Lily and the Art of Being Sisyphus

by The Carnivorous Muffin

Summary

As the unwitting personification of Death, reality exists to Lily through the veil of a backstage curtain, a transient stage show performed by actors who take their roles only too seriously. But as the Girl-Who-Lived, Lily's role to play is the most important of all, and come hell or high water play it she will, regardless of how awful Wizard Lenin seems to think she is at her job.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes
In which the girl-who-lived does not live up to her title, meets Death at a train station, and decides to change her name.

Eleanor Lily Potter was the only child of the deceased James and Lily Potter, both of whom had allegedly died in a car crash when she was only a year old. She now lived with her aunt, uncle, and cousin, where she worked as an indentured servant until she had repaid them for their unending kindness. She couldn't quite remember where she'd heard the term "indentured servant", but she had found it in her brain one day (the Dursleys had never really used that word, they'd always said 'freak' or 'girl' or any other monosyllabic name that was really more like a command) and had decided that's what she was. After all, she was the one who was tasked with keeping the house clean, making sure breakfast was made in some edible form, and weeding the garden, and in return her relatives gave her room (the servants' quarters beneath the stairs) and board (a smaller version of Dudley's enormous meals).

Sure, her room was a cupboard that had probably been a pantry in its last life, but it was a room and it had a mattress, so she didn't complain too much. She did wonder how she got sorted into this indentured servant business; she couldn't remember a time when she hadn't been working for the Dursleys, so she had to assume that the debt came when they had to take her in after the car wreck. Still, she'd think to herself as she was pulling weeds, that was an awfully long time ago and the debt should have been paid off by now (unless they were charging interest).

When not working for the Dursleys, she went to school and ran very fast as Dudley and his skinny friend (whose name she could never remember) chased her through the park with sticks, yelling things she never really bothered to listen to.

When asked to describe herself, she would respond rapidly, "I am a girl, I have red hair and green eyes, I'm short for my age but I'll grow taller when my work is more satisfactory and the Dursleys increase my salary, my parents are dead, and I am five years old."

It was in that year that the description she had given would change completely.

The Dursleys had some important family business in the city, which probably meant Dudley eating his weight in pasta at a restaurant that was too nice for servants to attend, and she had been left with crazy Mrs. Figg. Mrs. Figg, aside from being named after a fruit, loved cats. This was how the little girl knew to label her as crazy rather than eccentric, and on that particular day the house was crawling with them. Ellie (what she called herself back then) didn't particularly like or dislike cats, but she wasn't sure why Mrs. Figg needed so many.

They were sitting in her living room, a rather floral place with a bit too much lace to be considered decorative. Ellie was staring at the pictures of cats on the walls where the Dursleys would have kept pictures of Dudley, while Mrs. Figg arranged a battered silver tray that contained a wide variety of biscuits, bread, and tea.

"So, my dear, how's your cousin doing?" Mrs. Figg asked as she passed Ellie her particular cup of
tea for the day. Ellie knew she was expected to drink the tea first, but she really wanted to get to the food; the Dursleys had cut her paycheck again after discovering that Dudley had done poorly in school and had lowered their overall performance review. If she could store some of the biscuits now, she wouldn't have to worry about when her funds ran too low and starvation set in.

"Fat," Ellie responded, sipping from the tea with delicate poise that seemed appropriate for this kind of setting.

"...I'm sorry? I don't believe I heard you right; did you say your cousin was doing... fat?" Mrs. Figg asked, in the way that normally was reserved for Ellie's kindergarten teacher. Ellie nodded with an air of wisdom and set down her tea to explain.

"Dudley's been getting particularly round lately," Ellie said in confidence, "It's so that he can inherit the family business from uncle Vernon. You see, I think a lot of it is presentation, so if Dudley begins to look like uncle Vernon, he will eventually become uncle Vernon and be able to take over his legacy once uncle Vernon retires."

Mrs. Figg smiled politely, the smile Ellie suspected was forced and somewhat fake but received too often to be offended over. "That's... very nice, dear."

"I didn't expect Dudley to start training so early," Ellie confessed to the now somewhat silent Mrs. Figg, "But then again, aunt Petunia and uncle Vernon are always talking about how extraordinary Dudley is, so I guess it's pretty reasonable that he'd start super young."

Mrs. Figg's polite smile became progressively politer, and Ellie wondered if she was on the verge of saying another "That's very nice, dear." That always seemed to be people's (non-Dursleys) response to whatever she said, and she could never understand why. She wondered if it was something they ate.

"...How is school?" Mrs. Figg asked suddenly, as if to divert the topic.

School was a very interesting place. After a few days of being herded into her pen with the other children, Ellie had realized that school was a type of zoo for adults to watch and observe the patterns of children. They were observed in a somewhat artificial (but desperately attempting to be natural) environment, where their keepers would mark their progress in various tasks upon charts with gold stars and track their interactions with other members of the herd. However, this was all very hush-hush, as it would ruin the observations if the subjects knew they were being observed. Besides, she wasn't quite sure the other children were aware of the true nature of school; when she talked to one of them about it, they just sort of looked at her and then walked away.

"Very educational," Ellie finally settled on, before clarifying by saying, "We read books."

"Yes, I suppose you do," Mrs. Figg said. "Do you like it?"

"It's a place," Ellie said after pondering the question for a few moments with a shrug. "Books are nice, although we're not supposed to be able to read them yet."

"You can read already?" Mrs. Figg asked, sounding somewhat surprised.

"On the record I'll have to say no, as it will skew the official results of the experiment. Off the record, there were a bunch of books in the Dursleys' attic that mysteriously relocated themselves to the servants' quarters and haven't been missed." She blinked her large green eyes rather owlishly and continued to drink her tea. Mrs. Figg seemed rather put out by the stream of words that had exited the little girl's mouth.
Finally, crazy Mrs. Figg appeared to have reached her limit, because she sighed and said, "Eleanor, dear, would you like to play outside for a little while?"

And so, Ellie escaped the house filled with cats and made her way outside, where she faced a very ominous tree that would forever change her destiny. It looked like a very climbable tree, which was what caught her interest in the first place. Ellie had climbed very few trees in her life, and rarely just to do so (usually they were a means to escape Dudley when he was being unusually persistent).

Looking at it now, she thought she'd like to make a slow ascent so that she could try to touch the sky. Tall and grey, it blocked out the sun and cast shadows in Ellie's eyes as she climbed ever upwards.

At this rate, she thought to herself, I'll taste the clouds in my mouth before I ever reach the top and then I'll taste sunlight. She climbed steadily on, confident limbs reaching from one branch to the next with ease born of long-years of practiced athleticism. So perhaps it was not her confident foot that slipped, or a clever branch that broke under the weight, but rather an instrument of fate that sent five year old Eleanor Lily Potter tumbling from the tree to the hard ground several feet below.

She almost didn't feel the impact, and then she didn't feel anything at all.

For a moment or two there wasn't anything, she wasn't anywhere at all, and then slowly but surely a train station came into view. A great black and red train awaited passengers with a benign aura, while the station itself almost glittered with pristine cleanliness. She knew she had never been here before, and yet she felt as if it was all very familiar, like the face of a classmate whose name always snuck to the back of her mind out of sight, there but slightly out of reach. She stood slowly, brushed off her knees, and began to explore the seemingly empty station.

It certainly wasn't Mrs. Figg's garden, that was for sure, but then, sometimes weird things happened to Ellie, and she found that it was just best to go with the flow. Like the time aunt Petunia had cut her hair off with scissors and it had grown back overnight. So, mysteriously ending up in an unfamiliar/familiar train station was a little weird, but it wasn't unthinkable.

Walking about the station, she kept her eye on the train, wondering if she was supposed to get on. She didn't have a ticket, but it looked so bright and inviting, like it was smiling and waiting for her to hop on board for an adventure.

She approached the glinting train and found an entrance. Just before she stepped on, though, someone stepped off. It was a tall, thin man who reminded her of a crow. He stood very straight and very still, dressed in dark, very foreign clothing with worn edges. He looked out with mild interest at the station surrounding him. It wasn't so much that everything was black, but that everything was dark, like looking at a shadow and realizing that it was not black at all but a blue that had been consumed by black; this man wore a dark and tattered rainbow that had been dyed in ink so as to disguise its richness. He had rather wild dark hair that stood on his head like feathers, while his face was so pale it looked like a painted mask, and his eyes glittered like stolen green jewels that his crow's heart had taken delight in.

The crow-man hadn't noticed her, but was instead watching with those green-leaf eyes the emptiness of the train station. He frowned slightly and rocked back on his heels, blinking, before looking at it again with a cocked head.

He muttered something in an unfamiliar language and cocked his head to the other side, looking, if anything, more confused than before.

"Hi!" Ellie said brightly, waving at him. His head whipped around wildly until he was looking directly at her in blinking confusion. His mouth opened slightly before closing again, and he leaned back, as if he wanted to climb back into the train. "No, wait, don't go! My name's Ellie and I don't
know where I am. Was the train nice?"

He stopped moving backwards, at least, and paused as if to consider her, green eyes taking her in piece by piece until he had arranged and rearranged all of her. Finally, he said in a soft, powerful voice, "Hello."

He seemed to have decided she was alright, because he stepped off the train and onto the platform. He continued to regard her, all the while his features finally changing from confusion to a small smile, one she hadn't ever seen before, not even on T.V. It was soft, kind, but it was also old and sad and slightly dangerous.

Finally, Ellie stated with authority, "It's rude not to introduce yourself."

"Ah." The man's smile lost a little of that sad edge. "Forgive me, it's been a while since anyone has thought to ask." He then seemed to become distracted as he looked about at the train station, looking like the kids in school who almost knew the answer but then forgot at the last minute. Eventually, he said, "I suppose I am Death."

"Death?" she asked. She took him in with raised eyebrows; death on T.V. wore black too, but usually he was a skeleton, and he also had a scythe.

"Destroyer of worlds," he finished with a slight cockeyed smile.

She narrowed her eyes slightly, wondering if he really was death or if he was just some guy named Death. Maybe his parents were some of those weird people the Dursleys always mentioned. Or maybe he was a little crazy, like Mrs. Figg. She decided to find out. "Do you own any cats?"

He seemed slightly put off by the question, but eventually he responded, "…No, I'm afraid I don't. I once had an owl though."

"What happened to it?" Ellie asked when she failed to see an owl.

"She died," he said rather solemnly. He sighed then, and shifted his hair out of his eyes, looking at the train station in confusion. Finally, he asked, "I suppose you wouldn't know why I'm in purgatory at the moment."

Ellie had no idea. She had never heard of a train station called purgatory; all she knew was King's Cross, but she'd never actually been there either. She was about to say so, but then she caught eye of something interesting on Death's forehead. Faded and almost unnoticeable was a pink scar, a scar in the shape of a lightning bolt. She pointed to it enthusiastically. "Hey! I have a scar just like that one! I got mine in a car wreck when I was a baby, when did you get yours?"

He blinked rather owlishly. He settled for, "What?"

She pushed red hair off her forehead and revealed her own somewhat brighter scar, beaming. "Most people can't see it with the bangs in the way, but it's still there."

He appeared to examine her once again, more thoroughly this time, as if the first time had been only a passing glance and he had missed something glaringly important. He asked after a while, "What is your name?"

"Oh, right, I forgot!" she said suddenly and held out a hand. "Hello Death, my name is Eleanor Lily Potter, but I go by Ellie for short."

Death looked at her with a speculative expression. "Were your parents Lily and James Potter, by any
chance?"

Her eyes narrowed, remembering how he had introduced himself as death; he probably had been in the car with them that day. Somehow, though, she couldn't picture him in that car with all three of them, silently sitting unseen in the back out of the view of rearview mirrors, perhaps her eyes meeting his for a moment before the wreck had occurred. No, she just couldn't see him in that car with her. Still, if he was death, then he had met them afterwards; he must know something.

"Yeah!" she eventually exclaimed once she decided to answer the question. "Have you met them? I mean, if you really are Death, you must have. Are they okay? Happy? Do they miss me? Are they in heaven?"

(Although to tell the truth, she wasn't really decided on the whole heaven and hell issue; the few times she'd gone to church, the priest had seemed a little too enthusiastic about the whole idea to be convincing. Besides, she just had this nagging suspicion in the back of her head that it was on a similar level to the Dursleys' standards of normalness or anti-freakiness; they thought that if they screamed about it loudly enough when no one was looking, eventually it would become true.)

The man didn't answer immediately. After a few moments he said, "I believe that you and I, Eleanor Lily Potter, are in need of a long conversation."

"That's a bit odd; I've never been in need of a long conversation before," Ellie noted with a small frown, "Are they anything like Uncle Vernon's weekly reminders of the rules and regulations of the firm?" She eyed him suspiciously; she hated the weekly reminders, so very redundant and vague that they served no purpose at all. Usually they boiled down to her being vermin and that she should be grateful they took her in at all, and then she was put in the cupboard for good measure so that she could reflect upon their generosity.

"The firm?" he asked in confusion, raising his eyebrows slightly and then following with a rather familiar question, "How old are you, Ellie?" Death's own eyes narrowed slightly, this time his expression changing into a rather familiar one. It was the strangers' face worn with a sense of incredulity and slight disbelief.

"Five, but age is a relative thing, you know. It all depends on the calendar," Ellie informed him with a sigh. Whatever it was that always made people ask that question, it was entirely beyond her. Of course, the Dursleys had never asked. Really, no one had asked until school, and then it became one of the first questions an adult would ask. At first, she had thought it was the books, but it was something more than carrying large books without pictures around, something intrinsic that she just couldn't put her finger on.

Death looked at her for a moment before grabbing her hand and wandering off toward a bench. He sat down on it and motioned for her to do the same. "I am having a rather odd day, it seems."

Ellie nodded sympathetically; she was having a rather odd day as well, but they did occur every now and then and it seemed best to take it in stride.

Death glanced at her before continuing, placing his head in his hands with a sigh. He muttered something in that same language he had used before, the one Ellie couldn't place, not that it was surprising; she only heard what Dudley watched on television, after all. She supposed if she were going to jump on a limb, it sounded something like the kung-fu language that Bruce Lee spoke in between bouts of violence.

"Where does Death live, Mr. Death?" Ellie asked suddenly, eying the train curiously.
"I'm sorry, what, Ellie?" He looked back up abruptly, his hands twitching as if in shock that she had addressed him. This was a little odd, but sometimes Ellie forgot she was talking to people too; of course, people usually didn't answer back anyway.

She repeated her question patiently. He frowned slightly and then answered, "Many places, I suppose. Most recently, a different dimension on a planet many years away from Earth."

She blinked in surprise and turned away from him as she took in his response. She wracked her brain for information she had gleaned from the television. Ellie had made it a habit at a very young age to surreptitiously watch television over Dudley's shoulder. At first it had been something of a game, just to see if she could do it without anyone noticing, but then she had actually begun watching. Some of it was rather dull and pretty stupid, but other things, oh the things she saw. Whole new worlds of possibilities opened themselves up to her on that screen.

Finally, she tried to fill in the blanks. "A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away?"

He looked quite blank for a moment, before his lips twitched slightly. "Ah, not quite. Something similar though… Less Jedi," he added at the end.

"It must be very exciting. Space, that is," Ellie said, "I must confess it sounds far more interesting than Little Whinging." Then again, just about anything was more interesting than Little Whinging.

He smiled slightly, his lips still unused to the gesture, and said in a sad sort of voice, "Yes, I suppose it is." He sighed and then looked down at her. "Why are you here, Ellie?"

She looked at him curiously; she should have figured Death would be a philosopher. Ellie herself wasn't one for much philosophical thinking, because that always led her to the disconcerting thought that she didn't exist at all, but was only dreaming a false reality through faulty senses. It would explain why there were so many glitches in the laws of reality, after all. So questions like, why are you here, who are you, and what is the meaning of life generally left her quite stumped.

Still, she was talking to Death, who seemed pretty nice. She'd best try and answer his question. "I am here to exist."

Death blinked and gave her that funny look. She almost expected him to say, "That's nice dear", but apparently Death didn't content himself with euphemisms for some unsaid insult. Finally, he appeared to grasp what she had said and shook his head. "No, I meant why are you in purgatory?"

Ellie shrugged, looking around. "Well, reality isn't always consistent, is it Mr. Death?"

Death appeared at a loss for words. He rubbed a dark, gloved hand through his hair before saying in a quiet voice, "I'm not quite sure how to put this gently, but I'm afraid you're dead. You see, Ellie, purgatory is quite a bit like heaven or hell. It is a place your soul goes after dying, only purgatory is a temporary place. A waystation, if you will. It is here that you can move beyond the veil into true death; at least, that is what most humans do." He trailed off in puzzled thought, his eyes seeing beyond the station into some distant realm that Ellie couldn't quite see.

"Huh, I've never been dead before," she said lightly. She'd always expected death to be more boring. Or at least, she had expected fewer trains. "Is it always this anticlimactic?"

"No… Not usually. In fact, I'm beginning to understand why we've met." He stood then, rather dramatically in Ellie's opinion, and turned his head down to look at her. "You see, I did not always know that I was Death. I once thought I was human."

He paused there, looking down at her with a strange severity, as if to convey all the weight that this
statement held. She did not interrupt, but merely waited for him to continue with a strange amount of patience that she rarely felt for anything, particularly people.

"For many years, I lived like I was any other person, in spite of the many facts that showed that I was… not. In truth, there had been signs all my life, sometimes small and sometimes quite glaring, that I was not what I thought I was. I had never realized, had not even guessed, until the evidence was so overwhelming that I could no longer deny it." He seemed haunted, his eyes glassy and his shoulders hunched, retreating back into his crow's form unconsciously as he indulged in memories. His smile had vanished, leaving a flatness that she had glimpsed before, hiding beneath his first slight poorly-drawn smile.

"Sometimes I wish that I had been told in the beginning, that someone would guess and let me know so that I didn't have to… So that I wouldn't have false expectations, you understand? It is hard, to try so hard to be something you are not capable of being." He held out his hands in a gesture of sympathy, perhaps of offering, and his eyes regained some of their color as his pupils stored her image once again.

"The truth, Ellie, is that humans never see this train station. They pass through it without a second glance at their surroundings, and step onto the train and depart beyond the veil without a thought, because it is natural to them. It is not natural to you and it is not natural to me. We stand here and wonder where we are and how we aren't quite as dead as we thought. I think that you are like me, that you can choose to turn around now and reenter the world of the living and think nothing of it. You are the Death of this universe, Ellie."

There was nothing to say; she could think of no words to respond to the crow-man named Death. She regarded the train beyond him, saw it glinting in the sunlight with an inviting twinkle. She wondered if he was crazy after all. No one sane would say that to her, but then, no one sane spoke to her long enough to say anything at all.

What did this change, if it was true? If she really was Death, a different Death from the one in front of her, did it change her expectations in life? If she was Death now, then she had always been Death, even when her parents named her Ellie and the Dursleys had picked her up off the doormat. So, what changed? She had a feeling that something must, that some drastic thing must define this moment, but she couldn't think of anything. She knew now that she'd go back. Death was right; she could feel the way back to the living and the tree just behind her, and knew that when she did, no one would be the wiser. She'd return inside to Mrs. Figg (who'd ask questions about Dudley and school to be polite), she'd go home to the cupboard beneath the stairs and wonder if she'd ever get a room of her own, and she'd continue to do what she did every day of every year. It would only be inside, in her thoughts, that things would be at all different. Something must change, even if it was only for her own sense of wellbeing. There had to be some sort of significance.

"I think...I need a new name, then," she said with a strange sense of finality. "Can you think of one?"

He smiled, a true but pained smile, as if he understood every thought that had just poured itself through her head. He shook his head slightly, but in a kind way, and said, "I was always terrible at naming children. I named them after humans I loved."

