted to kiss him.

“I believe,” Ana bit her lip, “that there was another stipulation.”

He grinned, “So there was.”

Her first kiss with Fred was unlike any she’d had before. Graham had been too mouthy, she knew that now. There was too much unnecessary movement that always left Ana feeling like he was trying to swallow her face. Derek’s kisses, the few they shared, had been stiff, formal, and without much emotion. Then there was Garlic Guy; Ana couldn’t remember his name, but she clearly remembered that he had thought it was a good idea to eat a whole basket of garlic cheese fries before attempting to kiss her.

Fred though… Fred’s kisses were close to perfection. Ana wasn’t sure if she felt that way because she liked him so much or simply because it was true. They were gentle yet firm. He followed her lead and yet he took the lead. They really were the perfect blend and they left Ana longing for more. She wondered if she had enough time to make it up to Gryffindor tower for a good night kiss and still get back before curfew.

“What are you smiling at?”

Ana nearly jumped off her bed. She’d become accustomed to silence from her dorm mates. Hearing Hestia’s voice threw her for a moment. Ana looked over to Hes’ bed; they were the only ones there.

“Fred and I had a date today,” Ana said hesitantly.

Hes nodded, “Is that why you skived off class?”

“Ye-yeah,” Ana couldn’t stop the smile that spread over her face.

“Where – where did you go?”

“To Hogsmeade. He knows a secret tunnel.”

“Really?”

“Yeah,” Ana’s smile grew and she sat up.
“What are you smiling about now?”

“You’re talking to me.”

“Yeah, well, I’ve missed you.”

“I’ve missed you too.”

“I’m still mad as hell, mind you.”

Ana could see it written all over her face. “Yeah. I…I get that; I do. And I’m so sorry, Hes. I never meant to hurt you. You’re my best friend.”

“Yeah, but I can’t be.” Hes looked away briefly, and Ana could see a different kind of pain etched on her face. “Flora knows.”

Ana could hear the distress in her voice. “What? How?”

Hes shook her head “She figured it out. We’re sisters, twins; we’ve known each other since the womb. We know more about each other than either of us wants to know. She could ruin me. With one word she could ruin me, and she’d be foul enough to do it if it suited her.”

“Then…” Ana had to wipe her own tears away before continuing. “Then you have to stay with her.”

Hestia was surprised now.

“You have to stay on her good side. You have to hate me.”

“I can’t hate you, Ana.”

“Then you have to pretend.”

“Ana…”

“It’s okay. I can handle it. Just knowing that you don’t really hate me will be enough. And who knows, maybe being with the person I love will give you strength to be with the person you love.”

“Love? Do you?”

“I… I don’t know,” Ana stammered. “I…I mean, it’s too soon to tell, right? We only just started dating, literally, only just had our first kiss. But I…I don’t know. I mean… yeah? Maybe, I…I think I might. It’s completely mad though, right?”

“Wow. He’s turned you into a babbling buffoon.” Hestia smiled. “I’m happy for you.”

“Thanks.”

“Still, slightly mad as hell, but happy.”

There was a noise just outside the door.

“It’s game time, Ana whispered.

Hestia nodded sadly. Then, after a short pause, both girls turned away from each other and lay back on their beds. When Flora and Sadie arrived it was to a room in cold silence.
In the new term laughter was often heard from the Gryffindor table where Ana sat with Fred and George and their friends…her friends now too. Meanwhile, cold silence still persisted in her dorm, but Ana no longer expected it to lift. She knew Flora was as stubborn as they come and would likely never let up. Sadie, as much as Ana hated it, would follow whomever she feared most and currently that was Flora. And Ana could only hope that Hestia, for her own sake, would stay loyal to Flora until she was strong enough to come out on her own and Ana would be there for her when she did.

Things weren’t all bad for Ana though. She and Fred were doing great! She could safely admit to herself that she did indeed love him, but she didn’t yet have to courage to tell him; it still seemed too early in her opinion. She, Katie, Angelina, and Alicia were fast on their way to becoming very good friends with their own inside jokes. (Unfortunately, things didn’t pan out between George and Sarah, but the girls remained on friendly terms.) Ana’s study sessions with the girls had been replaced by new sessions with Katie and other fifth year students feeling the pressure of their looming OWL exams.

The biggest change though, and perhaps the most relieving one for Ana, was George. He’d forgone his initial hostilities towards Ana and he was now slowly coming around. Ana wouldn’t call them mates yet, but he was definitely more willing to participate in conversations that involved her, and even, once or twice, had engaged her in a one-on-one conversation. They never spoke of their past hostilities, however.

23 February 1995

Harry rushed into the Great Hall flanked by Ron and Hermione. He was nearly out of breath, having run all the way from the library. He’d exhausted all his resources there and had no other option. Fortunately, it was rather late in the evening so most of the Great Hall had been cleared, but Ana still sat with the twins at their table. Harry rushed to her.

“I need your help,” he blurted out to her rather surprised look.

“Harry, you don’t…” Ron tried once more to dissuade Harry of this particular course of action, but Harry cut across him.

“Have you got a better solution?” he asked. “Have either of you got one?” He looked between Ron and Hermione; they both shook their heads no. “Then yeah, Ron, I do.” Harry looked back to Ana.

“What can I do that they can’t?” she asked, slowly covering her surprise with a coy smile. “Apart from the obvious things like…”

“Ana!” Harry cut across her too. He didn’t have time to wade through her Slytherin arrogance. The second task was tomorrow and he had no way to survive underwater for an hour. If Ana couldn’t help him, then he had absolutely no idea what to do next.

“Right. Sorry. Go on.”
“The second task is taking place in the Black Lake.”

“In the lake?”

Harry nodded.

“It’s the middle of February! Parts of the lake are still frozen. Are they completely mental?”

“I need a way to breathe underwater for an hour. Any ideas?” he asked.

“Not just breathe, Harry. Your body will go into shock from the cold in minutes if you don’t regulate your body temperature too,” she said.

“Brilliant. So is there a potion for that as well?”

Ana looked surprised again; clearly, she didn’t quite gather his sense of urgency in the matter.

“Well…yeah. You could use a combination of a few potions.”

“Great!”

“Not great, Harry. I don’t have them in stock and one of them takes a week to brew.”

Harry fell, deflated, into an empty seat. Ana had been his last hope. Without a way to survive, he’d have no choice but to pull out. He could hear Malfoy’s smug ridicule now.

“You...you could use gillyweed,” a tentative voice suggested. Harry looked a little further down the table and saw Neville reading a rather thick looking book.

“Sorry, Harry. I—I didn’t mean to eavesdrop, but I just…I just couldn’t help but overhear, and...”

“He might be on to something,” Ana said. “Gillyweed could work. It gives one the essence of a fish: gills, webbed hands, and...body temperature regulation. Everything you’d need.”

“See, Harry; you can always count on a Gryffindor to have your back.” Though he didn’t say it directly, Ron’s words were clearly meant as a jab to Ana; even Harry picked up on that, and he shot Ron a look.

“Oh?” Ana had picked up on it as well. “And do you have access to gillyweed? Do you even know what gillyweed is, Ronald?” Ana asked. Before either Harry or Ron could respond though, she continued. “Judging by that annoying, blank look on your face, I’d guess not.”

“Nah. That’s just his normal look,” George said. Ana smirked with his support.

“Look, I don’t care if he knows what it is. Do you have any?” Harry asked. He was growing rather annoyed with Ana and Ron’s persistent bickering.

Ana’s smirk faded and she almost looked hesitant to respond. “No.”

“Does Snape?” Hermione interjected before Ron could say anything.

“Yes, but you’ll never get it from him and if I ask he’ll know who it’s for and he’ll say no on principle.”
“Then we won’t ask. We’ll just take it,” Ron said.

“I’d almost like to see you try just to see what he’ll do to you when he catches you because he will catch you this time,” Ana said. “Someone’s been nicking from us all year so we just implemented new security measures. Not even a House-elf could get through.”

“Brilliant,” Harry said dejectedly. “I guess it’s back to the library, Hermione. Maybe we missed something.”

“Sit. Down. Little Potter!” Ana said forcefully. “You came to me for assistance, so allow me to assist.”

Harry sat abruptly, surprised by the sudden change in tone.

Ana sighed. “I don’t have gillyweed, but… I have gillyflower. I can make it.”

“Ana…”

“But…”

Both Fred and Hermione tried to interject but Ana silenced them with a frim look and a smug grin.

“Don’t doubt my abilities; you’ll only embarrass yourself. I can do it. I should have enough to give you an hour’s worth, but I need water from the lake. Quite a bit of it.”

Ana looked around the table at the various pitchers. She quickly emptied the contents of three of them into glasses before handing them to Harry.

“Fill them up and bring them to my lab. It has to be Blake Lake water for it to work properly. As full as you can get them.”

“Alright. Yeah,” Harry said, the faint trickle of hope seeping back in. Meanwhile, Ana gave Fred a kiss to the cheek before quickly leaving.

“We should hurry, Harry, if we want to make it back before curfew,” Hermione said.

Harry nodded and the three of them set off for the front doors. They were stopped just outside the Great Hall, however, by Professor Moody. He denied them access to the grounds.

“But Professor, the task is tomorrow and I need…”

“Precisely!” Moody barked. “It is the assumption that you should be fully prepared by now and could do with a good night’s rest.”

Harry sighed and handed the pitchers to Ron and Hermione. “Will you make sure she gets these?”

“Of course.”

“Sure, Mate.”

“Actually, Professor McGonagall needs to see them both. Immediately,” Moody said.

“But…How…?”
The small bit of hope that Harry had gained, was squashed once again.

XXX

Ana was in her lab quickly working to prepare the gillyflower for stewing. She had already pruned all the flowers and was slicing the stems into thin strips when she heard a faint voice calling her name in the corridor.

“Hello? Ana Evans?”

Ana set down her knife and walked to the door. The same boy who had suggested the use of gillyweed stood a few doors down carrying the three pitchers and trailing water behind him. He saw Ana and made his way over, sloshing a bit of water as he did.

“Where’s Harry?” Ana asked.

“Pro—Professor Moody said he needed rest before tomorrow.”

“What about Granger and the other one?”

“Professor McGonagall needed them,” the boy replied.

“And Fred and George? Never mind. They’re off scheming I’m sure; probably with Peeves somewhere. What’s your name?”

“Neville. Neville Longbottom.”

Ana recognized the name immediately; she’d heard Sev complain about him several times and she figured that must have accounted for the trail of water he left behind. She could only hope that there was still enough water left to use.

“Very well, Longbottom. We must work quickly if we’re to get this ready for tomorrow.”

Ana took one of the pitchers from him and walked back into her lab. Neville followed only to be stopped at the doorway by an invisible barrier.

“Oh! I almost forgot. I give you, Neville Longbottom, permission to enter.”

The barrier gave way and Neville nearly lost his footing.

“New security parameters,” Ana explained unnecessarily. “Set those two over there if you will, please. Oh! This has lake debris in it.”

“I’m sorry. I can pick it out for you.”

“No!” Ana stopped him. “Leave it. It’s brilliant.”

“It is?”