She had loved very few things in her life. In spite of the blessings of genetics, she did not love Dudley or aunt Petunia, and they in turn did not love her. She loved the feeling of sunlight in her hair, grass beneath bare feet, and the ever-changing watercolor that was the sky. She did not love people. She closed her eyes and pictured all the people she had ever met standing before her; they were few in number and only some were graced with names she remembered. In the end, there was only one name to be considered, hiding in between her own like a half remembered whisper, the
name of a woman she had never and would never meet but one that would always be with her.

"I'll be Lily then," she said, and so it was.

After leaving Death at the train station in between life and death, she found herself at the base of a familiar tree, lying sprawled on the ground with a kink in her neck. Lily wasn't sure if she'd ever see him again; he had still been standing there when she left, watching her go with distant eyes, unsure if he would follow or wait in purgatory for some other train to arrive. She left with the feeling that for the first time in her life she had made a friend, and found herself looking back at the tree as if he might come walking through it. He didn't, but she watched all the same, a new tender hope sneaking through her.

"Ellie? Is that you out there? I thought I heard something," Mrs. Figg called from the back porch, looking slightly worried at the sight of the red-headed girl staring with a somber expression at the tree.

Lily turned away from the tree and walked back inside to where biscuits and tea awaited her, feeling that everything and nothing had shifted on its slightly tilted axis.

Chapter End Notes

Author's Note: I suppose if I'm going to label this fic in any sort of genre I'd call it absurdist, because that's what I'm really aiming for it to be, other than that I feel like I can't explain where I'm going with this without going there. Thanks for readings and reviews would be wonderful.

Author's Note (5/5/2013): It's come to my attention that I have a small case of false advertising with this story. Or at least, with my ridiculous summary and then my choice of genre this story comes off as something that it's not. This isn't a crack fic. It presents itself as a crack fic, most of the time, but at it's heart it isn't one. As I stated above if I was to label it with any sort of genre I'd call it absurdist, it has funny moments, but funniness has never been the point.

Lily, as the narrator, has a pretty impressive bias towards her actions. In truth she's a pretty terrible person with despicable actions, her morals are very much lacking, but it's not immediately evident since she's not a sadist and takes no real enjoyment in others pain. So if you're coming into this story seeking an underdog, who you can get fully behind and root for, then this story probably isn't for you. This is also a long story and I like moving in directions that people don't necessarily think of. So the story you see in the first ten chapters, first twenty chapters, might not be the story you end up with. Lily develops at a slow place a character, this doesn't mean she'll never develop. If she doesn't lose now it doesn't mean she'll never lose, if she fails to connect to her peers and humanity now it doesn't mean she never will, etc. So please, if you read, have faith in that despite all appearances to the contrary I do have some plan with an underlying theme to it.

Author's Note: 9/21/2018 chapter now beta'd by GlassGirlCeci
Holidays and Other Perilous Activities

In which Lily develops a new and alarming past time, gains a pseudo relative, and meets a very peculiar man who lives inside her head.

It had been a two months when Lily began to grow impatient. Time was a funny thing, objectively she knew two months was barely a blink of an eye, but to a five year old two months was an eternity and a half. Whole wars and battles between herself and the bloated nemesis Dudders could be fought, won, and lost within the course two days, let alone two months. So while she knew that to an adult in another dimension two months was nothing to her it seemed as if an age had passed her by. It also didn’t help that it had gone by exactly as she’d predicted, boringly.

She supposed the only thing that really was different was her gradual separation from the herd at school. The trouble was that she and other children were just a little bit different. It hadn’t been so noticeable in the beginning, sure Lily could read large books with words but other than that she had assumed she was like most of the other students. However as school wore on she began to note some alarming differences that she had dismissed her first week or so.

The other students had an odd way of talking, slow and stuttering and with words that weren’t quite right, but they were understandable if in a relatively simple manner. In general they couldn’t read, couldn’t even make out the letters on a page, Lily was very surprised by this as she couldn’t recall a time when she couldn’t make out words. What was really odd though was that they couldn’t seem to understand a word she said. She tried, multiple times, especially in the beginning but there seemed to be a disconnect between them. Mostly they would stare at her and blink for a bit, as if in shock, before wandering off or saying she was silly. It had been very easy for Dudley Dursley to convince the class that she was a freak after hearing her talk.

Everything was deceptively normal, a Dursley forced normal that Lily had known for all of her existence. She had hoped that this year might prove different, it hadn’t so far.

It was almost Christmas, the decorations were out, the cookies were being made and frosted in the kitchen and Lily was on her knees in the garden pulling out weeds. Now, why she was pulling out weeds when the weather report said it was going to snow the next day she didn’t really know. The Dursleys liked to give her menial tasks, true drudgery, this meant vacuuming, cleaning windows, weeding, anything to that effect. Having nothing really needing to be done that day they had gone back to one of the old familiars. So here she was, in the middle of winter, weeding the garden when it was going to snow.

Across the street Mrs. Figg watched her, along with the herd of cats that occupied her house, so all in all it was about a dozen pairs of eyes stalking her movements. Lily raised a hand in a half wave causing the almost sheepish Mrs. Figg to look away and close the curtains. Ever since Lily had first met Death Mrs. Figg had gone slightly crazier than usual, or at least she stared at Lily a lot more and seemed a bit more fidgety. She also asked a lot more about the Dursleys whenever she babysat, and always with a particularly hard stare as if she was trying to see through something. Lily had no idea in particular what she was looking for but she hadn’t seemed to have found it yet.

Cats and crazy neighbor-lady out of sight Lily was left staring at a row of identical white houses each one set on ignoring her and leaving her to weed-pulling suffering.

“This,” Lily said to herself as she pulled out one of the infinite weeds, “is not acceptable.”
She wasn’t sure what was acceptable but it seemed like a proper thing to say. She had been hoping Mr. Death would come to her but it looked like he was being difficult and she’d have to go back to him. Good thing she knew the way.

Standing up with an air of determination Lily walked into the garage where she searched through whatever dangerous hardware Mr. Dursley kept there. One of the wonderful things, Lily thought to herself, about having an uncle in the drilling business was all the potentially lethal things he kept in the garage.

After much searching, discarding various drills, hammers, and other blunt metal objects she found quite a bit of rope. It would definitely do. Grinning to herself she returned inside the house and carefully snuck past the living room and up the stairs to where the attic (and the rafters) waited patiently.

After painstakingly setting up the rope (the ceiling was higher than she thought and it was very difficult to stand on ones toes and tie knots at the same time) she set about writing herself a short obituary. She hadn’t bothered last time, but she figured she should jot something down just in case she couldn’t come back after all.

“Lily Eleanor Lily Potter,” She said as she wrote the words with the yellow crayon that had been hiding in her pocket. She examined the name, Lily twice, well that was getting a bit redundant. She crossed it out and began again, “Lily Eleanor Evan Potter,”

(She’d always liked the name Evans, and since Evans wouldn’t really do as a middle name she figured she’d just make it Evan.)

“Daughter of Lily and James Potter, deceased via car wreck. Cousin of Dudley Dursley, apprentice in largeness to Vernon Dursley. Niece of Vernon and Petunia Dursley, who always were kind enough to remind her of the substantial debts she owes to the family. Beloved by Death and tolerated by crazy Mrs. Figg. Um… 1980-1985.” Lily ended in a flourish and set the paper below the rope. Well, that was done. For some reason she felt there should have been more gravity with this situation but there really wasn’t.

With that final thought she climbed onto a few precariously stacked boxes and put her head through the loop. With one final breath she stepped off the box and a few jerking motions later she was in a very familiar train station.

And there he was sitting by himself on a bench, eyes forward gazing at the empty station with an expression that could only be described as blank, his gloves taken off and laid across the bench next to him along with a dark scarf. He caught sight of her and his expression changed to one of complete surprise, he stood rather swiftly with a grace and speed that just didn’t look right, and began walking toward her.

“Hi Mr. Death, it’s me Lily!” She said as she ran towards him, “Remember we met a couple months ago, I fell out of a tree and broke my neck, and then we talked about space and stuff!”

Death reached her, put his hands on her shoulders, and with a worried expression began to examine her finally he said, “Lily, what are you doing here?”

Lily shrugged, “Well you never came to visit and it’s almost Christmas and I was just going to be locked in the cupboard anyway so I decided to visit you and see how the train was doing. Anyone else come by?” Lily looked around eagerly for other people who might have somehow found their way to purgatory.
His mouth opened slightly as if to say something a bright spark of thought in his crow’s eyes glittered but then his mouth closed with a sense of finality and the spark diminished as if ground out under his heel. When he did speak it was in a flat voice that spoke of the dark years between worlds and stars that burned out long before the universe lost their light, “I’m sorry, but you decided to visit? How exactly did you decide to visit Lily?”

Lily stared at him for a bit and tried to remember what she’d told him the last time, she decided to start from the beginning, “Well, my parents are dead right, you met them in the car. Anyway after they died I went to live with my uncle, aunt, and cousin and I think I might they might have owned the car or something because I have a ridiculous amount of debt that I can’t seem to pay off. Anway, I was thinking of using the tree again but I figured I might land on my legs or something and that wouldn’t work, and then I remembered that uncle Vernon works for Grunnings (it’s a drilling company) and thus keeps a ridiculous amount of hardware in the garage. So I went digging for a bit, found some rope that was lying around, took it up to the attic and hung myself.”

He looked in that moment, like a tragic idol, standing on a pedestal his people had built for him and looking down at the writhing masses below and seeing them as they truly were. His eyes had dimmed, an ancient sadness creeping through them, and he reached out for her slowly and pulled her into an embrace. “I am sorry, Lily.”

She could never remember a time that she had been touched with affection, her earlier memories were blurred and vague but she could not remember a single instant. There was warmth in the darkened rainbow of his clothing, pressed in she could see the faded red in his jacket, and she wondered why he had allowed it to grow so black. She drew herself out of the hug with some awkwardness and looked around for a place to sit, she dragged Death over to an abandoned café and sat down with an expectant smile. He followed suit and sat down as well, his long legs bending quite dramatically, all while staring at her with that incomprehensible expression.

“So you never really did tell me about space.” Lily began without transition, wanting to get to the important bits of the conversation.

“No, I suppose I didn’t.” Death said quietly his small, almost human, smile returned and his eyes regained their lightness and jeweled spark, “It was interesting, in its own way.” He sighed, “Lily, I need you to understand something.”

“Yes?” She asked looking at him expectantly.

“What you did today was not… You can’t hang yourself, Lily.”

“Well, I kind of did.” Lily said in confusion, she was here after all so she clearly had the ability to hang herself. Her eyebrows raised in judgement as she wondered if Death had always had this problem finding the right words.

“No, I mean,” Death paused before continuing, “You should not kill yourself, Lily.” He sighed tapping his remarkably pale fingers together as he searched for more words, “I know that it is difficult, more than you can possibly imagine I know what life can be like. You have to remember though that it does get better, there is… light in the universe if one knows how to look.”

Lily really wasn’t sure where he was going with this so she decided to cut him off, “Okay, that’s great. Light in the universe, awesome. Actually, speaking of life in the universe, how about the universe; is it as awesome and filled with space ships as I think it is?”

He stared at her stunned for a few moments his own branch of thought cut off by her statements before responding in a slightly dazed manner, “Well to answer your question, yes colonization had
been going on for millennia by the time I left but… Lily, was Little Whinging that terrible?”

Lily blinked, “Terrible? Not really, pretty boring at times but it’s okay. We made Christmas cards in class the other day, I made one for you, but then I forgot it. I’ll bring it next time.” Lily said with a wave of her hand.

“…Next time?!” Death spluttered nearly falling out of his seat in shock, “Lily, I, do you understand what you just did?”

“I came to visit for the hols, that’s what people on television do anyways, and aunt Marge. I figured since it didn’t look like you’d be visiting me that I’d come and visit you. Unless you are coming to visit, is uncle Vernon going to have a heart attack? The doctors are a little worried about his blood pressure.”

“What, I, no, Lily!” Death said rather incoherently before gathering himself and beginning again in a slightly more agitated tone, “Lily, killing yourself is a very serious thing! Death is not to be taken lightly!”

“You do look fairly heavy.” Lily noted, not uncle Vernon heavy or Dudley heavy but too heavy to throw or push.

“No, not death as in me, death as in the topic in general.” Death said with dramatic hand gestures, “To even consider taking your life is not a game or a hobby or a whim, it is an irrevocable decision that cannot be taken back!” He looked at her and was apparently disappointed in her lack of understanding because he added, “We do not kill ourselves just so that we can visit strange men we meet in purgatory!”

Lily tapped her fingers together, thinking deep thoughts, before she said, “You’re not really a stranger Mr. Death, I have met you twice after all. Besides even if I really am like, dead-dead, this time I think you’re way more interesting than my actual relatives in fact… Are you my secret uncle?”

He seemed at a loss, his face regaining that expression he had worn just before her arrival. He stood slowly and made his way behind the empty counter, rummaging through some cupboards he eventually produced two cups and with it two bags of tea. Slowly he began the calming ritual of making tea in complete and utter silence leaving Lily staring at him blankly as she sat at the table. He returned with the tea in hands and sat down again placing one cup in front of her and leaving the other for himself.

“Lily,” he said finally.

“Yes?”

He didn’t say anything more, merely sat with one hand on the tea cup, waiting for it to darken. She looked at his hand and noticed the faded words, “I must not tell lies” etched in jagged painful handwriting.

Finally he spoke without any change of inflection or expression, “You wanted to hear about space?”

Not trusting herself to speak she nodded vigorously.

“I don’t like using the word ‘space’, to describe it. The newer languages have much better words. Space does not capture the light and it also does not capture the void, it is both the heavens and the hells we imagined existed outside of our plane of existence…”

And so Death went on at length about the nature of his reality. In his dimension space travel had
been underway even when he still had the impression that he was human, somewhat like Lily’s, but not to the extent to be considered a viable long-term option. It wasn’t until a few centuries had passed that colonization began to be possible, and half a century after that for a colonization program to begin. At first it started with Earth’s own solar system but gradually as time wore on they extended onwards to find more earthlike planets. Eventually it came to the point where Death believed that no humans lived on Earth and that no one spoke the exact same languages that had been spoken there. He was vague on many of the details of events, and his own role in them, and gave all in all a very generalized outline of the history of his people.

He never did say why he left and somehow despite all her other social failings Lily knew that there were some questions you did not ask.

He did not bring up his disapproval of her visiting again and seemed to have pushed the topic beyond them, toward the train that still waited patiently for a rider.

Eventually though Lily figured she’d better get back to the Dursleys, or rather Death promptly reminded her that the Dursleys would be looking for her. Returning she found herself lying face down on the floor with a bloody nose and a frayed noose hanging around her neck.

With her first venture deemed a success Lily than began the questionable and somewhat dangerous activity of visiting Death every Sunday. She also planned on visiting him for Christmas Eve, Christmas, and New Year’s but he didn’t know that yet.

Whether Death approved of this venture or not was hard to say, whenever she arrived he’d get this strange look in his eyes, as if he’d lost and gained everything all at once but he never again tried to stop her from visiting. It was in his eyes though and the subdued gestures of his scarred hands, that same dull sadness he wore whenever he first saw her coming, disappointed and glad all in the same moment.

The rope worked pretty well for a while but after a few times of coming back still hanging and desperately trying to get down she’d decided that maybe it’d be better if she found some alternatives that didn’t involve her accidentally dying twice. She seemed to regenerate every time she came back (her neck was never broken when she returned) but she wasn’t sure how much she wanted to push her luck. Besides hammering or drilling oneself to death sounded a bit messy and she didn’t think five year olds were allowed to buy firearms.

It was to be her third official visit that Lily discovered aunt Petunia’s sleeping pills that were absolutely not under any circumstances to be mixed with the gin that was hiding in the top cupboard in the kitchen where Dudders and the freak supposedly couldn’t reach it. No mess, regeneration should cover the poison, and not painful. It seemed perfect.

With flourish she produced a blank sheet of paper and quickly began writing both her obituary and her eulogy in slightly more visible red crayon. “Here lies Lily Eleanor Evan Potter, five years of age. 1980-1985.”

What no one had bothered to inform Lily was that death by sleeping pills was a rather iffy business. She had assumed that it would work somewhat similar to breaking one’s neck or suffocation, that it would be over rather quickly and that she would be back before any real time had passed. She didn’t realize that poisoning oneself was oftentimes a slower process and could take hours. With that in mind she didn’t take into account that the Dursleys might actually require her presence while she was dead in the cupboard.

It was then, to aunt Petunia’s great horror, that she discovered her five year old abused niece with an empty bottle of sleeping pills and a glass of gin lying unconscious in the cupboard beneath the stairs.
with what appeared to be a passive aggressive suicide note.

Lily was unaware of this as she was busy almost-dying but not-quite. She found herself not in the train station like she expected but rather somewhere else entirely. She wasn’t sure what to make of her surroundings, they seemed somehow flexible, as if they might change at whim. At the moment she appeared to be in some sort of library, thick leather bound books surrounding her on all sides. The place had a gloomy sort of atmosphere, the lighting dark, the room small, only a few dying embers glowing in a fire place. In the center of the room rested two leather chairs, in one of them there was a young man.

He looked similar to Death but Lily could tell with only a passing glance that it wasn’t him. Death was fluid, his expression changing from human to a crow’s in only an instant; a mere word, a glance, a thought and his face would shift. Death was in the habit of acting human, he often forgot himself and played at being both human and not in the same moment. This man was different. This man had a quiet intensity about him, something drew the eye and demanded it stay there, it was both refined and raw in the same instant. He lounged in the chair, long legs slightly crossed, chin resting in thin fingers, dark hair curling away from his face, all while observing her silently with pale blue eyes.

Hesitantly she made her way over to the chair opposite his, watching as his eyes tracked her every movement, still his expression did not change but remained impassive, empty almost.

“So… You’re not uncle Death.” Lily observed after settling herself in the large chair.

This caused a somewhat surprised blink, he straightened slightly, his brows furrowed, and he began to get that expression that most adults got in Lily’s presence. “No, I don’t believe I am. Although some might argue otherwise, you must be Eleanor Potter.”

Lily eyed him suspiciously, well, wasn’t that interesting. He knew her old name, without even having to introduce herself, even Death had asked first although he might have done that just to be polite. “It’s Lily, actually, but I suppose some might argue otherwise.” She said repeating his words with that same mocking tone that the villain always used in his monologue, “And you are?”

He smiled, slowly, but it was not a smile at all. There was no happiness at all in it.

“No, I can see the scar, after all I remember putting it there. It was a nice try all the same, you do look remarkably like your mother, little girl.” He said leaning back into the chair as if back in his element now that he had found his footing.

Lily pouted, well at least he was satisfied but she still had no idea where she was and she was late for her meeting with Death, “Not Lily Potter née Evans, Lily Eleanor Evan Potter, she’s dead. Car wrecks do that to people.”

“Car wrecks?” He asked abruptly the look of shock returning and throwing him off balance.

“Didn’t you know?” Lily asked in confusion, “I mean I assume since you started with the whole, ‘you must be Ellie’ thing and the ‘some people say I’m death’ that you knew my parents are dead. By the way, are you really Death? Because you look nothing like uncle Death who I’m actually supposed to be meeting right now. Did you get bored of the train station?”

“Oh course I know your parents are dead, who do you think killed them, little girl?” He asked in a raised voice, somehow making it sound not like a question.

“Another vehicle in an intersection.” Lily stated with confidence, “This is old hat though, Mr. Pseudo Death, we’ve been through all this before.”
Finally after a good moment of staring and prolonged silence the man said, “I believe, Miss Potter, that a reintroduction is in order. We’ve never spoken before, I suppose given the circumstances that you may refer to me as Lord Voldemort.” His lips suddenly painted themselves into a charming smile and he reached out a hand in greeting toward her, “And you are?”

“Oh, well why didn’t you just say so, Lord Voldemort? See, I’m actually looking for my uncle Death, we were supposed to meet today but I seem to have gotten lost somehow… Any idea where I am?”

“…You mean you don’t know?” He asked somewhat drily.

“A library? A really dark scary library?” She asked.

There was another moment of silence where Lord (that must be his first name) seemed quite dumbfounded, finally he asked in an almost hesitant voice, “How old are you… Lily?”

“Five, you know it’s funny, Death asked the same exact question when I met him.” Lily observed, how about those coincidences, maybe he really was Pseudo Death after all.

“…Yes, and this you meeting Death business…” He said before trailing off and then he seemed to decide against finishing that sentence and went back to answering her previous question, “We’re inside your mind.”

“Inside my mind?”

“Yes,” He said nodding absently as he thought over the information she had dumped on him, “Quite deep, almost at the bottom. One wonders how you managed to wander all the way down here.” He looked at her expectantly then as if waiting for her to illuminate her own situation.

“…I got lost?” Lily guessed, she really had no idea, because she wasn’t in the cupboard but she wasn’t in the train station either. Speaking of which she hadn’t really expected her brain to be so gloomy, or to have a man lounging in it, apparently weird shenanigans went on in her head when she wasn’t looking.

“…No, that doesn’t quite cover it. Tell me, Lily, are you ill?” The man asked his eyes sharpening themselves, he leaned in toward her as if to examine her more carefully.

“Not that I know of.” Lily had never really been sick, as far as she could recall anyway, it seemed that illness avoided her as steadily as children on a playground. Bacteria and humans, it seemed they shared the same ineffable social criteria.

He continued regardless, “What were you doing, before you arrived here?”

Lily frowned thinking back on the day’s events wondering what went wrong, “Well, it seemed pretty usual. I was woken up by aunt Petunia, I made breakfast for everyone…”

Here the man cut her off, “…You made breakfast?”

Lily blinked in confusion as she tried to grasp her thoughts, “Well, yeah, I mean somebody has to and it’s what I’m paid for right? You can’t expect Dudders to step near a stove; he’d burn down the house.”

He said nothing for a moment, appearing stumped, which seemed to be an uncomfortable state of
affairs for him before waving his hand, “Never mind, keep going.”

“Right, well then it’s Sunday, we used to go to church on Sundays, for a while at least. For the great charade, you know, but the Dursleys have grown out of it so we don’t anymore. Not unless it’s Christmas or Easter. Now Dudley just watches television in the living room, so I figured I had time to sneak into aunt Petunia and uncle Vernon’s bathroom without getting caught. I did, so I got the sleeping medication, and I also grabbed some alcohol from the kitchen just to speed things along. Then I went back into the cupboard ate all the pills, had a lot of gin, and here I am.”

He seemed to be without words. Finally he said, “You do realize that should have killed you.”

“I know, that’s why I’m so confused.” Lily sighed, “That really should have worked so I don’t know how I wound up in my brain of all places.”

“You, you, were attempting suicide.” He seemed somehow offended by this, as if it was a personal affront that she of all people should take this course of action. Then as an afterthought he added in a possibly more affronted tone, “And they left you with muggles?”

“I suppose, if you want to be blunt about it.” Lily said with a shrug, “I think of it as visiting uncle Death for Christmas.” She wasn’t even going to respond to the second part as she had no idea what a muggle even was, it sounded like some toy that Dudley might receive later for Christmas, and that would thus be shoved in her face for bragging rights.

The man leaned back in his chair as if deep in his thought, his face closed off to her, the thoughts lurking behind that pale visage. Finally his words fell like stones in the silence between them, “I see, that is, I confess a more interesting tale than I expected.”

His eyes locked with hers for a moment after he finished, trapped them there and demanded their attention, “We have met before, Lily. Do you remember?”

Lily looked at him again, reevaluating his status as a stranger. She had never seen him in her uncle’s house. He did not seem the type to visit, no, he didn’t seem the type to exist in Little Whinging. She could not picture him there, in that kitchen, listening to glorious tales of drills and Grunnings. She shook her head slightly with a small grimace, usually she was quite good at remembering things (particularly important things) and it bothered her that this man had slipped through the cracks of memory into the bottom of her mind.

“Oh no, not attempt, most times it works. I suppose you would say that most times I do commit suicide every Sunday.” She smiled charmingly at him, he seemed a bit out of sorts with this information. “You see it’s almost Christmas and he’s the closest thing I have to a relative who isn’t a Dursley and well, I think he’s lonely too to tell the truth. Still, my life’s boring, what about you? Is the bottom of my brain interesting, Mr. Voldemort?”

He said nothing instead focusing in on her eyes, the walls around them became transparent through them Lily could see the faint flickering of her own thoughts. Finally he said quietly almost as if in awe, “You aren’t lying, you truly believe what you say.”

“I don’t, generally. It’s in poor taste.” The Dursleys did not tolerate lies any more than they tolerated
freakishness, and even Death himself had a permanent reminder etched into his skin.

“How many times have you visited death Lily?”

Lily tapped her fingers in thought as she recollected, “Well, I suppose four times that I actually remember… we don’t talk much about the car crash but I suppose he could have met me there as well, I don’t remember the accident much.” Lily brushed the words off with a wave of her hand, “It’s not really important though. My life is… boring.”

He looked as if he was about to respond when suddenly glanced up, “I believe, Miss Potter, that you are being summoned.”

He was right, the room was becoming less substantial, harder to focus on. She raised her eyebrows though, wondering who would bother. “Huh, I guess you’re right.”

“We’ll talk later, tonight, when you’re dreaming.” He said standing from the chair and walking way from her following the path of the fading shrinking room as she found herself catapulted into consciousness.

“Hey wait!”

But he didn’t and soon she found herself blearily opening her eyes to the sight of white, a dripping IV in her arm, and the steady rhythm of a heart monitor. There really was only one thing to say to summarize the situation.

“Oh, shit.”
Reality: A Strangely Persistent Illusion

In which Lily continues the conversation with the man in her brain, Wizard Lenin’s great political conquests are partially revealed, and reality begins to fall apart.

Lily wasn’t quite sure what to make of her newfound situation.

The hospital was surprisingly nice. Far superior to all the haunts of Little Whinging, certainly the cupboard which is where she had expected to wake up, so even if things hadn’t gone exactly according to plan they weren’t altogether bad. Currently Lily was lying in a white bed flipping leisurely through channels on television taking immense pleasure in a freedom she had been denied all her life. In the corner of the room aunt Petunia sat and watched her with wide eyes and wringing hands, flinching each time the channel changed. Aunt Petunia had just returned from a hushed discussion with the doctor in which she had desperately attempted to avoid looking at Lily.

Lily just kept flipping through the channels looking for Bruce Lee and other kung fu adventures. It seemed that day-time television was lacking in this regard but that didn’t matter so much as the increasing drama in aunt Petunia’s reactions, she was remarkably flinchy today.

“…Eleanor,” aunt Petunia said hesitantly, Lily couldn’t recall aunt Petunia ever having said her name before, “The doctor said we can go home now.”

Aunt Petunia was showing a disturbing range of emotions, normally she kept to the safe emotional capacity of a thimble, but today the emotions layered themselves in her eyes until Lily couldn’t quite tell what was going on in her aunt’s head. Lily had always found others to be lacking in this regard, like cheap cardboard cutouts they portrayed a limited amount of ideas. Until she had met her uncle Death and later the mysterious man living in her brain she had not met a person capable of displaying such a variety. It had seemed a dull but inarguable fact of life that humans were not in fact sentient but merely programmed to believe they were by some outside party, possibly the same party whose lack of foresight was responsible for the occasional glitches in reality. People weren’t really people, after all.

This, Lily decided, must also be some glitch in the usual nature of reality caused by her lack of death that morning. She’d have to bring it up with the man lurking in her brain when she met him again. After all he probably had some hand in it; he seemed rather nefarious in that rather frightening library of his. Lily was getting rather tired of this reality anyway, she didn’t mind that it appeared to be breaking down. Between meeting uncle Death, her apparent immortality, the man in her brain, and various other incidents that occurred recently it looked as if the rules of the universe were beginning to fail.

She had discussed her observations at length with Death in the train station but he hadn’t seemed as convinced as her. It was her last visit, they were sitting in an abandoned café overlooking the platform drinking tea and glancing occasionally at the train that still waited for either or both of them to board. Death seemed more at ease with her presence this time, as if he had come to expect her visits, his motions were more fluid and his expressions no longer hesitated before passing into another emotion. He sat in his usual black wardrobe (it had never changed in all the time she visited) legs crossed at the ankles and leaning back in his chair which was for him an incredibly relaxed pose.

“Glitches?” He asked in response to her theories in a puzzled manner. Sometimes he didn’t understand what she was saying right away, taking a certain amount of time to process her words before finally grasping the content, whether this was because he hadn’t spoken English in thousands
of years or some other reason she didn’t know.

Finally his eyes lit from within, the idea caught, and he smiled slightly, “I suppose that is a good way to describe it if you are unfamiliar, I never thought of it that way but I can see where you’re coming from.”

“Oh, so you’ve noticed it too.” Lily said setting down her tea, no one ever had before, but then again he was Death so of course he’d know all sorts of things about the plumbing of the universe.

“Well, yes.” Death said haltingly in his awkward manner which usually meant that the answer was not quite a simple yes or no but needed clarification, “Only, they aren’t glitches.”

“No…” Lily said her brow furrowing as she tried to follow his words but he interrupted her before she could follow.

“I know that you are very intelligent Lily, but you are only five, that is you only have five years’ worth of experience in this world. That isn’t very long, no matter what you think of it right now. Things that seem strange or incomprehensible may be things that you just haven’t encountered yet, rules of the universe you haven’t thought of. Physics isn’t set, certainly not in the late twentieth century, and to declare research now to be the end all be all would just be kind of silly.” He paused as if to examine his thoughts for integrity they must have seemed sound because he continued, “When I was young I was introduced to the concept of magic, your glitches.”

Lily very much wanted to interrupt and comment that magic and glitches were essentially the same thing, unexpected phenomena that should not be possible according to the laws of the universe. However Death appeared to be on a roll and he was taking her comments seriously so she decided to let him continue.

“Everything that had seemed weird and… freakish was suddenly explained and more had existed almost as long as the human race had. I just hadn’t known it. I’m sure it’s the same in your universe, that there is a society of people aware of magic and who use it quite regularly.” Death finished smiling at her cheerfully, Lily could only stare at him.

Death was the smartest, best, most awesome person she had ever met. Sometimes, though, she remembered that he wasn’t quite human and thus couldn’t be held accountable for the just plain wrong things he said.

She took a large bite from one of the biscuits that Death had managed to scavenge and she observed him. He looked nostalgic, as if he was only half in the moment with her, fading into the past to his childhood eons ago. Magic, it was a much softer word than glitch, friendlier and a little more familiar. Though it very much was the same thing as a glitch by using that word it transformed. The Dursleys, for all their dullness, were very aware of the power of words. Certain words, seemingly innocuous had to be stricken from the vocabulary, magic was one of them.

Perhaps everyone did know then, or at least thought they knew. Still, people thought they knew a lot of things, when really they only glimpsed them in a crooked mirror. Death saw the signs but he existed outside of time, space, and the general universe. For him the world wasn’t ending but merely shifting slightly. Death had left his own universe, for that dark unnamed reason, so clearly he would live on when her own collapsed. Magic for him, supernatural phenomenon for them, and glitches for her; different words same thing and yet not.

“Huh, maybe you’re right.” Lily said, after all it wasn’t quite a lie.

Aunt Petunia brought her inside with that same strange expression still on her face, they stood in the
entryway staring at each other. It seemed as if aunt Petunia was seeing something different or rather looking for something different in her niece. Trying to see past the stained yellow sweater that had once belonged to Dudley, the secondhand frayed shorts barely visible beneath the sweater’s edge, the worn sneakers; all the things she and her husband had so desperately tried to make her.

They didn’t say anything but then Lily rarely had anything to say to her relatives. She wasn’t sure why she expected today to be different, that weird look on her aunt’s face maybe. She turned from her aunt with a sigh and made her way to the cupboard where she would wait until summoned either for school or some menial chore.

Aunt Petunia’s voice stopped her in her tracks, “Eleanor, wait! Did you…”

Lily turned around with a questioning glance. Only Death and briefly the man in her head had ever talked to her like that, as if they actually expected an answer. It was odd, strangely elating, but unexpected. What on earth was she supposed to say?

“I do many things.” Lily said finally with a slight smile, “In fact, I think I only ‘do’ things in the end. That’s what verbs are for, after all.”

This seemed to shake aunt Petunia from her bizarre new state of mind, her face tightened to its familiar stone-like expression, out of her pocket she brought out a crinkled piece of paper, “No! Did you do it on purpose, you little brat?!"

It was the eulogy Lily had written herself, the red crayon accusing her even at a distance. Oh, that, well, Lily hadn’t actually considered anyone finding it she supposed if anyone would it would be her aunt.

Well the fast and easy answer was, yes, the only trouble was she wasn’t quite sure what aunt Petunia was referring to. She had a good guess, the letter, but generally it was a good idea to be very specific with the Dursleys as mistakes were always blamed on her even when instructions had been vague.

“Do what on purpose?” Lily asked for clarification.

Her aunt shook her head, “Never mind, girl. Get in the cupboard and don’t even think about leaving.”

And that was how Lily wound back in the locked cupboard sans pills. Well, all in all it’d been a kind of interesting day. She still hadn’t met up with uncle Death yet, which was a major bummer, but locked in the cupboard without equipment she couldn’t really do anything about it. She supposed she could try hitting her head against the door but that just sounded like it’d lead her back to the hospital again and it didn’t look like that was good for her aunt’s sanity. Not that having control over a television for once in her life hadn’t been fun but all in all it had been a rather unplanned experience.

Well, it could have been worse, she supposed. Still, she’d rather have not been locked in the cupboard for the rest of the day. The trouble with the cupboard was that there wasn’t much to do there. The three or four books she had managed to salvage from the attic had been read multiple times, and they were all pretty boring to begin with anyway. The crayons that she had stolen from Dudley were getting dull and she was running low on paper, she had to be pretty conservative with it in case she was stuck in there for a really long time. Most of the time Lily spent her confinements in the cupboard thinking, the topic changed now and then, but she’d sit staring at walls while her mind went elsewhere.

She closed her eyes and leaned back on her cot breathing out all the exhaustion and disappointment the day had brought. Eventually she drifted off to sleep and found herself in a somewhat familiar
The library had changed in the few hours she had left it alone; it was brighter for one thing, a little less sinister but just as melodramatic. The man had moved from the chair to a window where outside the sun was just beginning to rise. He was paler than she had expected but just as tall, he stood looking out the window with determination as if waiting for something, although what he was waiting for was unclear.

He didn’t turn to look at her, this seemed to be his thing as he hadn’t said anything last time either. It looked like she’d have to start up the conversation, “So, man in my brain, how’s the weather?”

He turned to look at her slowly with a very odd expression, that same bafflement as before, perhaps combined with some fear, and frustration at the sheer lack of understanding. “Eleanor.” He said dully.

“Lily, actually, remember we had a whole conversation about that.” She sighed and made her way through the library inspecting the books, she suspected they weren’t real as they didn’t have any titles, she flipped through one and found it non-shockingly empty. The sinister library was really just sinister for show, how boring.

“Yes, we did.” The man said quietly, “There are a few things I’d like to ask you, Lily.”

“Really?” People rarely asked her anything, “Well I can’t guarantee you’ll like the answers but go ahead Mr. Vader, was it?”

“Voldemort.”

“Right, ask away Mr. Voldemort.” Lily corrected with a benevolent hand-gesture granting him permission to speak.

He seemed a little put out by that but merely sighed, “Do you know who I am?”

Well, that was a bit of a weird question considering they had gone through that whole song and dance of introducing themselves, or reintroducing as he had put it. Maybe he had only certain topic conversations he could bring up, or he was just at a loss, either way Death was way better conversation.

“You’re the man that lives in my brain, Mr. Voldemort.” Lily said with a sigh, really he was the one who had said it in the first place.

“No! That’s not…” He cut himself off rather deliberately with a look of extreme irritation. He smoothed back his hair and began talking again, “Before we can truly have a conversation there are some key facts you need to know, about me, about your parents, and about you.”

“Okie dokie.” Lily said making her way to the chair and settling herself into it with much gusto, she had the feeling this would be an epic of the ages, “Regale me with tales of glorious battle.”

He stared at her for a moment before saying, “Dear god, you’re being serious.” He looked slightly alarmed at that realization, as if he expected no demanded she be anything but serious. Lily nodded at his realization, she was being quite serious.

As far back as she could remember Lily had never made jokes. Lily always meant what she said and tried to translate her thoughts into their most basic form. Communication was made to be efficient to get ideas from point A to B with as little interference as possible. Or at least, that’s how it had always seemed to Lily. It was so difficult to get people to understand her already, why try to mess with their
heads, it’d just make the conversation that much longer. The Dursleys certainly didn’t tolerate any joking around, generally the longer the conversation went the worse the results.

“Voldemort is not a name that people speak lightly.” He began, as he did so his eyes seemed to darken as if a shadow had passed over them and his voice became cold, “There is a community of people who use magic that exists in this country, it is very old, and very powerful. It is hidden from the rest of Great Britain through various means, and is likely to remain so for the foreseeable future. I existed in this community and sought to overthrow the government as the dark lord Voldemort, leader of the pureblood movement, who aimed to remove the muggle-stain from our country.”

Lily raised a hand, that’s what they taught her to do in school when she had a question. Apparently it was a universal gesture that would get the idea across without flat out interrupting. However she was beginning to doubt if it really was as universal as her teacher had said because Lord Voldemort, king of the purest of blood (as if their blood was slightly more blood-like than everyone else’s), steamrolled right on ahead.

“With a few loyal followers, the Death Eaters, in the course of a few years I had taken control of the country. Only a few rebels stood against us while the rest of the population cowered in fear or stood in quiet support. I was so very close… Until the prophecy.”

This time Lily just straight up interrupted, “The prophecy?” That sounded like a truly exciting development, “Oh wait, let me guess! You killed your father and married your mother.”

His eyes narrowed and in a dangerous voice he said, “Don’t ever interrupt me.”

Lily raised her hands in front of her face in defense, “Okay, no interrupting ever. Got it. Continue.”

He said nothing for a moment, the room appeared to get colder, and Lily wondered if she had accidentally baited a dragon but he continued none the less, “It was prophesized that a child of my enemies would defeat me, it was very specific on the who but not on the how, only that I could not guess at their power. Long story short I came to your house one night to slaughter your entire family just so that I could kill you. Your parents fell easily, though they were supposed to be at the height of the resistance movement. And then there was only you, all alone, in your crib staring up at me just as you are now. I killed you then, in a way that could not miss, could not be altered, you should have died. Yet somehow you didn’t and here we are four years later in the bottom of your subconscious, me a wraith, and you a muggle-raised orphan and I want to know why.”

Lily took in his story slowly, tearing it apart in her mind, and looking at facets until finally she concluded, “So basically you’re Wizard Lenin.”

“Do you honestly have no sense of self-preservation?” He asked coldly with a strange half-grin that had no happiness only a deranged sort of madness, the library was shifting contorting itself into some unknown shape.

Even as the floor tilted and she was beginning to slide out of her chair, as the candle-light wavered and threatened to extinguish, as the dark crashed in overhead like a wave she considered his question and answered with a faint smile, “Why should I have one? I’m very preservable, like a pickle.”