“Yeah. It will give it that extra lake essence. It could buy him a few more minutes. Well done.”

“Oh! Er—thanks.”
Ana emptied the contents of her pitcher into the waiting cauldron and lit a low flame underneath it. Then she went back to thinly slicing the gilly-stems. Neville looked around the room nervously. Ana could sense his unease at all the potions gear and felt a little sorry for him. She knew not everyone could be an expert in the subject like herself, but she hated the idea of anyone feeling fear towards it.

“You know,” she began. “I wasn’t very good at potions either, when I started out.”

“Really?”

“Really.” Ana didn’t see the need in mentioning that she was five when she attempted her first potion. “And Sev wouldn’t let me near anything he was working on.”

Again, there was no need in mentioning that many of Sev’s potions were of questionable intent or that some were quite toxic.

“Do you want to know how I got to all of this?” she asked, waving her hand around the room.

“How?”

“Observation. I watched every little thing he did. From the way he held his knife,” she held up her hand to show how the knife was poised between her thumb and middle finger while resting on the curve of her hand and not gripped in a tight fist like so many made the mistake of doing.

“…To the way he positioned his other hand to gently guide the slice,” Ana continued while Neville leaned over the table to watch.

“I even watched his intense glare as he concentrated and I used to mimic that until I realized it was unnecessary.” Ana smiled. “Once I had the basics under control, everything else slowly fell into place. Of course, Sev doesn’t always inspire patience or confidence, and he never doles out compliments, not even to me. You just have to have the fortitude to know that you’re right.”

Ana scooped up the sliced stems and added them to the cauldron with a faint simmer.

“Now what do you have to do?” Neville asked.

Ana smiled at his sudden interest. “Now we wait and let the stems absorb all the water, including those two pitchers.”

“How long will that take?”

Ana chose not to reply and instead just continued to smile. “It’s getting close to curfew. You should probably head back to your common room. Wouldn’t want Sev to catch you down here.”

“What about you?”

“I’m a Slytherin. My common room is just around the corner.”

“Oh. Right. Well… I guess I’ll see you later.”
Ana nodded as Neville turned to make his leave. When he reached the door, she called out to him.

“Hey, Longbottom! Do you think you could meet me back here in the morning? For the gillyweed, so you can give it to Harry.”

“Why can’t you?”

“Because… He’s Harry Potter and I’m a Slytherin.”

“Oh. Yeah. Sure, I can do that.”

The next morning, Ana was almost late to the lake. She had to quickly dry her hair and she wasn’t able to take the time to straighten it or make it smooth. So she pulled a thick wool hat down over her ears; she’d pay for it in frizz later. The whole school was gathered in a set of stands on the lake’s bank. A small platform stage sat at the bottom where the judges and champions gathered. Ana was still rubbing the sleep from her eyes as she climbed the stands and settled into a seat next to Fred.

“Here, I thought you could use this,” Fred said as he passed her an orange and a muffin, charmed to still be warm.

“Thanks,” Ana said with a smile. She quickly ate the muffin before the charm wore off. Then she made quick work of peeling the orange.

“So, how much sleep did you get last night?” Fred asked quietly.

Ana shrugged. “Three, maybe four hours.”

“Are you going to tell him?”

“He doesn’t need to be bothered by it. What have I missed?”

“Nothing much. Dumbledore just said that each contestant has an hour to find what they’re missing underwater.”

“If they fail to retrieve their item,” George continued.

“Of if they take more than the allotted hour…”

“Then points will be deducted from their score,” Lee finished for them.

“You cannot do that, Jordan. I’m still new to this whole Weasley-Whiplash,” Ana said to the boy sitting behind them. “Do we know what they’re missing?”

“Not a clue,” Fred said.

“Do they?”

He shrugged.

“Well, that makes things decisively harder.”

“How so?” George asked.
“It’s a big, dark, black water lake. If they don’t know what they’re looking for, they could easily miss it.”

Ana took a moment to look around them as the champions prepared to enter the lake. Of course she would be the sole Slytherin in a sea of Gryffindor. She spotted Neville a few rows down sitting with the other fourth year boys. Katie and Angelina were sitting behind her; Alicia must have opted to sit with Henri. Ana even spotted Fred’s little sister sitting a row below them, but there were two bodies noticeably missing.


“Maybe they’re snogging,” someone suggested.

“Not likely,” Ginny said.

“Dunno,” Fred replied. “I haven’t seen them since last night.”

“He has a name, you know? The other Other Weasley,” Ginny said to Ana.

“Yeah, I know. And I’ll start using it as soon as he stops looking at me like I’m the scum of the earth. Isn’t that right…George?”

“Aye-aye… Ana,” George replied with a cheeky grin.

Down on the stage below, the champions were finally ready to go. With a last set of instructions, the cannon fired and they all walked forward into the icy water. Ana saw Harry shove something in his mouth and struggle to swallow it.

“I should have warned him of how awful it would taste.”

“I think ‘essence of fish’ was warning enough,” Fred said.

“So…” Ana continued as the champions disappeared beneath the surface. “Now we have an hour…to stare at a partially frozen lake and wait for something to happen.”

“Yep.”

“Yep.”

“I miss the dragons,” Lee whined.

“So then, do you mind if I…?” Ana asked as she looked down at Fred’s shoulder. He smiled.

“Go on then.”

Ana cozied up to him and laid her head on his shoulder. She closed her eyes and it didn’t take long for her to drift off to sleep.

“Ana. Ana, wake up,” Fred nudged her gently.

“Hmm?” Ana lifted her head and yawned. “Wha’s goin’ on?”
“The hour is nearly up. I thought you might what to see this.”

“Oh. Yeah. Thanks.” Ana sat up a little more and stretched. Looking down at the judge’s station she saw a head of silvery-blond hair.

“Delacour’s back?” she asked, shocked.

“After only fifteen minutes,” Fred said.

“What?!”

“She didn’t retrieve her item though,” Lee said.

“Oh,” Ana relaxed a little. “Well, that just goes to show you that beauty isn’t everything.”

“Well then I guess it’s a good thing I found a girl with both beauty and brains,” Fred said. Ana’s cheeks flushed while George groaned.

“If you’re going to be one of those couples, then count me out.”

“A couple, by definition, George, is two. So you’re already counted out in my opinion,” Ana said.

“I’ll have you know…”

“Look! Something’s happening on the lake,” Fred called out, diverting everyone’s attention.

Two heads broke the surface. It was Cedric Diggory and his date from the Yule Ball, Cho Chang. Applause erupted from the Hogwarts section, in particular, the Hufflepuff and Slytherin sections. Diggory would be awarded first place after a fine execution of the bubblehead charm.

Anticipation grew as a few moments passed. Then Krum emerged with his date, Granger. Durmstrang cheered loudly but their celebration was cut short as two more heads broke the surface: Ron and another silver-haired girl.

“Where’s Harry?”

Before anyone could answer her question though, Harry literally shot out of the water. All around her the Gryffindors broke out in a deafening roar, far surpassing the volume level of every other house combined. Ana had to plug her ears against the obtrusive noise, but she did so with a smile.

Despite being last to emerge, Harry was awarded second place for “Outstanding Moral Fiber.” He had reached the enchanted captives first but lingered in order to make sure everyone had been rescued. Never mind the fact that surely, surely the captives would have been released at the end of the hour and safely returned to the surface.

Ana looked up at the almost hesitant tapping. After taking a nice long nap in her dorm, she had returned to working in her lab.

“Well, if it isn’t Mr. Moral Fiber himself,” she teased.

Harry neither moved nor spoke. His eyes, however, darted around quickly.
“Oh. Right. I give you, Harry Potter, permission to enter.”

The spell lifted and Harry stepped forward.

“Mother of Merlin that’s going to get old fast.”

“New security measures?” Harry asked, moving forward slowly.

Ana nodded. “Freezes the intruder in place and silences them so they can’t free themselves unless they’re capable of silent spell casting in which case the suspect pool is significantly narrowed.”

“Suspect pool?”

“Like I said, someone’s been nicking from our supplies. Well, from Sev’s mostly, but they hit me last week. And since I couldn’t say with absolute certainty that the Wolfsbane potion hadn’t been tampered with…I had to throw the whole batch out. It was the first time in over six months that Remus had to face the full moon without it, and I wasn’t happy.”

“I imagine not. How was he?”

Ana shrugged. “He said he understood. That he never expected me to do it for as long as I have, or even to do it at all. You know, typical Uncle Moony stuff.”

Harry nodded.

“So, I…I guess I should congratulate you. Tied for first. You and Diggory are giving Hogwarts a good chance of winning.”

“I don’t think I heard a congratulations in there,” Harry teased.

Ana smirked. “Congratulations…Moral Fiber.”

He grimaced. “I think I like Little Potter better.”

Ana laughed. “Me too.”

“And I… I owe you a thank you.”

“I don’t think I heard a ‘thank you,’ in there.”

Harry smiled faintly. “Hermione said that in order to make gillyweed from gillyflower you… you have to brew it all night. It didn’t really take you all night, did it? It was just a phrase?”

Ana didn’t respond immediately. She didn’t really want him to know how long it took her. Her silence, however, was answer enough.

“I have to hand it to her. Granger knows her potions.”

“Why would you do that? I could have found another way.”

“There was no other way, so what was I supposed to do, Harry? Let you drown? Let you freeze? Let you withdraw? I don’t think Mum and Dad would have liked either of those options,” Ana said fiercely. “Look, I… I don’t know how to fight a dragon and I can’t get my friends onboard with my boyfriend. But I can brew a damn good potion. I didn’t tell you how long it would
take because you seem like the type to refuse such extensive help. So I did what I had to.”

“You’re right… I would have refused had I known.”

There was a stretch of silence between them.

“But… thank you.”

Ana nodded. “You’re welcome, Harry. And next time… don’t hesitate to ask me, all right? I’m your sister; let me be your sister.”

“Yeah… all right. So…what are you working on?”


“Wearable potions?”

“Dumbledore’s idea.” Ana picked up a small vile of clear liquid. “This is a calming solution, but I need to work on its consistency. I want it to be more like a lotion and it’s clearly not. The aroma, however, is very calming. This one here…”

Ana continued on as she picked up another vial. Harry quickly realized that once he got her started on her thesis work there was no stopping her, and he was okay with that.
March. Ana was really starting to feel the pressure of her OWL exams as her coursework intensified. She had a bit of a laugh, though, during her career meeting with Sev in which she told him she was dropping out after her OWLs to pursue a professional Quidditch career.

April. The coursework in March was child’s play compared to that of April. Even Easter Holiday was no holiday, only extra time for extra work. Her only reprieve here came at the very beginning when Fred and George turned seventeen.

May. Ana had to stop seeing Fred except at the few meals she made it to. Instead, she chose to spend every waking moment, and a few sleeping ones, in the library studying. When she did sleep, whether it was in her dorm or in the library, even her dreams were plagued with course work and OWL exams…when they weren’t circulating around the dream of the Forbidden Forest and Mr. Crouch that had decided to reappear.

Last week in May. Fred couldn’t stand the separation form Ana a moment more. But he knew the only way to see her would be to do the unthinkable, perhaps even the unbearable. Yet, he thought, not seeing her was more unbearable. So he fortified his strength and marched into the library.