The room stopped moving, the coldness drained from his features, he looked strangely tired he leaned against the wall his voice softer as he spoke, “Ah yes, I had almost forgotten… You truly can’t die, can you?”

She didn’t say anything, just looked at him, he seemed so sad in that moment, almost broken. It was funny, how he only smiled when he was on the edge of being shattered. A chuckle escaped him, and
then a cascade of laughter, he put his head in his hands even while laughing.

She felt she should apologize, every plan always went awry around her, but she figured he didn’t
want it. She was at a loss really, the truth was that Lily really didn’t get people as a general rule, even
uncle Death was confusing sometimes. So here she was, listening to Wizard Lenin break into
hysterics over his own rhetorical question. Well, she’d been more baffled in conversations (talking to
other children was notoriously difficult) but it was a bit strange.

“Um, I guess not?” She finally answered, “I mean, I’ve not-died a couple times but I guess that’s not
really conclusive, you know. It’s not like I’ve been trying really hard to kill myself.”

His laughter died down somewhat and that somber look returned as he regarded her the glitch that
had destroyed his kingdom in a single blow, “Lily, I would like to hear about your life, no matter if
you consider it ordinary or unimportant I want to hear it.”

“Erm, okie dokie then.” Lily said and then launched into her general observations of reality. It
apparently took longer than Wizard Lenin had been expecting because he relocated to one of the
chairs to sit down with a strangely blank look on his face. She told him about the Dursleys, about her
status as an indentured servant, her dead parents (although she left the car crash bit out since he
seemed to be a bit sensitive about it), the social experiments at school, crazy Mrs. Figg and her herd
of cats, Death and the train station, and the glitches in reality.

“I would like to meet this uncle of yours.” Wizard Lenin stated when she had finished, “Next time
you visit him you will take me with you.”

Lily blinked, surprised, and nodded slightly, “I can try, but you know it might not work.”

He gave her a cockeyed fox’s smile, one filled with hidden daggers for teeth, “Don’t worry about
that, I think I’ve figured out how to follow you there. Just don’t be surprised when I show up.”

She smiled back at him, she didn’t know how she knew, but she had the feeling that she and Wizard
Lenin were going to be great friends. Maybe it was the whole living in her brain thing, but she just
felt she knew him, and that more importantly he knew her as well.

“Lily, there’s one more thing. The Dursleys, you say your aunt found you in the cupboard?”

“Well, she was the one who was there at the hospital so I think so.”

“I’d be careful around them.”

“Careful?”

He regarded her carefully himself, finally he said, “When I was young troubled individuals were not
so much helped as they were dealt with. Should the Dursleys find you too unstable they may place
you somewhere else, somewhere much worse than a cupboard.”

She wasn’t quite sure what he meant but he didn’t explain instead he waved her off, “I have nothing
more to talk with you about, you may leave.”

What an insulting thing to say, considering it was her brain he was in in the first place. Still, she
really didn’t have anything else to say to him either since she had just given the whole life story.
With a sigh she stood up and slunk her way out of the library and into her normal conscious state
where the cupboard waited.

Careful, of the Dursleys, what a strange thought. She’d never considered them enough to even think
of acting a certain way around them, she was just their servant anyway how she acted or thought on her own time was none of their business. Still, aunt Petunia had been acting weird since the trip to the hospital so maybe Wizard Lenin’s advice wasn’t unwarranted.

She crept closer to the door of the cupboard, sometimes when uncle Vernon had just been given a report of her behavior he spoke very loudly, loud enough so that Lily could hear every word he said even when locked in the cupboard. Not always of course, most of the cupboard was a kingdom unto itself. She couldn’t hear anything, she frowned, Death had called it magic had said there was a society of people who used it at will. Wizard Lenin had also said there was a community of magic, one that he had belonged to until he had attempted vehicular homicide. The laws of the universe were failing, but maybe the ability to use magic was part of that, as if it was a glitch all by itself. If magic was itself a glitch then it should be able to do anything really, it could destroy worlds, certainly it’d let her listen in on her relatives.

She concentrated hard, closing her eyes and just thinking of the idea of listening, of hearing far off words and focusing on their sound. At first there was nothing just her own breathing and heartbeat and then the words began to trickle in.

“…swear Vernon this note it couldn’t have been an accident.”

“Girl’s only five Pet must have been…”

“No, Vernon, this was planned! If I hadn’t opened that cupboard in time…”

“Then we beat the idea out of her! Rid her of this nonsense just like we do that other freakishness.”

“No! Vernon, what if she tries again, what if she tries at school?!” There was a slight pause and then a worried flurry of words, “They’ll come back, Vernon, they’ll come back and do something horrible to us. Or worse, the school, what if they come to investigate?”

“Everyone knows the little delinquent…”

“She’s suicidal! A five year old, planning suicide, Vernon! No… No you’re right it must have been an accident no child, especially not her, isn’t smart enough for that.”

Again a pause, as if weighing the words, and while they both seemed to be in agreement the silence was uneasy and frayed with tension. Lily heard her still breath seeping out of her, in and out, a slight wave as words weren’t spoken.

“Right, we’ll get her out, but nothing too much. We don’t want the neighbors thinking things.” The words were spat out, forced into the silence where they lingered like broken bird. Lily frowned wanting to think on those words, on things implied, but footsteps were quickly booming toward her. Lily lost her concentration and backed away from the door.

The door was wrenched open light from the house pouring in causing her to clutch at her eyes and cry out even as uncle Vernon’s commands were spoken, “You, girl! Get out!”

Before she could move a great hand pulled at her sweater and threw her out onto the hardwood floor of the entry way. She looked up to see her looming relatives, Vernon in front and Petunia to the side. Careful, of these cardboard cutouts, set so menacingly against the skyline he must have been mistaken. He couldn’t see the cheap Christmas decorations, he couldn’t see how well it suited the Dursleys.

“Thought you could sneak into the medicine cabinet, did you?”
Of course, but the answer he expected was no. She shook her head and said, “No, sir.”

However the question, in spite of requiring an answer, was also rhetorical in that it didn’t matter what she answered. The lecture would go on regardless of the words she uttered, but still, it seemed best to play along in these things.

As predicted uncle Vernon steamrolled ahead, “No child in this house is going to be sneaking pills like a junkie! Like your no good dead parents!”

She’d always been told that her father was an alcoholic but uncle Vernon was never really clear on the details so apparently booze could be replaced with drugs without any real mishap. Although she’d never heard of a sleeping medication junkie though, but then again she usually didn’t get into discussions about narcotics or alcohol with anyone so what did she know?

In the meantime uncle Vernon was still talking and growing more purple by the minute as he continued to rage and stare down at her, “You’re a disgrace to this household, you little freak! Never should have taken you in, always knew you’d end up just like them! It’s genetics I tell you, Petunia, runs in the family!”

Aunt Petunia for her part was still acting a little odd looking at her not with her usual tight lipped affronted anger but instead with nervousness and perhaps a trace of fear. It wasn’t directly of Lily herself, of course not Lily was a little girl nothing to be terrified of, but something about the situation. Something in between the red raging of uncle Vernon and her own reaction to this well-worn scene caused that slight widening of the eyes and shaking of the hands. Whatever it was though uncle Vernon couldn’t see it and ended his rant with a shaking sausage finger in her face, “You want to live on the streets like a rat? You want to be stuffed in an orphanage where they never feed you? We offer you everything, more than you deserve, and this is how you pay us back!”

Before she could say a word she was shoved back into the cupboard hitting the floor with a hard thunk, “Back in the cupboard, see how you like it in there for a week!”

She turned back for one final glimpse of her menacing relatives, their faces concealed by the quickly closing door and soon enough everything was dark again. Lily stared at the door knowing, though she did not know quite how, that it would not open again for some time. Careful, Wizard Lenin had said with a sober expression, careful.

In the back of her mind she could feel him even now, lurking and looking upwards to where her own consciousness drifted, a wordless trapped presence who only let a single word echo upwards. Careful, Lily.
Lenin and the Art of Vague Friendship

In which several parties become concerned for Eleanor Potter’s wellbeing, Death makes several bad puns, and Wizard Lenin is not amused.

“Now, Ellie, I want you to pick the face on this chart that you feel like.”

Lily blinked staring at the man who was sitting across from her in a brightly lit room holding up a chart of cartooned emotions. He was looking at her with a smile that she assumed was supposed to be reassuring but just looked very strange when directed at her. Behind him rested several puppets, pictures of happy cheerful animals, and even further back several leather bound books and a few glass frames one of which held a piece of paper declaring his doctorate in psychology.

Lily regarded the chart and finally said, “I don’t see a picture for combating the absurdity of the universe, so I have to go with a mix between surprise and utter bewilderment.”

Lily felt it was important to go over the events that had brought her to the psychologist only a few days after Christmas.

It had all started once she had finally been released from solitary confinement by the Dursleys. For the crime of stealing aunt Petunia’s sleeping medication Lily had been sentenced to several days in the cupboard with breaks only to go to the restroom and get some food. Apparently sleeping medication was pretty important because Lily couldn’t even remember the last time she had been locked in there that long. She’d spent the next three days staring at the dark walls filled with her own drawings with a dazed expression, wondering if she should draw a portrait of Wizard Lenin in full Communist regale when she got the chance.

The migraine of death had occurred about half-way through her term. One moment she had been contemplating the nature of the fourth dimension, if the cupboard didn’t have a clock did time cease to move in regular intervals, and the next her head was on fire and being stabbed by tiny men. Her eyes snapped shut and she clutched and her pounding skull unable to think at all as the walls began to spin around her.

It was then that Wizard Lenin’s voice tore through her consciousness like a freight train in a sentence whose tone she understood but whose meaning completely escaped her, “Those goddamn muggle sons of whores!”

He didn’t seem to be waiting for a response, instead that soft, commanding voice tore on with an increasing sense of danger, “Locking us in here like a starving dog, as if that will somehow beat the magic out of her. Because starvation is an excellent means of combating suicide, she’ll learn her lesson now, even if they kill her to do it! And Dumbledore! Is this Dumbledore’s grand scheme for the instrument of my defeat? Lock her in a cupboard with her abusive relatives? What the hell does that senile bastard think this will possibly accomplish? All it would take would be a word to the Wizengamot or even the Prophet and he would be ruined. Even then, even if miraculously no one hears about this, how does he expect dear little Eleanor Potter to turn out? Does he expect to make a puppet for the light out of this, so grateful to the wizarding world that she’d do anything to keep it?” There’s a bitter laugh here somehow laced with irony and Lily was involuntarily flooded with the mental image of a boy a few years older than here with hard eyes the color of pale river stones.

“If this is the extent of the competence of the Order of the Phoenix then I have truly overestimated my enemies. Leave them alone and they’ll tear themselves to pieces!”
At the sound of Wizard Lenin’s most recent break into hysterical laughter Lily managed to pull some of her leaking brain back into her ears and pushed herself up into a half sitting position. The walls still spun but they now resembled walls rather than a kaleidoscope of shadows. The laughter died down but Wizard Lenin’s words still turned on themselves, like small gears they operated against one another to bring to life a great machine of thought. The pain in her head had localized to her scar, allowing her to think enough to be able to speak words.

“Argh, Lenin, stop killing my head with nails.” Kind of, it was the general tone of the words that counted. Not that he appeared to be listening anyway since he just kept talking, each word driving another spike into the lightning bolt shaped target on her forehead.

“Of course, there is the fact that Eleanor Potter is never explicitly mentioned in the prophecy, at least not in the section I heard. Surely, something as absurd and logic defying as that would be mentioned somewhere. Still, from the portion Severus relayed, it was Longbottom who should have had the power to defeat me. Dumbledore would consider that highly dangerous, talking to snakes terrified him; let’s see him handle deflecting the killing curse and blowing up a house. Perhaps the wizarding world isn’t even aware of the girl’s role in my… temporary leave of absence. It could very well have been brushed under the carpet, written off as another victory in dueling for Albus Dumbledore. I wouldn’t put it past him, but no, I’d think he’d bring reinforcements to the scene and he wouldn’t be able to brush her aside so easily in front of them while maintaining his image of protector of the good…”

“Too many words, Lenin!” Lily said as she rubbed her scar with two fingers trying not to cry as the mini-migraine continued. Lily had rarely ever cried, she hadn’t seen the point in it, it had never gotten her what she wanted and it was exhausting. If Wizard Lenin wasn’t moved by the voice of reason, otherwise known as Lily’s pain, he wouldn’t be moved by tears.

Finally Wizard Lenin stopped, as if remembering Lily’s existence, and moved his attention onto her. The pain in her scar vanished to a mild prickling that was easily rubbed away.

“Lily, I never did give you permission to call me… Lenin.”

Lily blinked in confusion, she honestly hadn’t considered names to be an issue for him. She had thought they were kind of like hats, sometimes convenient depending on the weather, and easily traded for another if it looked a bit gaudy for the occasion. Lily had no idea what she’d do with a French airplane disaster so she had related him to something she at least had some familiarity with. Besides, he should be proud of his dedication to the glorious revolution and the death of the Bourgeoisie scum. To be so driven as to say no to Uncle Death when he came by to take him beyond the train station; now there was a leader.

“None of that was in any way shape or form accurate.” Wizard Lenin stated without inflection, as if too bewildered to actually form an emotional response, finally he settled by saying, “I would infinitely refer it if you referred to me as something other than… Lily, do you have any way to get out of this cupboard once locked in?”

He appeared to give up on his request half way through, condemning himself to the name Wizard Lenin with something that sounded like resigned shame, as if he simply didn’t have the energy to waste on trifles like names but wished he did. She was glad, lord of the French airplane disasters didn’t suit him really, unless there were planes in this wizarding war that he had failed to mention.

“Answer the question.” He stated rather shortly.

She turned her attention to the door, eyes narrowing as she surveyed it. A few years ago she would have been able to jimmy the lock with a hair pin. She had originally gotten the idea when she had
overheard something from the television while she had been vacuuming the living room. She wasn’t sure how well these television antics worked in real life but she supposed it was worth a try. For weeks she had managed to escape the cupboard at night, spending her time stealing various books from the attic, exploring all the channels on the television and discovering the mighty kung-fu powers of Bruce Lee, and creating a complete mental map of Number 4 Privet Drive. It had ended rather abruptly when one night uncle Vernon had come downstairs to find her watching a really bizarre show featuring naked people, terrible acting, and quite a few whips, he had looked rather uncomfortable giving her the belt after that incident but it hadn’t seemed to stop him. After that a second lock had been added to the door, one that was attached to the outside where she couldn’t reach with a pin, and Lily had been condemned to her position in the cupboard for the rest of her known life.

However that was before she had realized the universe was splintering. If she could manipulate sound waves, cross dimensions, resurrect herself on a semi-regular basis, and enter her own consciousness she could certainly unlock a door.

Wizard Lenin seemed caught up in the small details of her story for a few moments, Lily could feel him sorting through her head looking for her age at the time and what she had been watching on television, when he forcibly retrained his attention on her, “Good, let’s get out of here before we do actually die of starvation.”

Lily blinked at that, she wasn’t sure the Dursleys meant to starve her to death. It’d be counterproductive since they had just driven her back from the hospital and all. Plus the Dursleys were so tied up in normality that she didn’t think they’d appreciate having their niece’s corpse stashed in their cupboard. Lily tried to figure out how to do that talking with her head thing that Wizard Lenin appeared to be doing.

After a few tries she got the hang of it and responded back, “It’s probably just best to wait it out, the holidays are coming up and they won’t lock me in the cupboard if they have to go to Christmas parties. They’ll have to take me to Mrs. Figg’s and then I’ll have to be fed, it will be fine.”

Wizard Lenin seemed unsure, she caught the mutterings of muggles, and goddamn Albus Dumbledore, but he didn’t actually say anything directly to her and seemed more or less prepared to wait out the rest of her sentence with her. Despite the initial headache caused by his appearance Lily was happy he came along, even after she had been released. He was rarely nice, and pretended not to listen to her, but he tended to agree with her opinions on Dudley and the Dursleys. It was nice to have someone agree with her, it had never happened before.

After a few days of watching Dudley at meals he had concluded in a strained tone, “Your relatives are disgusting. I’m shocked that you haven’t considered familicide yet, if you can conceive the thought of killing yourself how can you not consider simply killing them?”

So she was relatively happy when they were shipped off as predicted to Mrs. Figg’s for the holidays. Mrs. Figg however, for whatever reason, didn’t seem happy to see Lily. She seemed nervous, almost like aunt Petunia was after the hospital, always looking at her. Looking at her arms and her back, watching as Lily gorged on biscuits and tea with a somewhat ill expression. Lily didn’t really care what Mrs. Figg’s problem was, just so long as she kept providing food, Wizard Lenin however was growing increasingly wary the longer they spent there.

“Lily, how many cats exactly does this woman own?” He asked in a tone that was not quite cautious but approaching the tone at a safe distance, the cats were perched all over the room watching them like vultures, yellow eyes gleaming.

“I don’t know, I’ve never actually counted, I generally just refer to them as the herd.” Lily thought
with a chocolate chip biscuit in her mouth. One of the cats pawed at the tail of Lily’s braid as if it were a red fish, Lily snatched it away from its grasp before it could eat it alive with a look of alarm on her face. She had always been aware of Mrs. Figg’s cats, not quite afraid, but certainly she tracked their movements just as they tracked hers. There were moments she swore they had human eyes.

“…Right.” He said, and tried to put the cats out of his mind, apparently unwilling to bring the topic up further.

“Eleanor, dear, maybe you should slow down…”

Lily completely ignored Mrs. Figg and reached for more food, “Can’t, paycheck cut, have to make good with what I have now or I’ll never make it through winter.”

Mrs. Figg said nothing for a little while, rather she nervously wrung her hands back and forth, finally she asked, “Eleanor, are the Dursleys treating you… Do they… How are your relatives?”

“In a festive mood, I think.” Festive for the Dursleys was wearing holiday sweaters, their overall personalities did not change in the slightest. Rather they were amplified, aunt Petunia grim smiled grew more sour with the impending arrival of aunt Marge, uncle Vernon swelled with the turkey and his bonus check from Grunnings, and Dudley became surprisingly more needy as the mountain of toys and distractions proved once again insufficient.

“That’s not what I…” Mrs. Figg trailed off and continued to wring her hands nervously as the cats circled about them.

Abruptly, Wizard Lenin offered clarification, “Oh for God’s sake, Lily, she’s asking whether you’re being abused by your relatives.”

Lily blinked and looked over at Mrs. Figg who couldn’t seem to decide if she wanted to ask Lily anything at all, as if this was somehow a forbidden topic. Not that Lily was being abused by the Dursleys, she merely worked for them, they did nothing to her that she couldn’t handle.

“Yes, Lily, you are being abused.” Wizard said in a tone that brooked no argument, “Not that this woman really cares about your wellbeing. What we’re seeing here, Lily, is a common scenario of immoral people pretending to live by their higher ideals. She knows something is off about your situation, has probably known it for a long time, but is content to let you suffer. The knowledge that she is content in letting a child be beaten and starved almost to the point of death worries her and so to assuage her conscience she is trying to find a polite way to reassure herself without really getting involved.”

That seemed rather complicated for a crazy cat lady, “Um, so should I do anything?”

“Just ignore her and she’ll continue to ignore you.” Wizard Lenin said with a sigh, as if she had missed the entire point of his rant. She probably had, Lily didn’t think Mrs. Figg thought that much in general so she was a little confused as to why all that was going through her head when she could have just asked.

Lily could ignore it though. That was the great thing about Wizard Lenin, he had such practical advice.