He found her sitting at her usual spot with Katie and Sarah. They had books spread open before them on the table, but Ana was writing on a long piece of parchment. Fred made his way over and pulled up a chair to sit beside her. Katie and Sarah greeted him calmly, but Ana continued writing. When she set her quill down, she picked up the parchment still without speaking a word to Fred. She made a correction…and another one; Fred waited patiently until she set the parchment down too.

“There.” She exhaled a deep breath. “I think I’m done. What have I said about staring at me while I work?”

“That you find it endearing?” Fred replied with a smirk.

“That’s it’s a bit creepy,” she answered.

Fred shrugged a shoulder. “They’re one-and-the-same to me. Besides, I can’t help it if I’m enraptured by your beauty; you make it simply impossible to look away.”

“You’re laying it on thick today. What do you want?”

“Come away with me. I don’t care where we go, just as long as you’re with me.”

She smiled softly, almost sadly. “I can’t, Fred. There are only ten minutes until dinner and…”
“Perfect! Ten minutes isn’t enough time to start and finish another assignment. And you need a break, Ana.”

“There’s too much to do.”

“Fine.” He heaved a great sigh. “I guess I’ll have to find someone else to give this to, because, you know, no food or drinks in the library.”

“Is that a sugar quill?”

“Passion fruit flavored.”

Ana pouted. “That’s my favorite.”

“I know.” Fred grinned. “If you keep going like this, Ana, you’ll fry that pretty little brain of yours.”

“I hate to say it, Ana, but I think he’s right,” Katie said with a sigh.

“I can’t think straight anymore,” Sarah added as she closed her book and rubbed her eyes.

Ana eyed the sugar quill as Fred dangled it in front of her face.

“Oh, alright,” she said with a great sigh. “But only because it’s passion fruit.”

“Well, it’s good to know where I lay on the list,” Fred said with a grin.

XXX

Ana quickly packed up her notes and her Transfiguration essay before leaving the library with Fred. Once safely across the threshold, she held out her hand for the sugar quill. Fred pulled it out of her reach.

“On second thought,” he said. “It is rather close to dinner. I wouldn’t want you to spoil your app…”

“Hand it over, Red, or by the fury of Merlin, I will hex you,” Ana hissed.

“Alright, alright. I was only joking. Here you go.”

“A wise choice,” Ana said with a smile as he handed her the sugar quill. Ana popped the end of the quill in her mouth and took a long moment to savor it. “Mmm… I’ll be so glad when this year is finally over and I can drop all the unnecessary classes.”

“Like History of Magic? That was my first one,” Fred suggested.

Ana nodded. “And Transfiguration.”

“Astronomy.”

“Definitely Divination.”

“Chars.”

“Eh…I’m actually considering keeping charms.”
“Why?”

“Because I’m bloody good at it. And of course, Herbology, Potions, and Defense are keepers. I’m also mildly considering keeping Magical Creatures; Hagrid may be a bit unconventional, but I find bits of his lessons to be illuminating.”

Fred groaned. “I pulled you out of the library so you could relax and not think about school for one minute, and what do you do?”

Ana grinned. “I plan for classes next year.”

“You plan for classes next year. You’d think you’re a bloody Ravenclaw.”

Ana scoffed. “Ravenclaws only think they’re the brightest in the school. We Slytherins know we’re the true geniuses who could run this place. We just choose to set our ambitions elsewhere. But… we do so while enjoying this wonderfully delicious sugar quill.”

Ana smiled up at him and, for added emphasis, popped the quill back in her mouth. As he returned her smile, an alarming thought suddenly crossed her mind. Next year would be his final year at Hogwarts and then he’d be free while she’d be alone. Sure, she’d have Katie, but the short time they had together couldn’t compare to the years she spent with the girls. Ana missed them, and she knew she’d continue to miss them until things were resolved between them, but Ana had no way of knowing when or even if that would be.

“Ok, what just happened? Where did you go?” Fred asked, noticing the sudden shift in her mood.

Ana shook her head. “Nowhere. I just… it was nothing.” She tried smiling again, but it was faint and weak; Fred saw right through it.

He sighed. “You were thinking about the girls, weren’t you?”

Ana nodded slowly, almost shamefully. “We haven’t spoken properly in five months. I miss them, and I still want them to come around. I still hope that one day they’ll be all right with this, with us I mean. I must be mental right?”

“No.” Fred shook his head. “You must be Ana.” He gently brushed away the few tears that had fallen down her cheek before leaning in to kiss her forehead.

“Ambitious as a Slytherin. Bright as a Ravenclaw. Loyal as a Hufflepuff.” Fred grinned cheekily. “I’ll find your daring Gryffindor soon enough.”

“You mean the fool-hearty, reckless Gryffindor who can’t think two steps ahead? I think I’ll pass on that one.”

Fred laughed. “Hey. Don’t knock it ‘til you try it.”

Ana and Fred slowly meandered their way to the Great Hall. They were in no rush to actually get there, knowing that they wouldn’t be able to sit together during dinner. Suddenly Ana had the strangest sensation. She felt like she was falling down a vast abyss. It was a swirling, dizzying fall in which she spun uncontrollably. When she landed she was no longer herself, but she knew exactly where she was.

She was back in her dream of Mr. Crouch and the Forbidden Forest, only this time the feeling was much clearer and far more disorienting. She stumbled around the forest trying to find
her way through and rambling to trees like they were people. A bright flash and a searing pain jolted her back to herself.

XXX

“Ana? Ana, are you all right? Ana, what happened? What is it?” Fred asked frantically.

Ana had stopped walking for no apparent reason and she had this far away, dazed look in her eyes. Fred looked around them to see what had caused it, but he couldn’t see anything out of the ordinary. When she dropped her bag and quill and began to say, Fred quickly reached out to catch her.

“Oh…I…I think I’m going to be sick,” Ana moaned, holding her stomach.

“Alright, I’ll…I’ll take you to Madam Pomfrey then.” Fred grabbed her bag and steered her towards the hospital wing.

“No.”

“Ana, you need…”

“Dumbledore. I need to see Dumbledore.”

Fred chose not to argue, though he didn’t see what Dumbledore could do for a stomach-ache. They made their way slowly to the stone gargoyle. Ana had to pause every so often to focus her breathing as she fought a bout of nausea, and she was still slightly unsteady on her feet. When they finally arrived, they were not alone. Harry was there arguing with Snape.

“Professor, I need to see Dumbledore. It’s urgent,” Harry was saying for what was clearly not the first time. Still, Snape refused to give him the password.

Just as Snape looked up and saw Fred and Ana, the gargoyle moved aside and Dumbledore descended the stairs. Several things happened at once.

“I thought I heard a commotion down here.”

“Professor! It’s Mr. Crouch, he’s…”

“Belladonna?”

“Crouch is dead,” Ana said weakly.

“What? No, he’s not. I just left him; he’s…” Harry trailed off as he got a good look at Ana.

Dumbledore looked at her too. “Show me,” he said.

“I…I don’t think I can right now. My…my head won’t stop ringing,” she replied.

“I can take you to him,” Harry said.

“Lead the way, Harry,” Dumbledore relented and the two of them hurried off. Ana hesitated for a moment before turning to follow as well.

“Belladonna…”
“I have to, Sev,” Ana said. “I have to know if what I saw was real.”

Fred was beyond confused. What she saw? They had been standing in the middle of a corridor; they didn’t see anything, and Barty Crouch certainly hadn’t been anywhere near them. What was she talking about? Fred had no idea, but he followed after her nonetheless; Snape followed him.

Fred noticed that Ana was moving a little faster now at least, and he suspected it was due to her determination to see this—whatever this was—through. Still, they remained several paces behind Harry and Dumbledore. When they eventually caught up to them, Dumbledore had the tip of his wand lit and they were searching the ground for something. The beam of light hit a pair of feet and they all gathered around.

“That’s Krum, but where’s Crouch?” Harry asked.

“Is he…?” Fred began but he couldn’t bring himself to finish the question.

“He’s only stunned,” Dumbledore replied. Then he lifted his wand and a streak of light shot out of it and headed for Hagrid’s hut.

“*Ennervate,*” he muttered next, reviving Krum.

Krum opened his eyes, looking dazed. He rambled about how he was attacked from behind and tried to sit up. Dumbledore gently pushed him back down.

“Rest for a moment,” he said. “Severus, it appears we must search for Barty. Please send word to Alastor…”

“No need, Headmaster,” Snape said, looking over his shoulder and seeing the old wizard hobbling his way over. “He is on his way.”

Stunned by all that was happening, Fred finally looked up at the sound of heavy footfalls approaching them. Hagrid had arrived with his boarhound and a crossbow in hand.

“Professor Dumbledore! What’s going on?”

“Hagrid, fetch Professor Karkaroff if you will please,” Dumbledore directed. “His student has been attacked. When you’ve done that, then kindly escort these three back to the castle.”

Fred didn’t want to say as much, but he was ready to leave. Seeing someone his own age attacked and knocked out cold was a little too realistic for him. And he wanted to get Ana back to the castle and to Madam Pomfrey if she was still feeling ill. He turned to look at her to see just how she was doing, only…she wasn’t standing next to him anymore. She wasn’t standing anywhere.

“Ana? Where’d she go?”

At Fred’s inquiry, Harry looked around as well. “She was with you, right?”

“She was standing right here a second ago. Ana!” Fred called. Both he and Harry made to move towards the forest more.

“Not a step further, Mr. Weasley, Harry,” Dumbledore issued sternly.

Karkaroff and Moody arrived at the same time.

“What’s the meaning of this treachery?” Karkaroff spat as he pulled Krum to his feet.
“Damn leg! I would have been here sooner. What’s happened?”

“I vos attacked by Mr. Crouch or votever his name is. And now the girl is missing,” Krum replied rubbing his head.

“Attacked! Crouch!”

“Igor,” Dumbledore tried to calm him but Karkaroff would have none of it. He pulled Krum away shouting treachery the whole way. Dumbledore turned to Moody, unconcerned with Karkaroff’s temper tantrum.

“Alastor, it appears Barty Crouch is on the grounds. We must find him and Miss Evans.”

“I’m on it,” Moody growled before hobbling off with his wand drawn.

“Hagrid, take these two back to…”

“Not a chance!” Fred said defiantly.

“We’re not leaving my…”

“Girlfriend. My girlfriend,” Fred cut across Harry before glancing sideways at Hagrid.

“Then you stay with one of us at all times. No straying,” Dumbledore said.

In response, Fred and Harry both pulled out their wands too.

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Ana stared down at the ghost white eyes that were staring back at her, but they couldn’t see her. They wouldn’t see anything anymore. The once-esteemed mind behind them wouldn’t think anymore. Crouch was dead.

“Ana!”

She could hear Fred calling out for her, but she couldn’t pull herself away from those eyes. They might not be able to see anymore, but she could. She could see everything clearly now; things she didn’t want to see, things she’d like to forget but probably never would.

“Ana!”

They were much closer now. Closing in on all sides. She knew they’d find her soon, along with the dead body at her feet.