Mrs. Figg however didn’t have the benefit of having an advisor like Wizard Lenin and still kept trying to phrase her question, “Are you happy, Lily?”

In truth Lily wasn’t quite sure what happiness was. When they had story time at school the princess
and the prince always lived happily ever after. However this was only after great suffering and calamity had occurred, when the princess had almost died, the kingdom almost vanished, everything almost falling into ruin. Happiness then wasn’t a feeling in and of itself but rather extreme relief at having a terrible fate pass over them. The only time Lily could claim to be happy then was meeting with Death and Wizard Lenin, both points where she had died or very nearly died but not quite. She supposed that was accurate, she’d always preferred Death to the Dursleys and Wizard Lenin was shaping up to be decent company, but she wasn’t at the train station or in her brain at the moment she was stuck at Mrs. Figg’s.

The answer, then, was an adamant no. However, given Mrs. Figg’s unusual behavior she wasn’t entirely sure that was the answer that the crazy cat lady wanted to hear.

“Do you always debate this much over trivial decisions?” Wizard Lenin cut in, but she ignored him, he was just grumpy because a few days ago he’d had a ridiculous idea that she, a five year old, should teleport into downtown London to look for the magical shopping district behind a pub and prance around the black market to find out just what had happened to Wizard Lenin’s comrades. Of course she had said no, she was all for adventures, but even Lily knew that five year olds did not simply wander alone in London.

She had the feeling he hadn’t given up on the idea only relented slightly as he recognized her logic and the fact that he was little more than a voice in her head that she chose to tolerate.

“I’m not entirely dissatisfied.” Lily responded instead, which was also true, things had been shaping up quite nicely these past couple of months.

“Good, that’s… good.” Mrs. Figg said seeming somewhat relieved herself. She still looked slightly anxious, as if she had realized that Lily hadn’t quite said happy there, but her hands had stopped twitching at least.

Mrs. Figg looked at the clock on the wall, the one with cats on it, and said, “Oh dear me I’ve got to go and check on dinner, I’ll be back in a jiffy.” And so Mrs. Figg left Lily and Wizard Lenin alone with the cats.

It was the first time that Lily had been left to herself without adult supervision since that day in the hospital. Aunt Petunia had taken to watching Lily subtly while she was doing her chores, sometimes from another room, or sometimes from the back porch, but Lily was never left to her own devices. She always pretended like she wasn’t staring at Lily, as if that action was beneath her, but Lily always caught her aunt’s eyes on her narrowed in suspicion. If Lily had known what a big deal those sleeping pills were she would have just gone for the drills in the garage.

“Hey, Lenin, how do you feel about meeting uncle Death?” Lily asked the voice in her head.

Wizard Lenin started, “Now? Isn’t there a better time for this?”

Not really, with the constant attention from aunt Petunia if she didn’t act now she wouldn’t have a chance until school started up again. And she was not about to leave Death alone for the holidays, he probably was expecting her since she hadn’t managed to visit yet anyway.

With that thought Lily stood dramatically and observed her surroundings, unfortunately she didn’t know Mrs. Figg’s house nearly as well as the Dursleys’ so the hardware and medicine cabinet was not available however the good old tree was waiting in the backyard.

She smiled, snuck past Mrs. Figg in the kitchen, and started her ascent up the now familiar tree of destiny. Wizard Lenin’s anxiety mounted the further up they went; first starting with statements on
how it might not even work given the sleeping pill disaster and then moving on to demands to climb back down right now or he would slaughter all her remaining relatives and make her take the blame. On the top most branches she was hit with several images of a dismembered uncle Vernon that put most horror movies to shame.

Unfortunately for Wizard Lenin, Lily wasn’t very squeamish.

Leaning over the side of the tree she looked down to the ground several feet below judging it to be high enough, ready to dive head first, if that didn’t break her neck she’d have to try the roof. “You ready?”

Wizard Lenin didn’t manage to give an intelligible response by the time she jumped. However if she had to guess she’d think it was a no.

For a minute they were flying downward, trapped in the space in between, passing through the ground with a snap and floating into the abyss until slowly but surely the train station came into view.

Death was lounging in a chair in the café, green eyes tracing the ceiling where his past flickered invisibly. He looked comfortable, in his own way, as if he was merely waiting for something to occur but was content to rest until it did.

Distantly Lily heard Wizard Lenin say, “It’s a train station…” However she was already running towards Death and had no time to listen to whatever observation Wizard Lenin chose to make.

“Hey uncle Death, I’m back, you wouldn’t believe the trouble it took me to get here!”

He turned to face her, a smile already formed on his lips, until his eyes drifted to Wizard Lenin who was still standing where he had been deposited. She turned back to look at her companion. Apparently her wish to see him in communist regalia had come true, or at least partly true, dressed in red and black he wore a long overcoat and rather militaristic gear, on his jacket a gold sickle and star shone in the lighting of the station. Wizard Lenin apparently hadn’t appreciated the gesture as he inspected his outfit and then glared at her with the scary blue eyes that were so pale they were hardly even blue anymore.

Death stood and took hold of Lily’s hand in his own and walked slowly over to Wizard Lenin with an expression that Lily had never seen on his face before. It was one of his inhuman expressions, when he stopped pretending to be a man, a dry twisting of the lips that spoke of no real emotion only ages of history and power.

“If it isn’t Tom Riddle,” He said in a quiet voice, “The last time I saw you in this place you were naked and sobbing under a bench.”

Wizard Lenin looked somewhat insulted but also slightly confused before he managed to regain his composure and say, “You must be Death, then, Lily’s told me all about you.”

“Has she?” Death asked with a tilt of his head, “I suppose she didn’t mention that I don’t play chess anymore. If you’ve come to challenge me to a game I’m afraid I’ll have to pass, I do however play Jenga if you’re partial to it.”

Lily looked up at the pair of them, she felt, for some bizarre reason that she was missing about three fourths of the conversation. The danger that she had sensed in both of them, that pale fire in Wizard Lenin, and the cold barren stretches of the universe in Death, had come to the forefront and seemed to be radiating from their images.
“Oh, hey uncle, do you know Lenin already?”

Death turned his attention from Wizard Lenin with a cheerful smile; with one arm he drew her closer to his own body, tucking her in by his leg. It was funny, normally Death wasn’t this clingy. He always seemed a little hesitant about touching people as if he hadn’t done it for quite some time. Not that she had a problem with it since she wasn’t really a touchy person either.

“Oh yes, Tom Riddle and I go way back.” Death said with that same smile completely disregarding Wizard Lenin’s darkening features, “In fact I knew him back when I still thought I was human. Tell me though, how exactly did you come across Mr. Riddle?”

“Apparently he’s been crashing in my brain without paying rent for the last four years.” Lily said with a wave of her hand, “He says he got in there during the car accident that killed my parents, oh is that where you met him?”

Death looked over at Wizard Lenin with a curious tilt of his head but responded to her question at any rate, “I’m not the Death of your universe Lily; that would be you. I suppose I should clarify, not being a native of your own universe I’ve never met this particular manifestation of Tom Riddle, that being said one hardly differs from the other. Once you’ve met one Tom Marvolo Riddle you’ve met them all.”

Lily turned her head so that she too was observing the fuming Wizard Lenin, “Manifestation, there’s more than one?”

Death nodded, “Oh yes, your doppelganger over there isn’t even the original.”

“Do you think this is funny?”

Wizard Lenin’s face looked like it had in the library, that moment before he had started laughing, when the shadows had warped around them and his eyes had burned so terribly cold. Death straightened under the stare not out of fear but as if he was readying himself for something.

Death replied in a voice equally chill, “No, not particularly. For many years I wished to say that there was nothing that distinguished you from the other dark lords I’ve dealt with over the years, you all have such pretentious names for yourselves after all, but I will admit that you are very tenacious for a human that is.”

Death turned to Lily his eyes no longer even holding the semblance of being human, “Lily, wait in the chair where I was sitting when you got here.”

Lily nodded and did what she was told, she had the feeling one did not disregard orders from Death. As soon as she got there she resumed watching the conflict.

“Lenin, I must say it does suit you, does it sting?” Death asked with a wolf’s smile stepping close enough to Wizard Lenin so that they were chest to chest, “Of course you must take up some new mantle; your old name would have been far too ironic for this meeting.”

Wizard Lenin’s eyes narrowed, “I have trouble believing that you are really death but if you are then you have some information I require.”

“Oh?” Death asked, “I suppose I do look rather anticlimactic, the cloak is on loan and the scythe is tacky, but I rather doubt you’re asking for proof.” He paused then thinking, “Although, even I’m not entirely certain what happens to a horcrux when it dies.”

Wizard Lenin looked as if he had been hit in the face, Death looked over at him with understanding
painted in a moment, “Oh, you don’t know. You think you’re the original, don’t you?”

Lily burst in at this point having wanted to follow the dialogue but also getting more hopelessly confused the more words passed, “Hey, um, not to interrupt but what are we talking about?”

Death looked over at her, “Tom here isn’t really a person, rather he’s a fragment of a soul, a rather large fragment considering everything but a fragment nonetheless. You see a wizard can split their soul and store it into an object, that object and the soul inside it are then referred to as a horcrux. By a very strange twist of fate that comes when a human tries to murder death itself Tom here accidentally made himself into a horcrux and is only just now realizing it.”

“You have no…” Wizard Lenin started but was immediately cut off by Death.

“Proof? Mr. Riddle I remind you that I am Death, if anyone would know a horcrux on sight it would be me.” Death said calmly before continuing, “But you wanted to ask me something before we started arguing semantics.”

Wizard Lenin looked like he wanted to kill something, his eyes almost blank and yet even so jagged and sharp, like someone could cut themselves merely by looking into them too long. His expression had gone flat and his hands were clenched at his sides, still he didn’t move any closer to uncle Death, or make any move to strike.

“What happened that night?” He asked without inflection his words cold and bitter in the well-lit station.

Death regarded him carefully, not as if he was particularly afraid of Wizard Lenin himself, but more of the collateral damage an outburst might cause to the station. He said with that strange seriousness that seemed to pervade the conversation, “You tried to kill Death.”

“She wasn’t even mentioned in the prophecy!” Wizard Lenin shouted throwing his arms out so that they motioned to her, still sitting at the café table eyes going back and forth between them as if watching a ping pong match.

“Really?” Death asked curiously and looked over at Lily himself, “I just assumed the prophecy changed in her dimension but wait if she wasn’t in the prophecy why on earth did you bother?”

“It was convenient!”

“Convenient to break into a home under fidelis, protected by your greatest enemy, with the express purpose of killing their infant daughter?” Death asked with raised eyebrows.

“I do not have to justify myself to you!”

“Funny, most men do find that they do have to justify themselves to me, at the end of things at any rate.” Death remarked almost as an aside.

Wizard Lenin looked dully between Death and Lily finally stating, “It must be genetic.”

(She wasn’t sure what was supposed to be genetic since Wizard Lenin didn’t look inclined to explain his thought there but at least Death was confused as well, his eyebrow raised slightly as his eyes flickered to Lily sitting in the chair away from the action.)

He sighed and dragged a hand through his hair as if that might somehow allow him to abide the idiocy he must constantly contend with. With a grimace that almost seemed painful he continued his original line of questioning, “Are you seriously suggesting, that the little girl over there, is Death?”
“I’m not suggesting, I am certain.”

Wizard Lenin ignored the statement, “And that my attempt to kill her tore apart my soul and destroyed my body?”

“Well, it was also suggested to me at one time that it was the power of love that destroyed you.” Death said with a cocked head, “But as romantic as that may sound I never quite bought it myself.”

Wizard Lenin seemed to have run out of things to say, Death turned from him with a quick spin, speaking over his shoulder as he approached Lily, “Will that be all, Mr. Riddle? Not that I don’t appreciate your company but sociopaths slavering for immortality are not my usual cup of tea.”

With a sigh Death sat across from her and proceeded to completely ignore Wizard Lenin who was still standing staring after him both baffled and insulted. “Now, Lily, why on earth did you bring a nuisance like Tom Riddle here?”

“I like him.” Lily stated waving slightly over at her latest friend hoping he hadn’t taken any of that too personally, “He’s nice.”

“Earth must be a desolate toxic wasteland much earlier in your reality than it is in mine if Tom Riddle was just described as being nice.” Death commented drily summoning a pitcher of tea with a wave of his hand as well as two cups, she noticed that a cup didn’t appear for Wizard Lenin.

“He’s the only person besides you who’s ever listened to a word I say.” She protested indignant at Death’s assumptions, “He may not always agree, and he has these crazy political theories that he believes are somehow relevant to the very nature of reality, but he does listen.”

Death eyed Wizard Lenin warily, “Really, somehow I just can’t picture Lord Voldemort entertaining little girls.”

“Well it did happen!” Lily said with lowered eyebrows before angrily taking a sip of tea, “You said that you met a different version of him anyway in your universe, who’s to say that this one isn’t different?”

Death considered her statement, pensive at first, and then a small smile rose to his lips, “Who knows, maybe you’re right.”

A third tea cup appeared and Death motioned for Wizard Lenin to join them. Wizard Lenin glowered but then steadily approached pulling the third chair from the table with a grating noise against the pavement. Without a word he began to pour himself some tea doing his best to pretend the pair of them didn’t exist.

Death’s smile remained became almost fond, “You are doing rather well. The Tom Riddle I knew, from my universe, would have been frothing at the mouth and attempting to torture me into submission by this point.”

The tea stopped pouring for an instant Wizard Lenin’s face blank as the comment registered; he appeared to decide he didn’t want to acknowledge it and continued to pour the tea.

“Tom Riddle and his shenanigans aside, Lily, how are you?” Death asked.

After that the conversation calmed slightly. Wizard Lenin sat stiffly watching the pair of them as they discussed the nuances of Lily’s daily life, his eyes lingering on the softening of Death’s expression and the eagerness in Lily’s, only speaking when he was addressed and rarely then. This, Lily thought to herself as she sipped tea, must be what happiness really is.
Soon enough they were heading back into the world, Wizard Lenin waiting impatiently at the exit as Lily and Death exchanged some final words.

Death crouched down so that he was at her eye level, he brushed her hair back from her face with cold pale fingers, and with a sad smile said, “Good luck, in everything Lily, I’ll be here when you come back.”

He hugged her then, briefly, no longer than a single heartbeat and then he was standing and pushing her off towards Wizard Lenin. To Wizard Lenin he offered a half salute, “Try not to destroy the world in your attempts to rule it.”

With that Lily took Wizard Lenin’s hand and they walked back into Lily’s body resting at the bottom of the tree. Lily wasn’t sure what she had been expecting, perhaps a repeat of that fall day, where it had only been her and the tree. As it was she instead woke to Mrs. Figg’s frantic and a dizzy view as her body was being shaken back and forth in an attempt to revive her.

After the Dursleys returned from the holiday party, Christmas sweaters at their most festive, and learned that Lily had once again had a near death experience from a shrieking Mrs. Figg it was decided that the usual set of consequences wasn’t going to work this time. Or at least, it was decided by aunt Petunia, uncle Vernon in his fit of purple rage seemed hell bent on bringing out the belt and whipping it out of her but for whatever reason this idea was quickly dismissed by a panicking Petunia who looked out towards where the neighbor’s houses were still lit.

And that was how a few days after Christmas Lily and Wizard Lenin found themselves in child psychologist’s office.
The Dogs of Pavlov

In which Wizard Lenin tells a story, Lily’s shenanigans set a house on fire, and Death is blamed for recent events.

It was several Sundays after that first therapy session in Doctor Mitchell’s brightly colored office that Lily and Wizard Lenin found themselves once again in the train station called Purgatory drinking tea with Death. They were sitting at the usual café table each sipping tea that had been poured by Death at the start of the meeting. Death was wearing his usual black wardrobe but Wizard Lenin was kind enough to bring some red to the table, today he had lost his more military uniform and descended into school boy, wearing a dark gray uniform complete with a red scarf and a red beret that Che Guevera would have been proud to wear. For whatever reason though Wizard Lenin did not respect Che Guevara’s fashion sense and had angrily tossed the hat aside as soon as they had materialized in the station.

What was interesting about this particular meeting with Death was not that things had come to a head in the mortal plane, which they had, but because Lenin was too upset with Lily to function properly and thus had decided to vent to Death himself rather than seethe silently like he normally did whenever Lily visited Death.

The trouble was that Wizard Lenin loathed Death. Wizard Lenin, Lily found, loathed most things but Death had a special place in his cold black heart. What was strange about his loathing of Death was that it wasn’t so much for the man itself, although Death clearly annoyed him, as it was for the idea of what he represented. It was like Death had done something to personally offend Wizard Lenin and Lily had no idea what it was only that it made her head hurt whenever Death and Wizard Lenin glared at each other for too long.

In the last couple of visits they’d grown more tolerant of each other, they no longer spent the entire visit bickering for one thing, but they still weren’t exactly friendly. When speaking to Wizard Lenin uncle Death wore his inhuman face more often, the ancient face of a forgotten god. Before them he would stand, the God Emperor, observing his kingdom of dust. It seemed like there was some invisible war being waged above Lily’s head where the only weapons allowed were eye contact and subtle threats. Their friendliness to each other was sickly sweet, both of them wearing charming smiles, while their white knuckles gripped the table to keep from stabbing the other.

The undertone of danger was still very much evident in the air but this was the first time that Wizard Lenin was speaking for lengthy period of time to Death without the intent to unnerve or otherwise insult him. That wasn’t to say that Wizard Lenin was going out of his way to be charming but that single minded focus he usually brought to the conversation was elsewhere.

“You are possibly the worst father figure I’ve ever witnessed.” Wizard Lenin began casually as if discussing the weather, “And this includes my own father.”

Death blinked and did manage to look somewhat affronted which was more than Wizard Lenin’s other jibes had managed to accomplish. Insults that would have uncle Vernon tearing his hair out and beating her for shaming the family rolled off Death in cool waves leaving him as serene and untouchable as always. This time his eyes narrowed slightly and his expression became somewhat cold.

“And why is that exactly?”
Wizard Lenin began to grin, one that was positively Cheshire in nature, he folded his hands beneath his chin, “Well, there’s a little story that goes along with that.”

It had all started a few weeks back when she had first gone to therapy. Doctor Mitchell was a nice man, nicer even than Mrs. Figg who’d become somewhat jittery in the past few months since her meeting uncle Death. He didn’t offer her food but he offered relatively decent conversation in that he let her talk about whatever she wanted to and didn’t interrupt. Sometimes he’d ask specific questions, about school, Dudley, the Dursleys, even Mrs. Figg and he’d make little notes as she talked but for the most part she actually got to say what was on her mind.

It was very relaxing, never since uncle Death had she met someone she could really talk with. Wizard Lenin was all well and good but sometimes he disregarded what she said or went on his own giant rants instead. Wizard Lenin was very passionate about the Bourgeoisie scum after all; even being in the same house as her middle class masters was driving him up the wall. She didn’t realize until later that the longer she had been talking the more confused and worried Doctor Mitchell had appeared.

It was finally right before she started in on her explanation on the current state of Ragnarök that Wizard Lenin interjected. He had been somewhat displeased at the prospect of attending therapy, images flashing through Lily’s brain of institution and screaming drugged hallucinations, however he was willing to let her do what she wanted if these mistakes she made now would eventually force her way into the wizarding world as he called it that much sooner.

Wizard Lenin was under the impression that the only way out of her brain and into some sort of body would have to be found in the glitches that were occurring more rapidly as the universe decayed, moreover found in the community of people who worshipped these glitches as they attempted to manipulate them, the longer they sat around Little Whinging the longer the grand revolution would have to wait for his return. He was suffering in the ways that all great leaders suffer in exile, he was Napoleon on Elba, cursing the day he ever thought it was a good idea to invade Russia in winter. He seemed to be ignoring the fact that she was only five and even though her aunt and uncle might be alright with giving her responsibilities like cooking meals or cleaning the house they would not be okay with her gallivanting around downtown mystical London attempting to make a golem for the voice in her head that told her to kill things.