“Ana!”

“I’m here!” she called back. Then she sent up red sparks so they could find her. Their stampeding feet sounded like a herd approaching her. But there was one that was distinctly different among them.

“Ana!” Fred’s voice rang with relief. And then he saw the body. “Merlin’s left…arm! Are you…?”

“I’m all right,” Ana replied.

“Professor Moody, what are you doing?” Harry asked.
Ana finally tore her eyes away from the body before her to look at Moody. His wand was directed at her but she was numb and unconcerned.

“She was found alone at the scene of the crime.”

“Crime?”

“What?!”

“You really are mad!” Harry and Fred said.

“I strongly advise you do as suggested and lower your wand,” Sev warned.

Ana’s reaction was much milder. “I…I didn’t kill him. He was already dead when I found him.”

“Alastor, we must be reasonable about this,” Dumbledore implored.

Moody did not relent. “How do you explain how she found the body? She knew right where it was.”

“I tracked him as any good Auror ought to know how. He was stumbling around. He made a mess of the brush around him. His trail was easy to follow,” Ana replied simply.

“And how do you know he was stumbling?”

“Harry said as much.”

“It’s true,” Harry said backing her up without hesitation.

Moody was still not appeased, so Ana held her wand out to him in offering. “You can check my wand if you like, but you won’t find the curse that killed him there.”

“That won’t be necessary,” Sev threatened. Moody finally relented with a scowl and Ana pocketed her wand. Then she looked towards Sev; his eyes were black as a starless night.

“I’m sorry to have caused you alarm, Sev, but I had to know.”

“And do you?” His eyes softened just a little.

Ana nodded solemnly. “More than I wished for. My head is still buzzing, but I’ll get it under control.”

Then she looked towards Dumbledore. The look on his face was a mixture of emotions, some of which she hadn’t seen before.

“I think I can show you now if you’d like.”

He seemed to consider her offer a moment before responding aloud. “Hagrid, escort them back to my office please where they will wait for me there. Speak to no one of what has happened here.”

“O’ course, Professor. This way you three.”

The walk back to the castle was a long and silent one. Ana could feel Fred glancing at her every so often, but she had yet to look back at him. She didn’t know what she’d see in his eyes
when she did and she feared the revulsion she now felt for herself. And yet, somehow, the silence between them was agonizing. She knew she couldn’t talk to them in front of Hagrid, however.

“Hagrid?” she asked softly once they were in the circular office. “I...I know we are to wait here for Professor Dumbledore, but...neither of us have had supper yet...”

“And the kidney pies from the Great Hall had my mouth watering as we passed by,” Fred said stepping up beside Ana.

“Could you perhaps go down to the kitchens and ask an elf to bring us something?”

“Oh! Er—”


“Well, I... I ‘spose tha’ would be all right. You...you'll stay here?”

“Oh, of course,” said Ana. “We’ll be right here. I promise.”

“Arligh’ then. I won’t be long.”

There was a bit of silence as they waited for him to leave. Then Ana turned to Harry.

“Dobby’s in the kitchens?”

“Yeah. Dumbledore hired him, even pays him wages now. Wait...you know Dobby?”

“He was the Malfoy’s House-elf.”

“Until I tricked Lucious Malfoy into setting him free.”
Ana quirked a faint smile. “I’m sure you jumped to the top of his kill list after that.”

“I’m pretty sure I was already there actually.”
Ana’s smile grew a little bigger.

“Are you ready to tell me what that was all about now?” Fred asked, sounding unamused.

For the first time since the forest, Ana allowed herself to look at him. She saw something there she wasn’t used to seeing: fear. But fear of what? Her? In a futile attempt, she tried to play it off.

“I was hungry, and those kidney pies did smell really good.”

“Ana,” Harry said on Fred’s behalf.

Ana sighed. She knew she’d have to tell them; that was why she sent Hagrid away in the first place. She nodded and suggested that they sit.

“I...I didn’t track Crouch’s path through the forest,” she said. “I found his body because...because I knew where it was. I’d been there before.”

“What are you saying, Ana?” Fred asked.

“I didn’t kill him,” she said quickly.

“That thought never crossed my mind.”
“But…do you know who did?” Harry asked.

“No. Whoever it was kept themselves hidden, attacking from behind. I couldn’t see them.”

“See them? Ana, you’re not making any sense. How could you see anything; you weren’t there,” Fred said.

“I couldn’t see them like I’m sitting next to you and seeing you, I… It was more like… Ugh. I really don’t like the word, but it was more like a vision.”

“A vision?” Harry repeated.

“I’m not a seer. I can’t gaze into a crystal ball and divine the future or predict what’s going to happen based on a few tea leaves; I simply make it up in class and say things Professor Trelawney wants to hear.”

There was something akin to an understanding grunt that issued from Harry.

“But I… I’ve been having this reoccurring dream since…well since my birthday. No. No, I had a small glimpse of it before, at the World Cup; I’d forgotten about that.

“Anyways, in the dream, I’m stumbling around in the forest trying to get to Dumbledore. I feel like I have to tell him something important, but I can’t remember what it is. When I catch a glimpse of myself, however, I’m not me; I’m Crouch. Then there’s this flash of green light and I wake up.”


“Yeah,” Ana nodded. “That had to be it. That’s what it was. At first, I didn’t know what the dream meant. Honestly, I didn’t want to know. I thought it was just stress related because of my OWLs but… Then I had it again in the corridor this evening, and I knew something was different. It was different, more…intense, more real. And I… I think that may have actually been when it happened.

“Dumbledore knew about the original dream, and he told me to come to him if I had anymore. When we got out there I… I shouldn’t have wandered off alone; I apologize for that. I found Crouch because… I followed the path in my dream. I recognized the trees. And when I found him, when I saw the body…something clicked and I realized, he wasn’t the only one I’d seen.

“I’m not a seer. I don’t see things; I see one particular thing. I see the moment someone dies.”

Dobby arrived with trays of food, from kidney pies to spaghetti and from every flavor of biscuit to treacle tarts. But he arrived to a room smothered in silence. Harry did his best to quickly send the House-elf away with a grateful smile. The only thing was, no one really felt like eating any more.

“Ana, that’s…” Fred broke the silence, but he had no words to properly describe the situation.

“Crazy? Completely mental? And totally unfair? Yeah, I know, but… it is, you know. Crouch isn’t the only one; when I saw him, it’s like the dam was opened and I’ve been flooded with these other visions. Ms. Henley, our next door neighbor, died nearly ten years ago from what the Muggles call a heart attack. Mr. Todd, the grocer on Baker’s Way, died in a fire last summer; I can see them both happening as though it were only seconds ago. And I…” Ana looked to Harry.
“I saw Mum and Dad die,” she said softly. “When I was two, I saw them but… I was only two and I couldn’t tell anyone, at least, not in a way that they understood. So they…they must have sent for Dumbledore, a Legilimens, but he sent Sev in his place.”

“And in addition to being a natural Occlumens,” Sev said from behind them making the boys jump in their seats. “Your mind was more fragile than the ones I was used to working with; I had to be delicate or risk irreparable damage. By the time I got to the vision and realized what it was, it was too late.”

“What I don’t understand though,” Ana said, turning in her seat to face him. “Is that if I had that vision then, then why did they stop and why are the only now coming back?”

“It could be as the Headmaster said, that you are simply now of the age where such…gifts present themselves. Your parent’s vision could merely have been attributed to your personal bond with them. Or… it could be that when you removed the barrier I had in place you opened yourself to the possibility of receiving them once more.”

“So, the barrier you put in place to block my memories could also have been blocking my…visions?”

“Possibly.”

“And would I be correct in assuming that in order to block these visions again you must remove all traces of them including the link to my parents, which would require erasing any memory of them and Harry again?”

Sev nodded curtly.

“Then there’s no winning is there?” Ana swiped at the tears that betrayed her.

“There is, however, the possibility that you might be able to restrict them with time and practice. You are strong, Belladonna; you will achieve this.

“In the meantime,” Sev continued aloud. “The Headmaster requested that I remove this current vision.”

“You’re going to obliviate her?” Harry jumped to his feet.

“Not erase, remove, Potter. Remove the vision in its entirety so that the Headmaster may view it later at his own leisure, and so that Belladonna may focus on her upcoming OWLs.”

“Will it affect anything else?” Ana asked.

“No.”

“Then take it, take them all please. Because right now they keep playing through my head and I can’t stop them.”

“You must open your mind to me first. Allow me complete access.”

Ana nodded before closing her eyes and taking a deep breath. Then she called forth the visions, starting with the one of Crouch first. She felt a slight pull, no more intrusive than their typical occlumency lessons, but when the visions were done and she opened her eyes she no longer felt the lingering dread and panic that usually followed. She felt oddly calm, at ease, and clear minded.
“Now, I am to escort you back to your common rooms. The Minister is sure to have arrived by now and he and the Headmaster will be heading here. It is best that the Minister not know of your involvement at the present moment.”

With a lazy wave of his wand, all the food disappeared, including the biscuit in Fred’s hand.

“I was eating that.”

The faintest glimmer of amusement crossed Sev’s features.
Ana, Harry, and Fred all agreed not to tell anyone about Ana’s visions until after she sat her exams. She wanted to put them as far from her mind as possible, and Sev removing them from her memory helped a great deal. Professor Moody, however, didn’t seem to forgive or forget Ana’s finding of the body and wherever she went in the castle she had a hard time shaking his magical eye.

About a week or so after the incident, Harry pulled Ana aside to tell her about a dream he had involving Voldemort and Pettigrew. She encouraged and insisted that he go to Dumbledore with the news; she would have gone with him, but she was about to sit for her defense exam. Harry returned to her later that same day with startling news.

“Snape was a Death Eater!” he whispered harshly. “I know you’re going to argue that you trust him, but I don’t think you should.”

“He was a spy, Harry.”

“He was a Death Eater before he turned spy.”

“I know, but…”

“Wait! You knew? You’ve always claimed he was just a spy.”

“Of course I knew. We’ve been inside each other’s minds; I found a memory of it and he told me about it. Look, he made a mistake when he was younger.”

“Made a mistake?! You don’t join the Death Eaters by a mistake, Ana!”

“Harry, I really don’t have time to discuss this with you right now. I have to go take my defense practical. But…I trust Sev with my life, with your life even; you don’t know him like I do. No one does.”

“But what if he never really turned sides? What if it was all an act?”

“You’re wrong, Harry. I’m sorry, but you are. Now, I have to go.”

They didn’t discuss the matter any further.

XXX
Ana sat for her exams one after the other. They had the written portion in the morning and the practical after lunch. Then at last, she walked out after her last exam breathing a great sigh of relief only to find Fred waiting in the Entrance Hall for her.

“Katie, can I have my girlfriend back now?” he asked.

“Ugh! Please, take her I beg of you. She’s driving me crazy,” Katie teased.

“Oh bugger off, Bell,” Ana retorted before leaning in to kiss Fred.

“Aaamnd I’ve lost my brother again.”

“Bugger off, George,” Fred said grinning. “Let’s go for a walk.”

“Don’t you have another exam to study for?” Ana asked.

He frowned and shook his head. “And I thought you knew me.”

Ana rolled her eyes. “Let’s go you dolt.”

She took his hand as they walked out onto the sunlit grounds. They sat by the lake kissing and making plans to see each other over the summer holiday.

XXX

“Ana, are you almost done?” Fred asked.

“Nearly, I just have to bottle this last potion for Harry.” Ana spooned a clear blue liquid into a small vial and corked it. Then she put it and four other vials in her pocket. “And done.”

“Good. Now, let’s go have lunch with my Mum.”

“Wait! What?!?”

“Uh, yeah. Mum and Bill came to watch Harry in the task, and…”

“Your mother is here?!”

“Yeah, I just…”

“And you want me to have lunch with her?!”

“Er—yeah…”

“I…I’m not ready for that. Perhaps I should just sit with Adrian today.”

“And how would it look when I tell her that my girlfriend would rather sit with another bloke?”

“Simple. You don’t tell her.”

“What are you talking about? I have to tell her. We were planning on introducing you anyway; we’re just doing it a little earlier than expected.”

“Yeah, but that was supposed to be this summer, when I had time to prepare.”

“Prepare? Ana, you’re being barmy. Mum will love you. And besides, you need to give
Fred took Ana’s hand in his and pulled her towards the Great Hall. Meanwhile, Ana was beginning to feel a bit frantic. She wasn’t at all ready to meet his mum. She was hoping to have asked Granger what to expect from Mrs. Weasley first, but Granger had been so busy helping Harry prepare for the third task that they hadn’t had a chance to talk. Ana, of course, couldn’t ask Harry or Fred, or even George, because they were boys; they didn’t understand the importance.

Ana tried to slip free of Fred’s grasp, but he held firm. And then, all too soon for her liking, they stood in front of the Gryffindor table. In addition to the usual Weasleys, George, Ron, and Ginny, there were two others there. One, who was obviously Fred’s eldest brother Bill, had his long hair pulled back into a pony tail and wore a fanged earring in his ear. The other one was a plump, older woman Ana barely had time to take note of before she jumped up to hug Fred.

“Ohh, Fred. You’ve been behaving, yes?”

“A perfect angel, Mum.”

Someone scoffed at the table while Bill said, “An angel from hell maybe.”

“Now, I didn’t say what kind of angel, only that I was a perfect one.”

Mrs. Weasley made a disapproving tsk while smiling all the same. Then her eyes fell on Ana. “And you are you, Dearie?”

Fred grinned and threw his arm around Ana’s shoulder, pushing her forward slightly. “Mum, this is Ana, my girlfriend.”

“Girlfriend?”

“It’s a pleasure to meet you, Mrs. Weasley.” Ana was amazed that she managed to say those words with a completely even tone when it felt like her whole body was shaking with nerves. Ana thrust out her hand to shake Mrs. Weasley’s, but Mrs. Weasley bypassed Ana’s hand and pulled her in for a hug.

“Oh, you lovely girl. You must sit and eat lunch with us.”

Ana was squeezed onto the bench between Fred and his mother. Harry sat across from her with Bill or his left and Ron on his right. George was next to Fred and Ginny on the other side of their mum.

“So, Ana, is it? Are you in Gryffindor as well?” Mrs. Weasley asked.

Ana wasn’t wearing her school robe because she took it off when working in her lab and Fred hadn’t given her the chance to grab it. And she wasn’t wearing any other house indicator because at the end of the school year the dress code was usually pretty lax, especially for fifth and seventh years who had just taken their OWLs and NEWTs.

“Oh, uhm, no Ma’am.” Ana tried to keep the indignation out of her voice.

“That’s alright,” Bill said. “Nobody’s perfect,” he finished with a smirk very reminiscent of the twins’. Fred and George laughed.

“I happen to take great pride in my house. Sure it’s mostly full of thickheaded dolts who often can’t think for themselves. But at least they do think on occasion, unlike Gryffindors who
merely leap without considering the fall that awaits them.” Ana returned his smirk with one of her own.

“A Slytherin, then.”

“Not all snakes are wicked and vile creatures.”

“Despite what Rita Skeeter seems to think,” Fred said.

“Speaking of wicked and vile creatures,” Ana retorted.

“I can see why my brother fancies you,” Bill said. “A sharp mind like yours though, might have been better suited for Ravenclaw. It’s a shame really.”

“The Sorting Hat did consider Ravenclaw for a moment, but it chose not to be held accountable for the fate of one Marietta Edgecombe should it place me in the same house as her.”

“Wait! You threatened the Sorting Hat during your sorting?” Fred asked. “You never told me that.”

“Well, you never asked.”

Bill laughed loudly. “I like her, Fred.”

Ana’s smirk turned to a true smile. She had another brother on her side now; only three more to go. Mrs. Weasley, however, did not seem impressed.

“I don’t think it was right of you to have threatened another student like that. What could she have possibly done to warrant such and act in so little time?”

“Well…” Ana felt rebuked, an unfamiliar feeling. “I suppose she hadn’t done anything at the time, yet. But it was the way she looked down on me that I didn’t like, as though she was better than me. And then she told me and Katie that if we wanted to talk about some ruddy sport then we should go sit with the boys, as though girls weren’t allowed to enjoy Quidditch.”

“I’d have hexed her myself,” Ginny said.

“You would have done no such thing, Ginevra,” Mrs. Weasley scolded. “And I’m sure your mother wouldn’t approve either, Ana.”

Even Ron flinched at Mrs. Weasley’s slip.

“Mum…”

“My mother is dead,” Ana said before Fred could say more.

“Oh!” Mrs. Weasley’s eyes widened.

“My father too, actually. They both died when I was only two. I barely remember, them, but I don’t think they would have minded me standing up for myself.”

“Well, I… I’m very sorry to hear about your parents, dear, but sticking up for yourself and instigating something are very different.”

“I have never instigated anything, Mrs. Weasley. Most people are simply not aware of the initial trigger. Even my most wicked act was done in retaliation, albeit the retaliation was based on
faulty assumptions perpetrated by both parties."

Ana was struggling to keep her emotions in check. When she felt tears coming that she couldn’t hold back, she decided to excuse herself as quickly and politely as possible.

“I’m sorry, but I… I’ve just recalled that I have a meeting with my Head of House that I really must prepare for. Career counseling.”

“Ana…”

“I have to go, Fred. I’m sorry. Don’t want to keep Professor Snape waiting. Oh! Harry. I almost forgot. I have a few potions for you to use in the task if you’d like them.”

“Er—yeah of course.”

“Great. Each one is labeled for you,” Ana said handing over the vials. “There’s both a shrinking and a swelling solution, a freezing and a melting one, and then the fifth…” Ana swallowed roughly against the emotion swelling within her. “Granger mentioned you were having trouble with your shield charm, so I whipped this up this morning. It’s a barrier boost. Drink it and it will increase the strength of all your defensive spells for about an hour.”

“Excellent! Thanks, Ana. Are you sure you can’t stay? I’m sure, er—Snape will understand.”

Ana’s occlumency must have been stronger than she realized, if no-one noticed how much she was struggling to keep her smile. “He doesn’t usually though, does he?” Her voice cracked. “It was lovely to meet you Mrs. Weasley, Bill. No, Fred, you stay with your family. It’s alright.”

“I’ll be with them all summer, Ana,” Fred said standing.

“I’m sure your brother will be returning to Egypt soon, so stay.” She pushed him back into his seat before leaving in a hurry.

Ana really didn’t feel like going down to the dungeons, especially when it was so nice out, so she fled through the front doors. She quickly had to swipe at her eyes as the fresh air forced her tears to the surface at last. She stormed across the grounds with no particular destination in mind. She wasn’t even sure why Mrs. Weasley’s words had upset her so much. She continued to furiously wipe at the tears until her eyes became too blurry to see out of. Then she stopped at a large tree not far from Hagrid’s garden. She slumped to the ground behind it, pulled her knees to her chest, and let the tears fall without hindrance.

She wasn’t sure how long she’d been crying when a whining dog interrupted her. Ana lifted her head from her knees to look at the large black canine. At first, she thought it must have wandered off from its home in Hogsmeade, but it appeared to be far too filthy and far too skinny—Ana could see the indent of its ribcage—to be anything more than a stray.

“Go away,” Ana said. “I don’t have any food for you.”

The dog whined again before lying flat on its belly and resting its head between its front paws. As Ana studied it a little more she realized she had seen it before, rummaging through the trash bins in the village.

“Scram dog. Try the bins in Hogsmeade again. If a professor finds you here, they won’t take kindly to having a mangy mutt around. Go!”
The dog still refused to move.

“Suit yourself, but I won’t be held liable if McGonagall finds you.”

The dog jumped up and barked, its tail wagging as he moved closer to her. Ana continued to study it; there was something strangely familiar about it. Slowly a distant and faded memory came to mind of another black dog she had known. It was very similar in size to this one. In the memory, the dog was pouncing on a wooden floor begging to be played with; even its bark sounded familiar. Then there was another memory, a more recent one, of a large dog knocking her and Harry to the ground before dragging Ron beneath the Whomping Willow.

“I… I know you, don’t I?”

The dog barked again, its tail wagging vigorously now.

“Keep it down, will you. Or are you trying to call McGonagall over?”

The dog had enough decency to flatten its ears and lower its head in shame.

“What are you even doing here?” Ana asked. “Wait, you came to watch Harry, didn’t you? Of course you’d come for him.”

The dog cocked its head to the side.

“It’s nothing. It doesn’t concern you. Harry’s not here, obviously. He’s up in the castle having lunch and enjoying the company of a family who cares for him.”

Ana thought she felt another wave of tears coming on, so she looked away from the dog. It whined again.

“Just… go away. Please.”

The dog sat on its hind legs, refusing to leave. They sat there quietly for a while. Ana wiped away a few more tears and the dog laid its head near her feet.

“I’m not mad at him, you know,” she said softly. The dog lifted its head to look at her. “I know it’s not his fault; he tried to get me to stay, but I…I just couldn’t. I don’t know why.”

“Who are you talking to?”

Ana nearly jumped as Fred came around the tree. The dog leapt to its feet.

“Fred!” she exclaimed. “I thought I told you to stay with your family.”

“Yeah, well, it may have escaped your notice because you’ve been focused on my devastatingly good looks, but I don’t usually do as I’m told.” He settled into the grass beside her and leaned his back against the tree.

“Whose dog is that?” he asked.

“I… I don’t know. I guess Hagrid is taking in strays now.” Ana wasn’t sure why she kept Sirius’ identity a secret from Fred. Perhaps it was because she wasn’t entirely certain that it was Sirius.

“Look, Ana, about what my Mum said…”
“Don’t worry about it.” Ana tried to prevent him from bringing it up again because she was just about over it, but of course he didn’t listen.

“I think she was wrong. I’m sure your parents would be proud of you.”

The dog cocked its head to the side again while Ana fought against the sudden lump in her throat and the threat of fresh tears. That was it, wasn’t it? That was the root of all it. Somehow Fred had figured it out when even Ana herself couldn’t.