Since then they’d been at something of an impasse.

In the car ride over, when aunt Petunia had been giving instructions on precisely what she was never to answer honestly and if she did so help her god Eleanor Potter would never see the light of day from outside that cupboard ever again, Wizard Lenin had relayed his only warning, “Should this doctor find you too unstable, no matter your age, you’ll find yourself in a place much worse than the orphanage that your relatives threaten to send you to. Do try to keep things under control or you may find you have no choice but to return to the wizarding world earlier than expected.”

However apparently staying silent was easier thought of than done as Lily’s headache grew throughout the meeting until finally Wizard Lenin snapped in a fit of frustration.

“It’s as if you have no idea what children even sound like! You live with one, it should be easier than this, try to sound like Dudley for God’s sake.”

Wizard Lenin had this crazy theory that she was too smart to exist, at least for a five year old. “An intelligent child can read a thick book,” he’d once said, “a very intelligent child may have a particularly bright thought every once in a while. No child, no matter how intelligent, routinely ponders the nature of their existence and the existence of reality. You, Lily, are an aberration.”
Lily tried to think of how Dudley talked but it was hard since he rarely ever managed to say anything. She didn’t even think he’d really be able to answer Doctor Mitchell’s questions, at least not to the full extent.

She must have begun to look confused because while they were waiting in silence for Lily to answer Doctor Mitchell sighed and looked at the clock. “Well, Ellie, that was… I’ll have to think about some things for next time.”

“It was probably around that time that Doctor Alfred Mitchell realized he was a bit out of his league.” Wizard Lenin commented to Death before taking a sip of his tea his face serene in spite of his annoyance during the episode itself, “Lily didn’t need a child’s psychologist but she’d no doubt run circles around any other psychologist as well, so finding himself in a bit of a bind our dear doctor returned to the basics, that was his first mistake.”

Outside of therapy things had been slowly but surely returning to normal. Dudley now had the joy of being able to call her the crazy freak as opposed to just a normal freak to everyone at school, which given the way she talked was believed by everyone in her class, and had found a new and somewhat faster friend to chase her around with sticks on the playground. Aunt Petunia was slightly less jittery, only becoming nervous whenever Lily had to go to therapy, but otherwise returning to her grim demanding self only supervising Lily when she felt it was really necessary rather than the border line stalking that had been going on before.

The only real difference was the cats. Mrs. Figg’s herd of cats had now become a patrol, they now prowled the neighborhood at regular intervals, green eyes gleaming from rooftops like security cameras. Even Wizard Lenin couldn’t quite bring himself to disagree when Lily declared that they were spying on her.

Mrs. Figg herself seemed somewhat calmer than she had been, staring at Lily from across the street with a slightly cheerier smile, waving when she caught Lily’s eyes.

So it was really no surprise that Lily assumed that therapy would have no impact on her life whatsoever.

The next week Doctor Mitchell came to her with what she considered an interesting proposition. He began, first, by asking very direct questions that no one else had seemed capable of asking.

“Ellie, did you take your aunt’s medicine on purpose?” That was his first question, not bothering to waste time with pleasantries, she blinked at his directness. He lacked Wizard Lenin’s ruthlessness as well as his charisma, but it was a question in his vein of thought, very to the point with little wiggle room.

“Yes.”

He looked upset but not surprised, like he had been expecting that answer but wished he hadn’t been, rubbing his temples he moved onto his next question, “Were you aware of what would happen if you took too many pills at once?”

“Yes.”

They sat in the silence staring at each other, the clock ticking in the background, and the bright colors of his office clashing very heavily with the mood. He seemed to be thinking very hard about whatever it was that he needed to say next, as if one wrong word would doom the world to catastrophe.
Finally he said, “In the field of psychology there are several theories on why people do things they do even if the things are bad for them in question. One theory is that people are conditioned to do certain actions. In other words if a person does something and is rewarded they’ll want to do it again, or if they do something and something bad is taken away the same thing will happen. Do you understand?”

Lily nodded, “I know all about the stick and the carrot, Doctor Mitchell.”

One of Wizard Lenin’s great passions was motivating other people to do things they wouldn’t normally be inclined to do especially if it was only intrinsic motivation. He’d once went on for hours about how to combine the right amount of torture so that when someone even saw you’d they’d instinctively flinch and maybe even vomit on their own shoes.

“…Right, well, yes this is similar. According to this theory you were triggered into taking your aunt’s medication for some reason and once you had taken them you were rewarded in some way, so if we want to help you stop harming yourself, then we have to find either what triggered the event in the first place or how you were rewarded afterwards. If we can break the cycle at one of these two points then you will be better.”

Lily really only had one thing to say to that.

“Okie dokie.”

“Unfortunately for the good doctor Lily took his words as a suggestion rather than a mere explanation.” Wizard Lenin commented to his audience.

“I see.” Death said with a sigh looking somewhat bored; had he been human he might have even glanced at a watch at this point but as it was he just continued to stare blandly at Wizard Lenin, “Although I’m still failing to see what this story has to do with me.”

“Yeah,” Lily interjected now that Wizard Lenin’s flow had been interrupted, “What does this story have to do with uncle Death, Lenin?”

Wizard Lenin looked blankly at the pair of them, not quite murderously angry, but definitely frustrated. They stared at each other in silence looking for all the world like one of those dramatic stand offs in westerns where one of them would shoot the other two down in a matter of moments.

Finally Wizard Lenin said in a quiet voice, “If you would let me finish we wouldn’t be having this problem.”

It was on the car ride back, thinking over Doctor Mitchell’s words, that Lily had a terrible idea a wonderfully terrible idea. It was the word conditioned that had reached her, an odd choice of word in normal circumstances, one that pointed towards humans being products of their environments something Lily vaguely believed due to her own insistence that humans weren’t actually people.

Recently Lily had become well acquainted with the library. For one thing Dudley found the library very dull and generally wouldn’t go there even if Lily could be found inside and there was the fact that Lily liked books. She’d always understood books, even the complicated ones she wasn’t supposed to be able to understand, books were easy and very informative. She’d started to become a regular sight in the school’s library and could usually be seen in the corner next to a small tower of books. It’d taken some wheedling but she’d managed to convince the librarian to get some thicker books on psychology from the local library. For days she had been ready to tear hair out waiting for the book, flipping through the almost useless books stored in the school itself, suffering through lessons on how to read the alphabet listening to Wizard Lenin’s sly words that she wouldn’t have to
wait if she just ran off to downtown London now but she survived and the book arrived.

After spending recess and lunch reading the book Lily was ready. Finally in a grand moment of declaration that in any decent film would be accompanied by music she exclaimed to wizard Lenin, "I am going to make a Skinner's Box!"

According to her research Skinner had been a psychologist who believed that humans as well as animals could be conditioned to perform any sort of bizarre action based on series of either rewards or punishments. In several experiments he’d place a rat in a box with a lever and train them to pull the lever by rewarding them with food every time they did. The box in which these types of experiments were performed became known as Skinner’s Boxes.

It was a relatively simple model but why couldn’t it be expanded a little? Why couldn’t a box with a lever instead by a house, a house by the name of Number 4 Privet Drive to be exact?

Now what was not known by many was that Number 4 Privet Drive had an extra bedroom, no one actually slept there, but it was used to store Dudley’s extra toys that he didn’t want to play with but was too miserly to throw away. Lily had noted for years that whenever she asked why she couldn’t just have the extra bedroom since no one was living in it that uncle Vernon would turn into the purple faced rage monster who would yell at her for extended periods of time about her ungrateful ways that would appreciated in an orphanage. For years now she had lived in the servant’s quarters with no hope of moving up in the world until her debt had been paid off with interest. Now however, thanks to Doctor Mitchell and lots of books, she’d found a way to motivate her stingy relatives.

She’d start off small and if this worked she’d see where they could go from there.

That next morning as she was making a very artery clogging breakfast, one that in time might call Death in person to their doorstep, she asked aunt Petunia and uncle Vernon between frying slices of bacon, “So no one actually lives in Dudley’s second bedroom, can I have it instead?”

The old uneducated ignorant Lily would have then allowed uncle Vernon to have his rage fit but the newly improved in therapy Lily interrupted the purple madness with a very loud magically produced noise. According to the book from the library, which she now was starting to believe was more important and far more useful than the bible, people were naturally twitchy around some things more than others. Heights, loud noises, vermin, and various other things were very easy to make people afraid of and if she paired one of these unpleasant things with what she wanted then soon enough just to make it stop they’d let her have the room.

Of course they didn’t know that yet, all they knew was that something that sounded like a hideous gong had just rang through the house without anything seeming to set it off. The family sat in dumb wonder, uncle Vernon’s rage deflected, while Lily continued to cook breakfast and finally she asked again once they seemed back to their normal selves, “So no one actually lives in Dudley’s second bedroom, can I have it instead?”

Uncle Vernon considered himself a strong, sensible, and reasonable patriarch who in the face of trial by fire would walk through unhindered and unscathed. He broke before her next therapy session. It hadn’t taken much, after the first five loops, he’d started to almost resort to physical violence which aunt Petunia had managed to stop the first few times with a, “What will the neighbors think Vernon?” and even a “What if the psychologist looks for bruises?!” But after a while even aunt Petunia lost her ability to think clearly and came to the sound conclusion, “Oh Vernon, just give her the damn room!”

Without aunt Petunia to hinder him uncle Vernon tried and failed to beat the nonsense out of her. He had been trying and failing to beat the nonsense out of her for years. When she’d first started talking,
long before Dudley seemed capable of thought at all, he’d declared it to be some unholy freakish work and tried to see if spanking would do the trick. Later when they’d discovered she could read when Dudley could barely say words he’d resorted to the same methods. Aunt Petunia usually stared on in stern approval but was not an active participant. However, time had shown that no matter the event uncle Vernon had never once managed to change Lily’s behavior.

At first he tried spanking, then he tried the belt, then he tried the cupboard, he tried everything he could think of but nothing seemed to work because every time she’d come out with the same question followed by the same ungodly noise when he answered incorrectly. There was only so much of that a man could take.

Wizard Lenin seemed to be in awe of her, not saying much through the whole process, and only when uncle Vernon finally broke saying, “Have the room you little bitch!” did he comment, “You are a natural.”

“A natural what?” Lily asked, unsure if he meant psychologist or something else entirely. Whatever it was Wizard Lenin didn’t deign to clarify but rather continued in that strangely blank tone.

“That, I believe, would put Bellatrix herself to shame.”

He didn’t explain who Bellatrix was either but Wizard Lenin wasn’t the explaining sort really. She’d take the compliment if he was willing to give it.

Things were looking up in the world of Lily Eleanor Evan Potter. She now had a mattress, a window, and a book shelf it was like living in a palace. Mrs. Figg seemed to notice her attitude change or her cats did, because suddenly they were around a little less, as if they had been reassured by her now upbeat nature and could return to their den. School, while still boring, became somewhat easier as she knew that she now had a bookshelf to store whatever books she wanted. The best part was that Dudley was now hesitant to bother her, the loud noises affected him the worst, and whenever he came near her it looked like he expected his ear drums to burst. Things were actually changing in a way that Lily hadn’t thought was possible.

With this new technique there was no limit to what she could accomplish.

Wizard Lenin however wasn’t quite sure he agreed. Faced once again with life in Little Whining as opposed to the streets of magical Britain he began to get moodier about her success. Each time she managed to accomplish some new feat she’d hear a rumble of discontent from the resident Communist.

“I realize, Lily, that you have yet to be acquainted with failure but speaking from… experience… reach too far and your empire will collapse. If I were you I would quit while I was ahead.”

She didn’t listen though; she figured that since Wizard Lenin spent most of his time ignoring her words of wisdom she could afford to ignore his. After all, what did he know? He turned himself into a wraith in her brain by running a red light in an intersection in an attempt at homicide.

Later, thinking back on the event in the train station as Wizard Lenin continued to narrate his grievances, she would have done the same thing again if she had the chance even when things didn’t end quite as expected. Really, she still planned to do the same thing in spite of her lack of success. You simply didn’t take actions back like that, or at least Lily didn’t, even when Wizard Lenin was proven somewhat correct.

It started the day she decided to teach Dudley Dursley how to cook. Lily had been cooking for the Dursleys for years, when they’d realized that she could talk at a fairly young age they’d decided that
if she was smart enough to say some pretty words she was damn smart enough to listen to them. The first month had been a disaster, with little to no instruction and aunt Petunia screaming and making her cook over and over until she got it right, but eventually she had learned enough to be competent and now was fairly good at it. It wasn’t extremely difficult, most of it involved following the recipe, so she figured that Dudley Dursley was perfectly capable of cooking his own damn breakfast.

Aunt Petunia was in the garden and uncle Vernon at work so the coast was clear for Lily to begin instruction of her somewhat dim and bloated cousin. It would be good for him, Dudley didn’t really have any useful skills at the moment and cooking bacon always came in handy.

Wizard Lenin highly disagreed, he’d roused himself from daydreaming the latest scheme that would end in Dumbledore’s demise (whoever that was) to the sight of Lily wielding a frying pan before Dudley, “Lily, your cousin is five. Five year olds can barely talk, I highly doubt they can operate a stove.”

“Please, I’ve been cooking since I was like… Well before I was given an accurate way to measure time.” Lily thought as she simultaneously held out the frying pan to Dudley, “Today, Dudders, we’re going to learn to make bacon so that I don’t have to.”

Dudley stared at her blankly and then shook his head vigorously, “No, I’ll tell…”

Before he could finish the sentence with mummy the gong of death echoed throughout the room causing him to cover his ears a second too late. Lily started over from the beginning, “Today, Dudders, we are going to learn how to make bacon so that I don’t have to. Do you understand?”

He looked like he was going to cry but at least there was no mention of tattling to mummy so he must have been at least partially willing to cooperate.

“*I think we’ve established that you’re not normal, I’m not even sure if you’re human at this point.*” Wizard Lenin commented drily still responding to her earlier thoughts rather than her treatment of her cousin.

“What does that have to do with anything?”

Her scar began to tingle as Wizard Lenin started to feel his tolerance waning and his exasperation mounting. “*It means Lily that while you may be able to safely operate a stove your dear cousin Dudders will not be so fortunate.*”

“*Skinner said that a person can be conditioned to do almost anything.*”

“I don’t think Skinner had this in mind.”

“Look it’s not that hard, you just turn on the stove, and then put the pan on it, and then put some strips of pork fat in the pan and wait until it’s not quite burnt. Easy.” Lily motioned toward the stove with a hand and Dudley with tears in his eyes and healthy fear of the death gong put the frying pan on and turned on the stove.

Lily still thought that her greatest mistake was not the fact that she tried to teach her five year old cousin to operate the stove it was that she left him alone to do it once she was convinced he got the general idea, which was pretty much right away, and didn’t check on him even when the smoke alarm had gone off. Aunt Petunia, still gardening in the back yard, was unaware of the racket thanks to the magical sound proofing Lily had done earlier and only realized there was a fire when smoke was pouring out the windows.

It wasn’t as if the entire thing burned down but by the time the fire department arrived and all the
neighbors came out to stare the house was a bit singed.

After Wizard Lenin finished his story Death stood and walked over to the café to get more tea, his voice rang above the distant clanking of the pitcher as he set about making the new pot. “It seems you don’t know me very well. I am Death, Mr. Riddle, I have seen nations crumble beneath my fingertips. I am hardly disturbed by antics of a child besides you’re one to talk about childhood violence; I seem to recall you lynching a bunny before the age of eleven.”

Wizard Lenin seemed somewhat affronted by this, “Setting fire to the house was just the beginning.”

“Really, because I kind of thought it was the ending too.” Lily said, she hadn’t tried anything too ambitious after that; just stuck to getting out of things rather than teaching anyone new skills like cooking.

Wizard Lenin glared across the table at her, “Are you conveniently forgetting the memory and repairing spells you performed?”

Lily blinked. Well she couldn’t just leave the house like that, uncle Vernon had made it very clear that any sort of funny business would land her in the orphanage, and she was fairly certain that lighting houses on fire fell under the category of funny business. If the universe was splintering why not take advantage of it? It’d seemed pretty useful so far so she took some of that extra energy lying around and made people forget what happened and fixed the house. It was like the event never occurred in the first place.

“It wasn’t exactly spells, Lenin, I mean all I really did was suggest to the universe glitches that it may be a good idea to erase all the neighbors’ and the Dursleys’ memories and then fix the house but it wasn’t anything like a spell.” Lily clarified, “Wait, was that supposed to be the point of the story, I thought the point of the story was me learning to enjoy life.”

“I think it was supposed to shame me by showing your ruthless pragmatism and tendency toward manipulation, however Mr. Riddle doesn’t appear to know me very well, he still judges me by human standards.” Death shrugged but a small smile graced his lips as Wizard Lenin was being swiftly and surely cut out of the conversation.

“Children are not capable of that kind of magic!” Wizard Lenin slammed his hand on the table with all the fury of a slighted comrade.

The pair stared at him in silence for a few moments letting the words hang in the air finally Lily looked at uncle Death in confused exasperation, “He keeps saying that.”

Death’s eyes had gone somewhat flat though, looking as if he was digging through his own memories again, probably lingering on that time when he thought he was human, “Did I ever claim she was a child?”

That seemed to stump Wizard Lenin more or less or at least that’s what Death seemed to be assuming as he turned from the man and instead took Lily’s hands into his own and addressed her with a sad half smile, “Perhaps he’s right, I am not the greatest of father figures, even to my own children I ended up being somewhat disappointing. Without being on the same plane as you I can’t offer much in the way of guidance, just know that if you ever do need my help I am waiting in the train station between life and death, all you need to do is call and I will be there.”

Sometimes when Wizard Lenin really provoked Death he’d get very serious for a few moments and then tell her something odd that seemed like it might be important later but was rather irrelevant for the moment. Still, she knew that these were words the Dursleys would never tell her and so she
would accept them for all they were worth.

“Are you done with your little moment?” Wizard Lenin was clearly not appreciating Death’s gesture, “I believe that concludes our business here, Lily.”

Wizard Lenin grabbed her hand and started dragging her toward the exit, she waved goodbye to Death with a small smile, knowing that she’d somehow find a way to visit next Sunday even if things went to hell and back before then. He smiled and waved back offering the parting words, “Next time, he should come dressed as Castro, I would particularly enjoy an exploding cigar.”

All in all it was a fairly decent Sunday afternoon even if it had ended with her drowning herself in the bathtub in order to reach the train station.
It was on her sixth birthday, a monumental event for Dudley whenever his occurred but a nonexistent one for Lily, that Lily finally decided to visit Diagon Alley.

"Is this it?"

Needless to say Lily wasn’t as impressed as Wizard Lenin wanted her to be.

Normally she would never have given in to Wizard Lenin’s demands, she was an expert at not giving in to Wizard Lenin’s demands, it was practically all she did. He would always get grumpy about it, or throw a giant rage fit about it if it’d happen enough times in a row, but he knew and she knew that there wasn’t really much he could do about it. He was freeloading in her brain and that came with a price, turned out there was no such thing as free freeloading.

She supposed the start of the events that brought her to Diagon Alley began after the operant conditioning disaster, as Wizard Lenin had later coined it, which had nearly burned down Number 4 Privet Drive.

Doctor Mitchell turned out to be a halfway decent psychologist and a nice guy considering he had no idea what was actually going on in Lily’s life. She’d decided that if they were trapped on a desert island together without hope of rescue then Lily wouldn’t immediately resort to cannibalism. So the week after the operant conditioning disaster he’d still been talking to her about her feelings that might have triggered the event and the attention she received afterwards.

In spite of aunt Petunia’s very clear instructions on what she was absolutely never allowed to tell Doctor Mitchell ever, which included her residency in the cupboard, her bouts of starvation, and half of what uncle Vernon ever told her she must have let something slip because by the end of the session Doctor Mitchell had a very pensive and concerned expression on his face.

He finally said at the end of their session, “Ellie, I think it’s best that we had a meeting with your relatives included as well, I think there are things that should be discussed with your guardians present.”

Needless to say the Dursleys weren’t pleased by that development.

It had taken several phone calls, several attempts at putting Lily back in the cupboard, several rings of the gong of death to convince uncle Vernon that it was a terrible idea to put Lily back in the cupboard, and several frustrated thoughts from Wizard Lenin just telling her to leave already because “Goddammit even orphanages were better than this shit!” to get uncle Vernon, aunt Petunia, and herself into that office together.

Even then it hadn’t exactly been easy going, there had been a lot of accusations on aunt Petunia’s end about her breaking their agreement and blabbing to Doctor Mitchell about certain things and uncle Vernon had been very upset that he was involved with this at all. Like Wizard Lenin he was grumbling on consistent intervals that Lily should be shoved into an orphanage where she belonged and she could see how she liked it there. Wizard Lenin did not appreciate the comparison to him and
uncle Vernon, even if it was completely valid.

The meeting itself was slightly more interesting.

“So, I’m glad we could all come together today I realize that there were some scheduling conflicts on your end Mr. Dursley but I believe it was best if we all met at the same time.” Doctor Mitchell’s hands were clasped together as he surveyed his audience, the bulging Vernon Dursley who was practically bursting out of his suit, the rake thin aunt Petunia wearing clothing that looked as if it was trying to be expensive but was clearly bought in a common department store, and Lily dressed in her usual second hand clothes from Dudley being much too large and sporting several prominent stains.

Uncle Vernon grumbled something while aunt Petunia gave a smile that was almost painful to watch it was so tight, in fact Lily thought to herself, she’d never really seen aunt Petunia smile anywhere so she’d probably forgotten how to do it properly.

Things might have gone well enough, Wizard Lenin would later reflect to Lily, if uncle Vernon hadn’t been the first one to speak.

“What’s the girl done now, doctor?” Uncle Vernon asked crossing his arms and looking very much in a hurry to get out of the office.

Doctor Mitchell blinked and looked at Lily who was looking back with a somewhat pitying expression, she had warned him the last time that this meeting would be far from pleasant, he hadn’t listened at the time and now he was getting what he paid for.

“I’m sorry?” He asked and then continued, “Oh no, I didn’t call you here because Ellie’s done anything wrong in particular I would just like to talk about her current situation.”

“What about her situation?” Aunt Petunia asked sharply the smile dropping.

“Oh dear,” Wizard Lenin commented drily in the background watching the events with what could only be described as laziness, “It appears your dear aunt suspects you of tattling about your abusive situation, let’s see how she handles this little scenario.”

At this point, feeling he couldn’t badger Lily or manipulate her into allowing him access to the mortal plane by proxy, Wizard Lenin had taken to commentating the day’s events in the same manner as he would a poorly written soap opera. She could just picture him in her head, lounging in front of a grainy television screen that supplied the picture of the therapist’s office, eating popcorn and looking horrifically bored with posters of regular Lenin, Stalin, and Mao lining the walls in the background. She had the feeling that he resented that image but was too tired and bored to do anything about it.

Doctor Mitchell blinked, perhaps surprised by the harshness evident in aunt Petunia’s tone, he took a second to gather himself before responding, “Well Mrs. Dursley, I’m sure it’s extremely evident that your niece, Ellie, is quite intelligent. Intelligent might be the wrong word even, gifted is closer. Normally I’d suggest playing a more active role in Ellie’s education and getting her to connect to her peers but I’m afraid that at this stage Ellie simply won’t be able to connect to other children especially in an educational context.”

That seemed to throw both uncle Vernon and aunt Petunia for a loop as they stared blankly back at the good doctor.

Uncle Vernon finally interrupted with a great harrumph, “Gifted? Now I know you went to some big-wig university but listen here my man, there’s nothing gifted about this girl, dumber than rocks she is.”
“You must be joking,” Doctor Mitchell muttered, “I did the tests for official reasons but even listening to her talk you can tell…”

“Never talked normal, not like our boy Dudley, even in the beginning she’d prattle on like this and that never saying anything at all. She just says all that to make you think she’s smart but we Dursleys know better, she’s got the wool over your eyes.”

Doctor Mitchel just stared at uncle Vernon blankly before continuing like he hadn’t spoken in the first place, “I would suggest you move Ellie to a gifted school or at the very least a gifted academic program and enroll her in outside activities where she can connect with peers in a context that’s not about academic achievement. I would also suggest spending more time with her she has some rather bizarre ideas about her…role in the family I suppose is what I’d call it.”

Instead of uncle Vernon it was a panicky looking aunt Petunia who stepped up to the plate this time, “What kind of ideas, what nonsense has she been telling you?” Then aunt Petunia’s cracked, strained looking smile appeared, “She’s just full of ideas I tell you, just like my sister was, her imagination just runs away with her sometimes.”

“What do you think that’s about?” Lily asked Wizard Lenin while everyone was distracted.

“Well, you did tell him that you’re the family’s indentured servant and that they’re charging you interest. Of course, Petunia Dursley might be thinking that you told him about the amount of time you spend locked in a cupboard or the fact that you’re starved at regular intervals as punishment for what they consider bad behavior. She must have thought long and hard about sending you here in the first place, Vernon certainly didn’t think too much about it, but I suppose that last suicide attempt in Mrs. Figg’s yard left her no choice.” Wizard Lenin commented drily in a tone one usually reserved for going over presentations, at the end he added a side comment, “You know in spite of all our differences I will say that you do manage to make your life quite interesting, Lily. Only you could manage to cause this sort of madness before the age of six.”

“Ellie?”

Suddenly everyone was looking at her, she blinked and looked around, surveying the range of expressions from worry on doctor Mitchell’s face, anxiety on aunt Petunia’s, and vague annoyance on uncle Vernon’s. “Oh, uh, sorry spaced for a moment, we were talking about…”

She actually couldn’t really remember as she had been more focused on watching everyone’s reaction and giving Wizard Lenin his dues. Ever since Wizard Lenin had made his presence in her brain known it’d been hard to focus on things in the physical plane like Dudley, or uncle Vernon, or aunt Petunia, or even Mrs. Figg’s cats who should always be watched for signs of suspicious activity. She didn’t want to say the word real because with every day that passed her convictions were growing stronger that reality was nothing more than a highly sophisticated (if somewhat glitchy) program that was slowly but surely falling apart as maintenance had not been done in millennia. Besides that the people there hardly warranted attention anyway, usually there wasn’t a need to focus on who said what when, because the Dursleys usually ran on a loop of sorts.

She’d noticed the pattern since she was three and Lily was deemed responsible enough to begin some of her duties as an indentured servant because, “if a freak can talk like a dictionary at that age she can certainly clean a house and make herself useful”. Aunt Petunia had a spark of originality every once in a while and Dudley was slowly but surely learning to communicate with more than five words at a time, but uncle Vernon seemed to be stuck on the thought of sending her to the orphanage and stopping the freaky business. (Not that Lily ever learned specifically what the freaky business was, as far as she could figure it out it had partly to do with her talking and the other part had to do with the glitches.)
Really, there was no point in paying attention.

“We were discussing sending you to a new school.” Doctor Mitchell summarized quite briefly, a fact most appreciated by Lily.

“Oh,” Lily said although she didn’t really know what was wrong with the last one. Perhaps they’d caught on that she knew that the experiment was really an experiment and was being moved so as not to disturb the results, “Okie dokie, I have no problem with that.”

She must have missed something fairly important because things seemed even more tense and awkward in the room than before. She didn’t remember telling Doctor Mitchell anything that horrendous, after all she was an indentured servant, it wasn’t like it was a big secret or anything. If it hadn’t been for Skinner’s box and the gong of death she’d still be living in the servant’s quarters with the spiders and the flickering light bulb and she was the one who still did most of the chores so clearly she still hadn’t worked off her debt.

“… So are we done here then?” She asked when she felt the silence had extended itself to a ridiculous amount.

She wouldn’t know for quite some time that this meeting would be somehow more significant than the others. Lily wasn’t moved to a new school, uncle Vernon had flat out refused, not that Lily really minded either way. She wasn’t really interested in school and she didn’t think that a gifted one would be that much better than a regular one. Besides if Wizard Lenin was right then the society of glitch manipulators would come for her on her eleventh birthday anyway to regale her with stories of unicorns and leprechauns. (For being so against some of the realities of his own culture Wizard Lenin had taken that thought rather personally.)

For the following months Lily went to school, was babysat by Mrs. Figg, visited uncle Death, attended therapy with Doctor Mitchell, and slowly but surely increased her collection of books by raiding neighborhood garage sales.

The only real difference was the intensity with which Doctor Mitchell looked at her and asked her questions. He’d ask the usual stuff about school and her feelings about life in general but some new ones would also occur. Very specific questions, “That bruise on your arm, Ellie, do you remember where you got it?”

According to aunt Petunia in the car rides over she was never ever supposed to tell when the bruises had been caused by uncle Vernon. She’d never said anything about the bruises caused by Dudley though and most of the bruises were caused by Dudley.

At school Dudley was perfecting his art of warfare by enlisting recruits to form an angry mob like structure and chase after the crazy freak with sticks. Unfortunately for Dudley he was doing this at the same time that he was cloning himself into a miniature uncle Vernon. Round Dudley had become even rounder and it was quite easy to wait him out if she climbed on the roofs of play structures. Sometimes though she’d be distracted talking to Wizard Lenin or planning her next means of transportation to reach uncle Death and he’d sneak up on her and get a few well place shoves in.

Things didn’t really present themselves until school was out and Lily was back to her full time job of working in the yard for the summer pulling weeds and watering plants under the watchful eye of the overseer aunt Petunia.

It occurred seemingly at random, one moment Lily was in Dudley’s second bedroom which she had claimed for herself flipping through a book on psychology that might prove useful in the future the next aunt Petunia was opening the door and screaming at her.
“What did you tell him?!”

Lily blinked looking up from the text into aunt Petunia’s tight and very frightened looking face, she wondered if she had missed some context to go along with that sentence because at the moment she was grasping for names. The Dursleys didn’t like non responses or questions though so she’d have to come up with something, maybe it was some sort of generic him, like what did she tell all of mankind, but she usually didn’t talk to humanity as a general mass so she came up with something on the spot, “I tell him that I am Eleanor daughter of James destroyer of worlds?”

Aunt Petunia looked too upset to even be phased by that comment, “The psychologist you little brat, what lies have you been spouting to that psychologist?”

There was something about Doctor Mitchell that terrified aunt Petunia. Almost the same way that Wizard Lenin instinctively twitched at the thought of psychology in general aunt Petunia always seemed harsher and a little more afraid when Doctor Mitchell came up. Aunt Petunia had been twitchy in the hospital after finding Lily passed out in the cupboard almost dead, she’d been terrified after Lily had visited uncle Death at Mrs. Figg’s, but the psychologist was worse than any of that to her for some reason.

She was always giving Lily instructions about the psychologist, every single time she had a meeting without fail, the same rules over and over again of what not to mention and a few more added in just to be safe. Her knuckles would become white on the wheel and she wouldn’t even look at Lily as she said these things.

Lily didn’t lie as a general rule occasionally she would omit certain truths but she wouldn’t directly lie about anything. Doctor Mitchell wasn’t really an exception, sure there was a lot she left out, but she didn’t make up the things she told him either.

“I wouldn’t be telling your aunt that if I were you, that’s not exactly what she wants to hear.”

Wizard Lenin interjected with sagely advice, “You see, when your aunt says lie here what she really means is what true facts have you told him about the situation. Like, for example, the fact that until a few months ago you were routinely locked in a cupboard and starved like a dog.”

Wizard Lenin probably had a point, she’d learned over the past couple of months that Wizard Lenin was very good at telling what people were thinking, much better than Ellie was. It was a sort of hobby of his, look at a person and see what they think what they’ll do, to distract from the ever growing boredom of being stuck in her head without access to his precious revolutionary movement. She’d eventually visit his comrades but she just wouldn’t be doing it at the age of five, she’d wait at least until she was the respectable age of eight to wander through the wizarding ghettos of London.

“So,” Lily thought to Wizard Lenin still looking wide eyed at her aunt, “What should I tell her?”

“Well, that’s a bit of a thorny question Lily.” Wizard Lenin said and once again she got the distinct feeling that this was a bit like watching a really boring television show for him where he knew exactly what everyone was going to say and when except for Lily herself, “You see, Petunia Dursley realizes now that she’s in a bit of a pickle. Something you told that psychologist, probably the meeting with your family and uncle Vernon’s comments about your unnaturalness, tipped him off to the fact that this may not be the most nurturing of environments. Combine that with the fact that a five year old has planned and attempted suicide multiple times and he’s piecing together a picture of a very dysfunctional family. After finding bruises multiple weeks in a row, some quite nasty, that you report are from your fat cousin and the fact that your aunt and uncle seem to be doing everything in their power to keep you from being recognized as gifted, he probably felt he had justification to call in someone to inspect the situation more thoroughly. Now, I don’t know the specifics as it’s been fifty years since I’ve had to pay attention to muggle nonsense like this, but I’m fairly certain that if they
find enough evidence they’ll have you sent somewhere else and possibly Dudley as well."

Somehow Lily didn’t think that Wizard Lenin wanted her spouting all of that directly to aunt Petunia, it didn’t really seem like a good response anyway, far too long and insulting to the Dursleys.

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“It means Lily, that you can say whatever the hell you want right now, because no matter what it is aunt Petunia can’t lock you in a cupboard to starve or have you beaten within an inch of your life if someone is coming to check your living conditions.”

He sounded a bit exasperated by the end there, almost disappointed as if he had hoped she would pay attention to that giant rambling thing he had just said, Wizard Lenin was interesting and she did spend most of her time talking to him about things like psychology, politics, communism, glitches, all the important things in life but sometimes he wanted more. She also got the feeling that he was somewhat ashamed that he spent time talking to her, that he looked forward to talking to her and her responses, as if it was a slight to his ego that he should descend to this.

“Well, I didn’t really lie but I did omit a few minor details.” Lily said to her aunt after the long silence. Aunt Petunia stood there, looking like all her fears had been realized, and slammed the door in Lily’s face.

“You’re welcome?” Lily called after her.

Later that day, walking down the stairs in the morning, she passed by the kitchen and heard aunt Petunia and uncle Vernon’s harsh whispering voices.

“…Dear god, Vernon they’re sending social services, social services do you know what that means?”

“We keep a roof over her head don’t we, we don’t beat her, she gets fed, we do everything fine Pet they can’t do nothing.”

“Oh, I don’t know Vernon, if it wasn’t for those damn people my sister… We should never have taken her in, even if they made us, we should never have done it. She doesn’t belong here.”

They didn’t say anything for a moment either of them, Lily stalled outside the room hardly daring to breathe listening to the words, they who were they, they sounded a bit like a conspiracy a bit like Big Brother. She wondered if they were trying to do surveillance on Wizard Lenin, a she was the only revolutionary figure who could possibly interest the dreaded they, they somehow must know that he’d been hiding in her brain for the past four years.

“Lily, don’t be an idiot.” Was Wizard Lenin’s harsh response, “Believe me when I say there is no Big Brother, I would know. Now stop jabbering and pay attention, this could be important for us.”

“You mean for me, right?” Lily corrected for him, sure Wizard Lenin lived in her head but he was kind of removed from the situation.

“Don’t ask stupid questions.”

“We’ll just be careful.” Aunt Petunia said carefully, “It will only be for a few hours, give her instructions, treat her like… Pretend she’s Dudley for a few hours and not one of them, and then it will be over and they’ll never come back.”

Wait so Lily was a part of the they she didn’t remember being inducted into the secret police, she was
beginning to have the feeling that aunt Petunia and uncle Vernon didn’t know what they were
talking about and were being overly dramatic to make up for their lack of understanding.

“*Probably a fair assessment given your relatives.*” Wizard Lenin agreed with her but in a distracted
tone, he was trying to figure out who the *they* was also, he seemed to have pieced it together but his
thoughts were clouded so she couldn’t make out what it was supposed to be. The only thing she
managed to catch was a mob of people in ridiculously expensive and colorful bath robes waving
around very short sticks that made light appear.

“We should get her out of that quack’s office, he’s doing no one good.” Uncle Vernon said which
caused a sigh from aunt Petunia.

“No, Vernon, we can’t… Maybe in a little bit, she hasn’t done anything for a while so maybe
she’s…”

Here Lily could piece together the context they were probably talking about her visiting uncle Death,
which had been occurring every Sunday like usual she’d just gotten a little better at her methods.
After much researching and thinking she’d discovered that mixing certain chemicals in a closed room
with no air coming in and out was a very easy way to get things done and that the attic worked
excellently. No one missed some of the cleaning supplies under the sink, and if they did they hadn’t
wondered about it, and so things had been working perfectly for months. Sometimes she spiced
things up a little with a good old fashioned hanging and sometimes suffocation with a plastic bag
over her head but she liked the chemical version the best so far.

It was at this point she decided that this was all the interesting things uncle Vernon and aunt Petunia
had to say so she waltzed into the kitchen and made her presence known for the round of daily tasks.
One task aunt Petunia later took on herself was cleaning out the cupboard so that it appeared that no
one had ever lived there.

She also purchased Lily new clothes including dresses which she’d never actually worn before and
stuffed them into Lily’s drawers. All in all she was a flurry of activity so that by the time the social
worker arrived Lily’s room looked like that of a second Dudley.

“No,” aunt Petunia told her and Dudley, “When the nice lady from the government comes I want
you both to smile and Dudley remember to say nice things to Ellie and Ellie… Don’t talk. And smile,
everyone.”

So Lily cheerfully smiled for an hour and didn’t say anything except when prompted by aunt Petunia
while Dudley glumly sat in front of the television since he didn’t like being told what to do even if it
was for a few hours. The social worker came, looked around, looked at some of the fading bruises
on Lily’s arms with a critical eye, and then left.

Lily’s conclusion after the whole affair was, “Well, I think we passed inspection folks.”

At least, Lily thought that at the time, Wizard Lenin did too. It’d been a grand show of acting on all
the players parts but Big Brother apparently disagreed.

It was the middle of the night the next day, Ellie had been sleeping and conversing with Wizard
Lenin. Her mind turned out to be very dynamic, it wasn’t always a scary library, today it was a beach
that could be seen in any tropical post card. She and Lenin were on the sand looking at the sunset
Wizard Lenin in a ridiculous amount of black and red clothing considering the weather and Lily in
her normal Dudley-esq attire. Wizard Lenin must have been feeling bored or nostalgic or both
because he was telling her about his life before he became a feared revolutionary.
“You know, I had a friend like you when I was very young.” He said distantly his blue eyes not looking at her but reflecting the red light in the horizon, “She even had your hair.”

“I thought you didn’t have friends.” Lily interjected at this point because Wizard Lenin had seemed to exude a feeling of lone-wolfishness to her all the time.

“You’re right, allow me to correct that statement, she was my only friend.” Wizard Lenin said in that same tone, not seeming offended at all, which was a record for their conversations, “Very intelligent and incredibly awkward, could barely get through a conversation, but she was the only person I ever met who I came close to liking.”

Lily felt she was a great conversationalist, just not with people on the physical plane, she could only really hold conversations with sentient beings and she didn’t know too many of those.