“I mean… you’re brilliant, Ana,” Fred continued. “Not just in the academic sense, though you are there too; you claim to struggle with Transfiguration, but you’re averaging an E in there. You’re bold and confident. You do want you want, you don’t care what others think of you, and you don’t let anything get to you. You’re witty and funny in your own way without even trying, and believe me, that’s tough to do. And you’re beautiful. Merlin! You’re so beautiful.”

Ana still felt the threat of tears, but these were of a different sort. The dog barked.

“See, even Snuffles agrees with me,” Fred said.

Ana’s lips twitched in a slight smile. “Snuffles. I think the name suits him.”

The dog barred its teeth and growled slightly in disagreement.

“And I’m sure if you told my Mum that you’re Harry’s sister, then she’d have been more understanding,” Fred continued.

“I don’t want her to like me because I’m a Potter. I was an Evans first.”

“Technically I think….”

“I knew I was an Evans first.”

“Fair enough,” he relented. “But she won’t like you because you’re a Potter. She’ll like you because you’re brilliant.”

Ana grinned. “And how brilliant was that again? I don’t think I told you to stop.”

Fred grinned. “See. Right there, a prime example of your brilliance.”

Ana smiled in earnest. “And you’re an idiot.”

“Gee thanks.”

“Mind you, a very cute idiot.”

“I think the word you’re looking for is ‘devastatingly good looking.’”

Ana laughed but nodded. “Yeah, I think you’re right.”

“Course I am.”

Ana locked eyes with him and felt a great pull within her. Words she’d been thinking for nearly five months rushed to the tip of her tongue. With the warm summer sun and the light breeze on them, it would have been so easy to let them go. But she fought it still.

“Fred, I… thank you,” she finished after a long pause.
Fred smiled. “I know. Me too.”

“Definitely an idiot.”

“Definitely,” he agreed. And then he kissed her, soft and sweet. As his hand slid around her waist and he made to pull her onto his lap, however, the dog intervened. With a loud bark it jumped in their laps, breaking their kiss, and squeezed itself in between them.

Fred laughed. “I think Snuffles is jealous.” He scratched the dog behind its ear.

“Ew,” Ana pinched her nose. “I think Snuffles needs a bath. I have it on good authority that the Giant Squid is looking for playmates, you know,” she said to the dog.

As the dog let its tongue loll out the side of its mouth, Ana was sure she saw it smiling.
Memories of Another

Chapter Notes

Oh wow... How long has it been? I can't even remember. I'm so sorry to have kept you waiting. Easter is a crazy time for me, add being short staffed and a chapter that doesn't want to cooperate and well...you get a delay.

But I am happy to say, that this chapter has finally been subdued and wrangled into something that I hope you enjoy.

Belladonna 45

Memories of Another

24 June 1995

The crowd was mad with excitement. The Triwizard Champion would be a Hogwarts student; Delacour and Krum couldn’t finish the maze, so only Diggory and Harry were left. Ana sat next to Fred while his family stretched out on the other side of him. They were laughing and singing along with everyone else when suddenly Ana felt herself falling. It was the same dizzying sort of fall that left her feeling like she would retch. Her hand seized up inside Fred’s.

“Ana?” Fred was alarmed at the sudden and drastic change that overcame her. Her smile had vanished and the laughter had died in her throat. Her face paled, and her eyes were wide and fearful.

“Ana?” He tried again, but her glassy daze remained distant. Then she blinked slowly, coming back to herself.

“Did you just…?”

“Yeah,” she nodded briefly. “Sev. I need to get to Sev and Dum…Dumbledore.”

Fred nodded and jumped to his feet. He cleared a path ahead of them, claiming Ana was going to be sick and her appearance certainly led others to believe that was the case. It was an almost treacherous decent as Ana remained unsteady on her feet. When they reached the bottom, Ana barely had enough clearance to duck around the corner before she really was sick.

After a minute or two, Fred helped her stand back up.

“What’s going on? I heard her screaming,” Snape said.

“I think she had another vision, Sir.”

“Belladonna?”

“It… it’s Cedric, Sev. He…” She started crying.

“When?”
“I… I don’t know; it was so intense. Soon if…” She trailed off.

“Let me see.”

Ana nodded and prepared to open her mind to him. Before he could enter, however, Sev hissed in pain and clutched at his left forearm.

“What? What was that?” Ana asked. “Sev, what…” Ana reached for him but he pulled back.

“Stay here. I will tell the Headmaster.”

“Sev, what…” but he was already gone.

“Ana? You don’t think that Diggory….” Fred began. “I mean, it could have just been a warning, like with Crouch. You had dreams of him months before it actually happened. Right?”

“Yeah…might be,” Ana replied. She didn’t want to tell him that she saw Diggory wearing the same jersey as when he entered the maze.

“But… you don’t really believe that?”

“No,” she said choking on more tears.

Fred moved into hold her when that same distant look crossed her face. She creamed coming out of this one and promptly covered her mouth as she sobbed uncontrollably.

“Miss Evans?” Dumbledore returned with Sev.

“She had another one, just now. She hasn’t said of whom.”

“Miss Evans, I must…”

Ana nodded before Dumbledore could finish his sentence. He took her by the shoulders and locked her in an intense gaze. Fred glanced up at Sev, but the Potions Master kept his attention focused on Ana. Fred looked back at Ana just as Dumbledore pulled away.

“Harry,” he whispered.

Ana sobbed harder and dropped to her knees.

“Wait, what? Harry? No. It can’t…”

Fred couldn’t finish his sentence, as the stands erupted in cheer behind them. All four of them quickly turned their attention to the field. A golden cup and two bodies lay at the entrance to the maze. Ana screamed and tried to scramble to her feet and run forward, but Sev stopped her with a paralyzing hand on the shoulder. Dumbledore, however, did rush to the field where he rolled Harry on to his back. Fred held his breath and waited as silence befell the crowd.

Ana continued to cry as she too waited. And then Fred broke the silence.


Suddenly there was a deaf-defying shout. “That’s my son! That’s my son!”

“But Diggory has not.”

“Cedric…”

“Belladonna, I must assist the Headmaster. You are to wait here.”

“I need to see Harry,” Ana protested.

“You will wait here.”

Sev left no room for argument as he left, and Ana turned towards Fred.

“I don’t understand; why were the visions so different?” she said.

“What do you mean?” Fred asked.

“I had the one of Crouch off and on for months, but with C…Cedric,” she choked, “it was just the one. And then why was Harry’s wrong?”

“Maybe Harry’s is supposed to be…” but Fred couldn’t finish his sentence.

“No. He…he was wearing his Triwizard jersey, same as Cedric, and… and they occurred in the same place. He was supposed to die tonight; I saw him cast the killing curse.”

“Who? Harry?”

“No… You-Know-Who cast the curse at Harry; there’s no way to block it.”

“You… Ana, he’s…”

“He’s back, Fred. I don’t know how, but I saw him. He was there.”

Fred stood speechless. How was one supposed to respond to the news that You-Know-Who was back from the dead? Over his shoulder, Ana saw Professor Moody leaving with Harry tucked into his side. Harry may have been a little battle weary, but all Ana saw was that he was alive and she was overcome with relief.

“Harry!” She rushed forward and threw her arms around him. There was a small hesitance before he returned the hug.

“Cedric…” he choked out.

“I know. I saw.” Harry squeezed a little tighter. “But, you? How are you not…?”

“I—I don’t know.”

“We don’t have time for this. Let’s go,” Moody said gruffly as he pulled Harry away from Ana.

“Where are you taking him?”

“To the castle.”

“I…I think it might be best to stay here.”
“No! We’re going to the castle,” he spat.

Ana wasn’t quite sure why, but something didn’t seem right. She was almost certain that Dumbledore would want Harry to remain close to him. Someone had gone to great lengths to organize Harry’s death, and until it was discovered who that was then Harry was safest near Dumbledore and Sev. Ana’s fingers instinctively grasped her wand.

“No. I really think he should stay,” Ana said, pointing her wand at him.

“Ana!”

“What are you doing?” Harry and Fred said at the same time.

“Are you going to stop me, girl?” Moody almost taunted.

“If I must.”

“Well, let’s see what you’ve got then.” Moody released Harry’s arm and pulled out his own wand.

Ana’s heart hammered in her chest as her hands began to sweat. She could scarcely believe that she was going to go through with this: dueling a renowned Auror. The very idea was mental, but for Harry she knew it must be done.

“You can’t do it, can you?” Moody taunted. A new resolve came over her.

“Don’t you know not to tell a Slytherin she can’t do something? Expelliarmus!”

Ana flicked her wrist with near expert precision and Moody blocked it with ease, non-verbally. Ana tried another one.

“Levicorpus!”

Moody blocked that one easily too. Again and again Ana fired a spell at him and he continued to block them easily. Ana was beginning to realize that without the ability to perform non-verbal spells then she would never be able to surprise Moody with an attack. That realization was extremely irritating.

By about the fourth or fifth spell, another voice joined the fray. Fred, despite not understanding why Ana was so set on separating Moody from Harry, was lending his assistance to her. Still, they were not enough to combat the Auror. There was a grunt followed by a thud. Ana glanced briefly beside her to find Fred sprawled on the ground.

“No!” Ana gasped.

“You’re good, but not you’re not good enough,” Moody said.

Ana was furious; her hands shook. She was not about to let him get the best of her. So she performed the only bit of magic she could non-verbally.

“*Legimens.*”

Ana found herself inside the dark and twisted mind of her Defense Professor. She managed to break through his defenses with ease, but what she found confused her.
A couple lay withering on the floor before her, their screams were agonizing to hear. Surrounding them were three men and one woman with wild dark hair. The woman’s cackling laugh was almost more terrible to hear than the screams. She pulled back her wand and the screaming was replaced with heavy, breathless panting.

“Your turn, Barty,” the woman said.

Then the youngest of the three men raised his wand and directed it at the couple.

“Crucio.”

The scene changed and Ana was standing in a cold, dark hallway. She gave an involuntary shudder as a cloaked dementor drifted by her. Ahead of her she saw Mr. Crouch with a frail looking woman beside him. And behind a set of iron bars was the same boy from the previous scene.

The scene changed again and Ana saw herself talking to Harry, Ron, and Hermione; the mayhem of the World Cup was unfolding behind them. Then she saw that same boy pass by them with a House-elf tailing behind him.

Next she saw the boy fighting Professor Moody. A stained glass window shattered as a stray spell hit it.

Then she was back in her vision of Mr. Crouch. This time, however, she could clearly see Professor Moody cast the curse that killed him.

Lastly, the scene changed drastically. Moody, Crouch, and the forest disappeared leaving Ana alone in an empty space. The boy from the first scene appeared again, looking a little older and a little more deranged.

“You are good,” he said. “The Dark Lord would be pleased to have someone of your talent on his side. It’s a shame you’re tainted by the filth of Blood Traitors.”

Then he set the tip of his wand against her chest and shouted, “Stupefy!”

Ana was thrown out of Moody’s mind with great force. She fell backward and hit her head hard on a rock. She couldn’t have been out long, but when she came to Moody and Harry were gone. They were replaced by Sev and Dumbledore. Ana focused on Sev’s narrow eyes for only a moment before the events came rushing back to her.

“Fred! Harry!” Ana sat up quickly, making her surroundings spin wildly around her.

“I’m here,” Fred said weakly to her left. He was bent over his knees, clutching his stomach in pain; George was kneeling beside him. Fred met Ana’s gaze and gave a half smile. “It’s
nothing."

“I…”

“Miss Evans, what happened? Where’s Harry?” Dumbledore asked, demanding Ana’s attention.

“It was Professor Moody; he took Harry. I tried to stop him, but…” She winced as a sudden jet of pain rang through her head. She touched the back of it and brought her hands back stained with blood.

“Severus,” Dumbledore cautioned. Sev had clenched his jaw to the point where his face went white with fury. “Mr. Weasley, will you see to it that Miss Evans and your brother get safely to Madam Pomfrey? Minerva, Severus, with me please.”

Sev didn’t need to be told again as he followed swiftly after the old Headmaster who moved across the grounds faster than Ana had ever seen him move.

“Come on; let’s get you out of here before they clear the stands,” Bill said as he bent down to help Ana to her feet. George did the same for Fred, and once they were both stable they rushed to each other.

“Oh, Fred!” First Ana hugged him tight and then she shoved his chest. “Are you a complete idiot!? What were you thinking?”

“Ow!” Fred rubbed his chest. “I was thinking that I couldn’t let you have all the fun.”

“This isn’t funny!” she said with tears in her eyes.

“No,” he sighed. “No, it’s not; I’m sorry.” He pulled her back to his chest. “You thought it was a good idea that Harry stay here, and that was good enough for me. I knew I had to help however I could.”

“But something could have happened to you. Something did happen to you.”

“Something happened to you both, Ana. Or did you hit your head so hard that you’ve forgotten already?” George quipped. Ana gave him a hard glare, but refused to leave Fred’s arms again.

“George is right. You’re both lucky things didn’t turn out worse. Now, let’s get you to the castle,” Bill said, ushering them all forward.

The walk back to the castle was a silent one. Mrs. Weasley joined them along the way with Ron and Hermione in tow and still the silence remained. When they reached the hospital wing, their explanation for being there was muffled. After the excitement of the duel faded, the realization that Cedric Diggory had died set back in. And as everyone tried to wrap their mind around that, Ana was trying to figure out the memories she’d seen in Moody’s mind. They made no sense to her.

“Unless…they weren’t his…”

“Huh? What was that?” Fred asked.

Ana jumped slightly; she hadn’t realized she’d spoken aloud. Fred, his brothers, and Hermione were all standing around looking at her while Mrs. Weasley was trying to get
information out of Madam Pomfrey.

“I…” Ana considered for a moment not telling everyone there what she had seen, but she needed answers and her head was still ringing from her fall, even after Madam Pomfrey had patched it up.

“I got inside Moody’s head,” she continued. “It was the only non-verbal spell I knew, the only way to catch him off guard. But the memories I saw…” She quickly described the memories in question. “They don’t make sense unless they don’t belong to him.”

“But that’s not possible,” Hermione said. “Who else could they belong to?”

“Unless… Moody’s not really Moody,” George offered casually.

“Who else could it be?” Ron asked skeptically.

“Dad was called to Mad-Eye’s just before school started,” Bill said. “There was some business about some trash bins set off by an intruder.”

“An intruder?” Ana exclaimed curiously.

“I remember that now,” Fred said.

“Yeah, but they were proven to be unwarranted claims. The Aurors found no sign of any intruders.”

“Maybe they were too late,” Ana suggested, piecing it together slowly. “Maybe… there was an intruder who got the best of Moody.”

“Got the best of Moody? You’re mental if you think that! He’s an Auror, a brilliant one!” Ron defended their teacher. Ana met him with a hard glare.

“All the same, the intruder bested him and… took on his appearance.”

“And how do you propose…”

“How else? Polyjuice Potion. I believe you’re familiar with it. It’s so simple, so calculated, so…brilliant, and I’m an idiot for not piecing it together sooner.”

“Ana, you’re not…” Fred tried to reassure her but Ana carried on.

“All year someone’s been stealing from our supplies. They’ve been very good to mask their intentions, but there have been two consistencies: boomslang skin and lacewing flies.”

“They were making polyjuice,” Hermione said.

Ana nodded. “Yes, but who? Who was it?”

“Do you recognize the other man you saw in the memories at all?” Bill asked.

“No; I’ve never seen him before.”

“But you said you saw him at the World Cup,” George said.

“No, we only saw Winky,” Hermione said.
“Winky?”

“Mr. Crouch’s House-elf.”

“Mr. Crouch was at Azkaban too, visiting the boy in the cell,” Ana said.

“Crouch had a son that he sent to Azkaban,” Bill explained. “It must have been him, but…he died in Azkaban.”

“He didn’t,” another voice said from the doorway. They all turned to see Harry standing there with Dumbledore behind him and a black shaggy dog at his feet.

“Harry!” Ana took a step towards him, but Mrs. Weasley beat her to him and wrapped him in a tight hug.

“Thank goodness you’re all right,” she said before kissing his cheek. Harry nodded wearily but looked over her shoulder at Ana. Behind them, Sev stepped through the doors levitating an unconscious Moody. Ana’s hand flinched towards her wand.

“That’s the real Moody,” Harry said, breaking away from Mrs. Weasley and making his way over. “The one we knew was an imposter.”

“Barty Crouch Jr.,” Ana said softly.

“How…?”

“I was in his mind; I saw his memories. He set all this in motion.”

Harry nodded. “I…I’m sorry. I should have helped; I should have tried to stop him.”

“Don’t be an idiot, Little Potter,” Ana said almost harshly before giving a faint grin. “You had enough to deal with; it was my turn.”

“But you took a hard hit; I…”

“Me?” Ana rolled her eyes. “I’ve taken harder hits from one of George’s bludgers; it was nothing.” She looked pointedly at Fred and the others, warning them not to contradict her.

“If you ask me, Mr. Crouch was at Azkaban too,” Harry said.

“Headmaster, may I inquire as to what that dog is doing in my hospital ward?” Madam Pomfrey asked, eyeing the dog suspiciously.

“Snuffles? Hey, Ana, look, it’s Snuffles,” Fred said.

“What?” Harry asked.

“I suspect he has another name,” Ana said.

“Ah yes,” Dumbledore began, answering Madam Pomfrey’s question. “Snuffles, here, will be remaining with Harry for awhile. I assure you, he’s quite well trained.”

Madam Pomfrey did not look pleased, but she was not one to go against the Headmaster’s orders. Instead she ushered Harry into a bed, Ana as well, and brought them both a dreamless sleep potion. Snuffles curled up at the foot of Harry’s bed while Fred took up a seat beside Ana’s.

Ana turned her head towards Harry’s bed. “We’ll discuss the rest of it later, Little Potter. For now, rest.”
The school year ended on a somber note. The traditional end-of-year feast, in which the Great Hall was usually decked out in banners displaying the colors and crest of the Inter-House Champion, was more of a memorial in which all the banners were black and displayed only the school crest. Instead of his lively end-of-year speech, Dumbledore instead told everyone the circumstances surrounding Cedric’s death, most notably, that he was murdered by You-Know-Who. Then, after the feast, addresses were exchanged with the promise to keep in touch, and the students all boarded their ship, or their carriage, or the Hogwarts Express to return home.

Except, Ana wasn’t going home.

Shortly after Cedric’s death, Dumbledore had established a group to counter-act You-Know-Who’s rise to power. Sev, being in the unique position that he was, was sent back into the fray to gain You-Know-Who’s trust. He took on the precarious mantle of spy once more. Mrs. Weasley didn’t seem to think it was a good idea for Ana to remain home alone at Spinner’s End while Sev was doing who-knows-what with his fellow Death Eaters; Sev agreed despite Ana’s protests. So, Ana was sent to spend the entire summer at Fred’s House under the ever-present and persistent gaze of his mother.

“Think about it this way,” Fred said, noticing Ana’s glum mood as they walked the train aisle looking for a compartment. “Now you get to spend the whole summer with me.”

“And your brothers,” Ana countered. “I don’t think Percy will want to read Witch Weekly with me and braid my hair.”

“I’ll braid your hair,” George said, reaching for it. Ana pulled back.

“You will not touch my hair.”

“Your mistrust wounds me.”

“It won’t be the only thing to wound you if you ever so much as think of touching my hair again.”

George laughed.

Ana returned her attention to Fred. “Look, Red, the prospect of seeing you all day every day is the sole redemption in this whole convoluted plan. I just worry about him, you know.”

“I know,” Fred replied, rubbing her back affectionately and kissing her forehead.

“Good Godric! I hope they don’t act like that all summer. How do you live with it?” Ginny asked.
“With lots of numbing spells and vomit reducing tonic,” George replied. “I hate to say it, Little Sister, but our dearest brother has changed.”

“Your dearest brother, perhaps.”

“What do you mean?” Fred asked.

“I’ve always preferred Charlie.” Ginny smirked.

“Huh! Traitor!”

Ginny dodged Fred’s attempted blow by ducking into a compartment with her friends.

“Hey, what’s the little ferret doing down at that compartment?” George asked.

“I don’t know, but whatever it is it can’t be good,” Ana replied.

The three of them approached the compartment Draco and his two dunder head companions were standing outside of. It quickly became clear that Harry was on the inside with Ron and Hermione.

“Speaking of filth, here comes some more now,” Draco said with a pinched sneer seeing their approach.

Ana rolled her eyes. “Your originality astounds me, Draco.”

“And your stupidity astounds me. Tell me, how does it feel to be Slytherin’s most tragic story?”

“Tragic?”

“You know, Mother once toyed with the idea of a match between you and me? Thankfully, Father saw that for the mistake it would have been. Not that it matters, now that you’ve tangled with filth.”

“That’s no bother to me. I’d prefer my guy to not have been down the trousers of another bloke.” Ana smirked while Draco’s face turned red and Goyle cracked his knuckles.

“You think you’re so clever,” Draco sneered. “But that won’t be enough to save you or your precious Sev when the Dark Lord comes for him. Mudbloods,” he looked in the compartment towards Hermione before looking back at Ana, “and blood-filth like you will be the first to go. Well, second. Cedric was fir…”

His words were cut off as several jets of light hit him and his compatriots. Fred, George, and everyone in the compartment had their wands directed at the trio that now lay sprawled on the floor. Ana was the only one who had not attacked; his comment about Sev left her reeling.

“Huh, interesting combination,” George said as he stepped over the bodies and into the compartment. Fred and Ana followed him.

“I don’t know how you were ever friends with that git,” Fred said, taking a seat and pulling Ana down next to him.

“He was different when we were younger,” Ana replied. “We were both lonely children with no other friends and we were forced to endure the rigorous lessons of the most vicious tutor in Britain.” She saw the skeptical looks on their faces and sighed. “I don’t know. Maybe we never
really were friends; maybe it was all just a matter of convenience.”

Ana wanted to shake off Draco’s words and not let them get under her skin, but she knew there was truth behind them. As long as Sev remained her guardian, then his loyalty to You-Know-Who would always be in question. She didn’t want anything to happen to him because of her.

Ana remained down for much of the train ride until something caught her attention in the aisle outside. Hestia had been walking by when she stopped suddenly. She looked down at the ground before looking in through the compartment window. She met Ana’s gaze and cocked an eyebrow; Ana casually shrugged a single shoulder in response. The corner of Hestia’s mouth lifted in a smirk and she nodded before carrying on. The exchange all happened so quickly that no-one else noticed, but it was enough to give Ana a tiny glimmer of hope for the future.

Ana arrived outside Fred’s home clutching his arm tightly. Mrs. Weasley and Bill had met them on the platform and it was decided that apparition was the best way to travel. Mrs. Weasley didn’t really want Ana to do a side along with Fred since he was so new to apparating, but Ana insisted that she trusted him (and she wasn’t about to be left to wait for Bill or Mrs. Weasley to return.) All-in-all, the side along was rougher than she was used to, but a success nonetheless.

Now, Ana stood starring up at this structurally unsound building that the Weasley’s called home. It looked as though it had once been a single story house but over the years additional floors had been added. Its crooked additions could only have been held up by magic and would surely drive any Muggle to madness trying to figure out how it was stable enough for living. Put simply, it was unlike any house Ana had ever seen before.

“Welcome to the Burrow,” Fred said jovially. Then, seeing her wide eyes and slightly agape mouth, his demeanor dropped. “I know it’s not much, but it’s…”

“Wonderful,” Ana said breathlessly.

Fred looked at her curiously.

“You’ve never seen Spinner’s End. Where there’s row upon row of identical charcoal gray houses, darkened by the ash of the old mill, and it’s quite impossible to tell one apart from the other. But this… I doubt there’s any other house like this in the world.”

Fred smiled. “Well, wait ‘til you see the inside.”

The Burrow was as eclectic and unique on the inside as it was on the outside. They walked into a small sitting room; the kitchen was off to their right with a door leading out to the garden. A long stretch of wooden stairs that branched off to several landings stretched out before them. And everywhere Ana looked there were photographs and trinkets scattered over every surface. In the corner sat a large clock, but instead of having two hands to display the time there were nine hands each with the face of a family member on it. Six of those hands were in a shaded area labeled home, two were at work, and the third was out of the country.

Ana turned to Fred with a smile. “Sev would never approve of this. At Spinner’s End, everything has a place and everything better stay in its place. There are two bookshelves full of manuscripts and potions texts, a couch and a seat for sitting and little else. There are no photographs; though, Sev does have his Masters displayed on the wall with pride.”

“It sounds so dull. What do you do for fun?”
“Read potions texts and brew potions.”

Fred’s face turned sour.

“In more recent years, I’ve gone to spend a few days with Sadie or Hestia; I spent all of last summer with Sadie actually, at the beach. We…” Ana trailed off. “Well, it doesn’t really matter. That was last year.”

“Well, we have something better than the beach,” he said.

“Oh?”

“Yeah, a paddock out back where we play Quidditch.”

Ana smiled. “You just said the magic word. When can we start?”

Fred grinned and walked to the foot of the stairs where he cupped his hands around his mouth and shouted. “Oi! Who’s up for some Quidditch?”

There was a short pause before a door opened and Ginny poked her head out. “I’m in!”

George appeared beside them with a pop, startling Ana. “What are we waiting for?” he asked.

Then on the top landing, Ron stepped out. “Did someone say Quidditch?”

“Yeah! We’re putting a game together!” George called back.

“Cool! I’ll be right down!”

“Not now you’re not,” Mrs. Weasley said coming in from the kitchen. “First you’re going to get your things up to your room and unpack. Your brother and Father will be home soon, and dinner will be ready within the hour.”

“When can we play then?” Fred asked.

“Tomorrow. Perhaps. Now, go on, move. Ana, dear, you’ll be rooming with Ginny.”

“Thank you, Mrs. Weasley,” Ana said as Mrs. Weasley walked away.

“Well, I’ll see you a bit,” Fred said.

“What do you mean? Isn’t your room up there somewhere?”

“Sure it is, but I’m not climbing all those stairs. It’s mad.” Then he disapperated on the spot, leaving Ana to carry her trunk up alone.

“Git,” she muttered before making her way up. Fortunately, she put a feather light charm on her trunk earlier making it quite easy to carry. When Ana reached the landing where Ginny had appeared, she found the door open.

“Did he make you lug that up here alone?” Ginny asked, eyeing Ana’s large trunk.

“Yeah.”

“Git.”
Ana cocked a smile.

“Come on; you can take that bed. Hermione usually sleeps in it, but I guess we’ll figure something out when she arrives.”

“Granger is coming?”

“She usually does. Is that a problem?”

“No. Why would it be?”

Ginny shrugged and went back to her unpacking. Ana did the same while taking in her surroundings. The room as a tad too small for two beds, but Ginny didn’t seem to mind. The walls were spattered with various Quidditch posters.

“Are you a Harpies fan?” Ana asked.

“I’m more of a Gewnog Jones fan,” Ginny replied. “She’s really brought the Harpies around in the last few years.”

“That she has, but I still don’t see that the thrill of being on a winning all girl team can surpass the thrill of beating all the boys.”

“I don’t give two bollocks what the boys think. Their feeble opinions have no effect on my skill.”

Ana nearly choked on her surprise. From the way Fred talked about his little sister, Ana had not been expecting a reaction like that out of her.

“True,” she said, “but you can’t deny the pleasure you feel when you see that devastating look on their face when they’re surpassed by a girl.”

“Also true,” Ginny conceded. “I’m taking some clothes down to Mum for washing; do you have anything you’d like me to take?”

“Oh! Um, sure. You can take these; thanks”

“Don’t mention it. Seriously, don’t tell anyone. I’m not running a maid service.”

Ana vowed her silence before Ginny left. Ana didn’t really have anywhere to unpack her things to, so she only took out some of her essentials. Ginny hadn’t returned by the time she was done, so Ana stepped out on to the landing. She was just wondering which room belonged to Fred when he stepped out as well. He met her eyes almost immediately and waved her down with a smile. Ana was happy to oblige.

Fred’s room wasn’t much different from Ginny’s, size wise. There were two beds in there too, one was quite clearly George’s. There were black marks on the walls and various surfaces that Ana suspected were charred marks. The two desks had been pushed together facing each other and were cluttered with designs, product notes, scraps of paper, and what appeared to human ears. And the room itself played host to a lingering smell of smoldering ash.

“Do I even want to know what those are?” Ana asked, pointing to the ears.

“A work in progress that I’m sure you’ll find quite beneficial too.” He picked one up and handed it to Ana. “Extendable ears, used for listening in on distant conversations. Trouble is
Ana ripped the ear away from her, wincing in pain and rubbing her own ear.

“…they only have one volume of loud.”

“Loud?”

“Really loud?” he suggested instead.

“Still a bit of an understatement.”

“Forget the ears for now,” Fred said grinning. He tossed the ear back on the desk and pulled Ana flush against his body.

“Whoa. Well, hullo.”

Fred’s grin turned a little more suggestive. “You know, there is one thing, I’ve never done that I’ve always wanted to do.”

“Oh? What’s that?”

His grin turned cheeky.

Nearly an hour later they were still in the midst of a gobstones tournament.

“Bugger! Best of seven?” Fred asked as Ana captured his last gobstone and obtained the victory.

“Suits me; you’re still going to lose, Red.”

Ana divvied up the gobstones and they prepared for another match. They were fairly evenly matched truth be told. Anytime one took a stone, so did the other. Ana was just about to take her final shot. She had her gobstone positioned, she knew what force it would take to knock Fred’s stone out; she was ready. She took a deep breath, and just as she went to take her shot… George appeared without warning and with a loud pop causing Ana to misfire and her stone went wildly off course. Fred whooped with delight.

“That doesn’t count! Outside interference!” Ana claimed.

Fred didn’t buy it though. “Nope. If you can’t take the pressure then perhaps this isn’t the game for you. You’ve got to remain focused against outside forces.”

Fred began lining up his next shot. “A superb beater, such as myself, knows all about that. We’ve got to contend with the wind, the velocity of the other player, even the magic embedded within each bludger. It takes aim, precision of force, and perfect ti…”

CLAP!

Ana clapped loudly just as Fred made his shot, causing his gobstone to go as off course as Ana’s had.

“Timing?” she asked.
“That’s cheating!” he accused.

“No, that’s leveling the playing field. If you can’t take the pressure, then perhaps this isn’t the game for you.”

“I…”

“Gobstones?” George interrupted Fred. He was sitting on his bed, arms folded over his chest, and eyebrows raised. “You had a girl alone in your room for an hour and you were playing gobstones?”

“We’d never played against each other before,” Ana replied.

“Yeah, someone was always too busy studying to play,” Fred added.

“Aw, Freddie, you have so much to learn, Mate,” George said.

Ana scoffed. “Like you’re the one to teach him?”

“What would you know of it?” George asked.

“I’m friends with Sarah; girls talk to their friends.”

George’s eyes went wide and his smile faded.

“Wait! Are you saying you’ve talked to Katie and Angelina about me?” Fred asked. Ana smirked. “What did you say?”

“Aw, Red, you’re adorably naïve if you think I’m telling you.”

“Naïve? I’ll show you naïve.”

Fred launched himself at Ana, scattering their gobstones everywhere, and pinning Ana to the floor. He crawled on top of her until his face was inches from hers.

Meanwhile, George rolled his eyes. “You’re don’t have time for that now. Dad and Perc are home and Mum says supper is ready. She wants us all downstairs.”

Fred sighed before reluctantly getting up and helping Ana to her feet. Even then though, he pulled her flush against him and wrapped one arm around her waist.

Gorge stood up. “I came as a favor to you; Mum will be up soon if you don’t come quickly. You don’t want her catching you like that with the door closed.”

“Why? I’m not ashamed of loving your brother,” Ana said.

Ana had never heard silence quite as deafening as the silence that followed her slip. She’d been thinking the words for weeks, but this was not how they were supposed to be said for the first time.

George’s eyes went wide as he stared between Ana and his brother. “Come on, Freddie; don’t be an idiot,” he thought.

Fred stared unblinkingly back at Ana; momentarily at a complete loss. Then a slow easy grin began to spread across his face.
Ana tried back-tracking but once the words had been said they couldn’t be unsaid, and she hesitated a moment too long to make any contradiction believable.

“It’s ok, Little Snake. I love George’s brother too,” Fred said at last.

George sighed. “Idiot,” he said before disapperating.

Ana stared in disbelief at Fred. Having him take the mickey on her was almost worse than him not saying the words back.

“I agree with, George,” she said. “You are an idiot.”

She tried to walk by him but he was still holding her hand and he spun her back in.

“Wait,” he said softly.

Ana couldn’t bring herself to look into his eyes, so she stared at his chest as she fought to keep her emotions in check. The silence seemed to stretch on for hours. Then he slowly tilted her head up to meet her eyes and took a deep breath.

“I love you too,” he said sincerely. Then he kissed her gently, shortly, before disapperating with a loud pop.

Ana was once more left alone. “Bloody git.”

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