“Huh, interesting, what happened?”

Here Wizard Lenin did turn towards her looking somewhat exasperated but unsurprised as if he was used to this feeling, “What do you mean, what happened? Did something have to happen?”

“Well, she’s not here is she? Unless she’s leading the great revolutionary movement in your stead, but wouldn’t that offend you or something, I mean it is your revolution.” Lily pointed out imagining this mystery friend of Wizard Lenin who had Lily’s hair and couldn’t hold conversations.

“If you must know she grew up became very boring and married a near sighted idiot with terrible hair.” Wizard Lenin said rather shortly before returning his attention to the sunset.

Lily thought about that for a moment, “So… You’re saying I’m going to grow up and become boring and marry a near sighted idiot with terrible hair… That really doesn’t sound like me.”

“No, that’s not what I’m saying Lily. Some day, Lily, I hope that you’ll learn how to talk to people without misinterpreting their words so utterly that it no longer resembles what they said in the first place but I’ve never been said to be an optimist.”

“You’re a communist revolutionary, Lenin, that’s pretty optimistic.”

“Ah, of course, and when did I ever say I was a communist?”

She stared at him blankly, of course he’d never said it directly but it was always heavily implied, besides he wore communist clothing every time she saw him so he must be a communist.

It was at this point that the noises started happening causing both of them to look up. Lily had learned fairly early on that certain events were noticeable even on the inside of her head, they usually couldn’t be subtle, but sometimes she could tell what was going on. It was the middle of the night though so she wasn’t sure what it could be.

Wizard Lenin’s eyes narrowed as well, “You’d best be going, for all we know Dudders has finally decided to smother you in your sleep.”

She couldn’t really see Dudley being capable of that but she left anyway opening her eyes to see a very strangely dressed man in a black thin bathrobe with a stick aimed at her face. She’d heard about pedophiles, mostly from Wizard Lenin who was the source of all her real knowledge, but she hadn’t pictured them like this.

“What the hell?” She asked and the man took a step backwards his eyes widening in alarm.
He was middle aged and incredibly greasy, tall and thin, with a hooked nose and piercing black eyes. If Death looked like a crow that became a man then this was his mangy garbage eating cousin who lacked his magnificence.

“Severus Snape, you son of a bitch.” Was Wizard Lenin’s rather confusing assessment of the situation.

They stared at each other for a few moments and Lily decided it was time to state the obvious, “… So, hi, you’re in my room in the middle of the night, are you Big Brother by any chance because my friend Lenin doesn’t believe you really exist.”

“That is not Big Brother, Lily, it’s something worse.” Wizard Lenin said with a note of panic in his voice she’d never heard before, “Now Lily, listen to me very carefully, you’re going to stand up in a few seconds and as fast as you can tackle this man in the knees to throw him off balance. You’re then going to do everything within your power to take that stick from his hand, everything, you must not let him hold onto the stick.After that sprint past him and down the stairs and out of the house and we’ll discuss what to do from there.”

Lily tensed in the bed, whatever this was it was serious, the man didn’t seem to interested in chatting and he seemed to be getting his resolve back because the stick was once again raised to her eye level.

“Now, Lily.”

Lily jolted out of the bed and jumped into the man’s knees causing him to topple backwards onto the floor, that part of the plan went swimmingly, unfortunately as she tried to reach the stick he hit the back of her head with his other hand and things became rather dizzy after that. Distantly she thought she saw the stick in front of her, or several sticks, and the heard a mumbled “Obliterate” or “Obfuscate” but she couldn’t make it out.

She’d wake up several hours later with a pounding head ache and a raging Wizard Lenin in her head.

“What the hell?”

After that Wizard Lenin decided to play twenty questions but with facts from her life asking what she remembered and what she didn’t remember when it seemed everything was in order he appeared to give a sigh of relief.

“It appears you’re immune to more than just the killing curse but memory charms as well, probably because I’m so present, I’m sure it muddles up the arithmancy.”

“Memory charms?” She asked rubbing her head and getting up from the floor and wandering over to the window.

“Yes, that was a wizard, and it appears he was sent here to make sure you didn’t remember something.” He didn’t give a specific which probably meant he didn’t know so she didn’t press for details instead she wandered downstairs to find out what she was doing that day.

She’d find out what she was supposed to forget later that week when preparing to go to therapy. When she’d asked aunt Petunia to start driving aunt Petunia had just stared at her blankly then angrily and asked, “What nonsense are you talking about girl, and what are you doing out of the cupboard?”

According to aunt Petunia and uncle Vernon everything that year hadn’t happened. Lily hadn’t been caught visiting uncle Death, had never been taken to Doctor Mitchell’s, and most importantly had
never been given the second bedroom for lodgings. After a few sessions of the gong of death and Skinner’s house she remedied that small fact but it still left her feeling disturbed.

“So,” she said later to Wizard Lenin, “It’s like it never happened in the first place.”

“Well, that’s what obliviate does.” He paused for a moment and then added, “You know, Lily, you would know a lot more of what wizards are capable of if you visited Diagon Alley.”

“Can’t you just tell me that?”

“Well, I can tell you some, like I can tell you that man’s name but unfortunately I can’t tell you who he works for unless we get to Diagon Alley.”

“I assumed he worked for Big Brother.”

“If you want to learn anything you’re going to have to go to Diagon Alley.”

And so a few weeks later when her relatives were suitably distracted Lily found herself in Diagon Alley attempting to see Big Brother’s true face for herself.
As far back as Lily could remember she had never celebrated her birthday, for a while she hadn’t been exactly sure when it was, it had only been pieced together after a few trips to the doctor’s office as well as her registration for school. It was nothing like Dudley’s birthdays. You’d think those would be a national celebration, what with the cake and the mound of presents and the few small child friends who were invited over while Lily was told to entertain herself somewhere far away from the party.

That particular year though the Dursleys were distracted enough on Lily’s birthday to allow her to do something interesting instead.

Whoever erased the Dursleys memories hadn’t done the best job, probably because he hadn’t known what he was looking for. Wizard Lenin, and later Death, both theorized that he had most likely been summoned because of the interference of social services. His orders were probably to erase anything that had to do with that situation, which meant Lily’s appointments with Doctor Mitchell, her near death experiences, and the birth of Skinner’s House. So it was up to the Dursleys to erase what needed to be erased so some things like Lily’s new bedroom vanished like it never happened but other things like the suggestion that some child was gifted and should be put in a gifted program were not.

They just thought the gifted child was Dudley.

Remarkably soon after the greasy agent’s visit they were taking Dudley to visit schools and having him take standardized tests to see where he might be placed. Each time he failed one of these tests they raged for about a day, saying how the schools didn’t know what they were talking about, and took Dudley out to ice cream. She wasn’t sure Dudley was entirely aware of what was happening, but he knew that if he took the tests he would get ice cream, so he was as of yet a willing participant.

On July 31st 1986 Dudley received back another letter of denial from yet another program. The first few times this had erupted in mild arguments and then self-assurances that the brilliant Dudley was simply too brilliant for that school to appreciate and they would move onto the next one. However this particular letter was from the sixth gifted program and they were starting to reach the rope’s end.

“It’s all these intellectuals I tell you, don’t appreciate real intelligence when they see it, think the world’s based on book learning. If they wanted book learning they’d want the girl, wouldn’t they?” Uncle Vernon asked sharply as if it was beyond comprehension that any gifted program would ever want Lily, as he walked around the house getting ready for work with more vigor than usual, rejection letters usually did manage to raise his blood pressure.

Lily was watching all this from a seated position on the stairs, breakfast having been finished and not yet told to get out of sight she was taking advantage of this rare opportunity simply to watch the comings and goings of the resident Dursleys. She’d decided to observe their patterns and keep her psychologist skills up to date so as to impress Doctor Mitchell when she got around to visiting him again. It was all detailed in a notebook, the daily activities of uncle Vernon, aunt Petunia, and even Dudders and this was on its way to being logged as well.

(Wizard Lenin had been rather upset with her when she decided to continue therapy with Doctor
Mitchell but he was the only adult who lived in her own dimension who she actually liked and their sessions had been very educational so she wasn’t about to leave him in the dust just because Big Brother had wiped his memory of her.)

“Uncle Vernon: Blood pressure steadily rising, a three on the purple scale of rage, and about to head to work but too distracted by his own pacing to notice. Possible side effects from memory wipes by the secret glitch manipulating government: irrationality and delusions.” She finished with flourish in the black pen that she had upgraded to at Wizard Lenin’s insistence, he really hated crayon.

The aunt Petunia entry was blank as of yet but that would soon be remedied by aunt Petunia’s almost scheduled response to uncle Vernon’s temper.

“Maybe we should just wait a few years Vernon, until Dudley’s done with primary, then we can try again and they’ll see…” Aunt Petunia started only to be cut off by her husband who was stepping steadily up the purple scale by the minute, although he was still on the low end, it was nowhere near some of the purple rage Lily could induce at times.

“They’re all so near sighted they couldn’t see their own hands if they stuck them in front of their faces, a waste of time Pet, complete waste of time! In my day we didn’t have any of this gifted nonsense, you stuck it out with the regular crowd.” Uncle Vernon said just as he was about to leave the door, before turning back around and saying, “These big-wig university egg heads wouldn’t know real intelligence if it hit them in the face.”

And with those final parting words Vernon Dursley was off to Grunnings to tell tales of glorious hardware that would forever change the lives of its customers leaving aunt Petunia standing in the hallway with Lily sitting behind her on the stairs with her notebook of observations and Dudley off in the living room watching cartoons.

Aunt Petunia must have been upset as well, in her usual tight-lipped grim fashion, because Dudley was yanked away from the television that morning so that the pair of them could go visit the school. Mrs. Figg was then called, and after being assured that she could look after Lily, the remaining Dursleys were off.

That was how Lily wound up in the house by herself on her birthday, or mostly by herself, the promise of Mrs. Figg coming over to pick Lily up in ten or so minutes was hardly an authority figure.

She’d been set on visiting Diagon Alley for a few weeks now, ever since they had tried to reset her memories, and it seemed like she wouldn’t get much better of an opportunity than this one. Besides, if she really wanted to impress Doctor Mitchell she probably needed a section on the glitch manipulators as well, who knew how they thought.

Finding the commuter rail from Surrey had been simple enough, and confusing the ticket machine and collector with a few well-placed glitches was child’s play. It was on the train to London that Wizard Lenin started dispensing instructions.

“You can’t go as Eleanor Potter, if they’re sending wizards to wipe your memory because of social services they will certainly send someone if they find you visiting Diagon Alley. Someone wants you living with these muggles very desperately, to the point of interfering with the muggle government, and it appears they aren’t above the questionable use of oblivate either.”

As far as Lily was concerned she already wasn’t Elliot Potter, Elliot Potter was more of a title than an actual name, something she was called sometimes by some people who didn’t know her very well.

“No, that’s not what I mean. Magical Britain is remarkably small and if I’m correct about your
publicity then I imagine you are quite well known. It doesn’t help that you look like a thinner, poorer, and curlier haired version of your mother as a little girl so even if you weren’t particularly famous you’d be known on sight. Anyone could look at you right now and could most likely guess that you are Eleanor Potter.”

So when they’d reached London Lily had taken matters into her own hands by visiting a pharmacy and buying a box of cheap black hair dye.

“*You look like white trash.*” Was Wizard Lenin’s final conclusion after looking in the mirror and seeing the black-hair that just screamed of the use of hair dye. That combined with the frayed blue sweater and the faded blue shorts did manage to accent his point but Lily personally didn’t think that hair color made that much of a difference.

“*You look like you just walked out of your mobile home which is filled with your seven brothers and sisters all of whom have hyphenated names.*” He almost seemed disgusted by it, and in her mind she caught what looked like one of Wizard Lenin’s memories of a really ugly man with a few teeth missing lisping racial slurs at him like there was no tomorrow.

“Well, I don’t look like Eleanor Potter anymore, right?”

Wizard Lenin, in spite of the fact that her father apparently had curly black hair, was forced to agree that at this point no one would mistake her for a Potter.

A little after that, a trip through a pretty grimy looking pub called the Leaky Cauldron, and a trip through a back alley she found herself in the middle of magical Britain’s most popular shopping district which looked like a really boring version of a mall.

“Is this it?”

Around her people were milling here and there all dressed in extra fancy bathrobes and pointy hats, carrying shopping bags and conversing with one another all looking like a renaissance fair gone terribly terribly wrong. She’d expected something, well more, these people were willfully taking advantage of the destruction of the universe surely they’d be cooler than pointy hats.

She opened the notebook of observations and started a new section under glitch manipulators. “Act disturbingly normal doing errands such as shopping; only real difference is the style, which looks like they just walked out of a comic convention or a renaissance faire, all in all don’t seem like a society taking advantage of one of the side effects of Ragnarök.”

“You’ll find that humans are pretty well human wherever you are. There’s no such thing as the übermensch, at least not for them. Now stop gawking, you look like a lunatic talking to yourself in the street.”

“I thought I looked like white trash.” Lily responded somewhat confused.

“Oh, believe me Lily, you look like that too. Now get walking.”

Lily started walking forward at Wizard Lenin’s instructions towards the Goblin bank which Wizard Lenin wanted to visit first for funding to buy books and other necessary materials. According to him the Potters had been extremely wealthy and as their only heir she should have at least some access to the account even if it was limited. “*Goblins*,” Wizard Lenin explained, “generally tend to have fewer scruples when it comes to things like the age of a client, or moral obligation to see their clients make responsible decisions, so they are unlikely to bat an eye at the six year old head of the family wishing to withdraw funds as a wizard might.”
As she passed through the streets a few people met the sight of her with raised eyebrows but at the look of determination on her face they all went back to their own lives. She may have been a six year old walking alone through Diagon Alley but she was a six year old on a mission; that was much different.

“I’m the head of the family?” Lily asked Lenin to which she heard a vague confirmation.

“Unless you have a secret older brother I’m unaware of then yes, you are the head of the noble and ancient house of Potter, and thus the head of their bank accounts as well. Usually a magical guardian would be appointed to take care of funding until you reached majority but considering the fact that you were dumped with the Dursleys it doesn’t look like anyone is caring for your wellbeing. Again, even if someone has the key there should be a trust fund available to you simply by use of your blood.”

It was surprising, how much Wizard Lenin knew about her parents, she’d never asked him about them because aside from the car crash she hadn’t considered the three of them to be that connected. The more she talked to him though the more it seemed like he really knew them, had researched them, and had strategically thought out their deaths.

She’d never really known her parents, there had been a time before she’d known Death and Wizard Lenin that she’d wondered what having parents would be like, she’d sometimes dreamed about two people looking at her the way that uncle Vernon and aunt Petunia looked at Dudley. That was a long time ago though, she’d long since given up sentiments like that.

She’d get by just fine without them, she always had, and in some ways it didn’t matter that Wizard Lenin had casually slaughtered them in a pick-up truck. She could feel Wizard Lenin bristling in her head, wanting to interrupt that it wasn’t a pick-up truck but instead green lasers of death, but just because she was visiting Diagon Alley and doing him a huge favor didn’t mean she had to listen to every word he said. Besides green death lasers were ridiculous.

“Green death lasers is not the technical term.” He grumbled in her head as they walked through the marble doors to the bank.

It was a very fancy bank, fancier than any place she’d ever been, marble was everywhere and gold chandeliers were hanging from the ceiling. Behind the teller’s windows sat grumpy looking shriveled men the height of munchkins in the Wizard of Oz, she supposed those must be the goblins, and by the look of their clothing and glasses they were quite well off.

Putting on her best impression of Wizard Lenin on a mission, namely that of a man who was not to be interrupted or questioned for fear of death, she walked to the nearest teller. She was about to tell him that her name was Eleanor Potter and she was here for her gold but before she could start the goblin took one look at her and paled slightly, his narrow black eyes growing wide, and he left the window.

“Uh…Hey? I want service?” She asked after the empty window.

“It’s official, you look too poor, inbred, and ignorant even for the goblins. I never thought I’d see the day they’d deny a customer but here it is.”

She got the feeling that Wizard Lenin didn’t really believe the words he was saying either but they were still standing at an empty window waiting for the goblin to come back. Before Lily could shout for some attention she saw the goblin returning with an even more official looking goblin following behind.
“They’re sending the manager?” Wizard Lenin began thinking very rapidly giving Lily a vague headache images began cycling rapidly most of them featuring the crazy old man from the wardrobe burning incident. Whoever that guy was Wizard Lenin had some serious unresolved issues with him, maybe Wizard Lenin needed to chat with Doctor Mitchell, he was clearly harboring some intense feelings.

“I do not need to see your pathetic psychologist!” Wizard Lenin responded harshly which probably meant he really did need to see her pathetic psychologist he just didn’t want to talk about it. Before they could get into an in depth discussion about Wizard Lenin’s feelings they were interrupted by the pair of goblins who had returned to the window.

“Miss Riddle, it has been some time.” The goblin manager said looking her straight in the eyes with a rather flat expression as if he wasn’t particularly thrilled to see her, “If you’d follow me we’ll discuss the status of your current accounts.”

“Riddle?” Lily asked Wizard Lenin for clarification, “Isn’t that what uncle Death calls you?” At the same time though Wizard Lenin was exclaiming in her head, “Riddle? Surely they don’t mean…”

“Ah, yeah.” Lily blankly followed after the goblin pair into a back room feeling very confused especially since Wizard Lenin was refusing to come up with a reasonable explanation leaving Lily hopelessly in the dark. Maybe they mistook her for Wizard Lenin, he was in her head after all, and she had a feeling that he was one of those really important people you didn’t overlook just because they were stuck in someone else’s brain.

She was taken to a back room that was rather plain when compared to the rest of the bank, there was a table and four chairs, but other than that there wasn’t much there. After taking their seats at the table the goblins stared at her with an intensity that no one besides Wizard Lenin and sometimes Death ever did, seeing that sort of expression on the physical plane was more than a bit bizarre. She was very tempted to write it down under Goblins in her notebook but she felt like it would be a bad idea to write ideas like that down while she was still the same room as them.

“So… moneys, you say I have moneys to discuss?” She asked twiddling her thumbs and trying not to fidget under the staring.

Wizard Lenin must have been more than a little disturbed as well as he didn’t even attempt to correct her grammar or her posture.

“Yes,” The head goblin said motioning to the other to bring out a portfolio with the name Lily Riddle written in very fancy writing on the top, “In the past decades since you’ve visited our fine establishment your… investments have more than tripled. As requested at the investigations of certain law officials and other wizards all have been turned away and your accounts have remained untouched.”

Lily began flipping through the folder, she didn’t know how much a galleon was worth but given Wizard Lenin’s unusual blankness of thought as if being overwhelmed by the sheer amount of money she was guessing the big numbers listed on the page meant a lot. “That is… most excellent.” Lily said in her most authoritative tone, the tone of a person who had lots and lots of money.

“This might be more than what’s in the Potter vaults…” Wizard Lenin commented in a tone that was almost horrified.

“Yes, quite.” The lead goblin said, “Would you like to make any withdrawals today, Miss Riddle.”
She didn’t need Wizard Lenin to feed her the answer to that one, “Yes, yes I would.”

Two bumpy cart rides, an excellent view of a chained dragon, a dungeon crawl, and a room filled with gold coins later Lily was walking out of the bank with a smile and what Wizard Lenin had deemed as an acceptable amount of cash to buy the books, supplies, and perhaps even information they would need.

Lily Riddle, apparently, didn’t have a magical guardian keeping her key for her so Lily had no problem making withdrawals.

Lily was celebrating the new found wealth with ice cream that was in a flavor she had never heard of before, wizards turned out to be rather creative when it came to their ice cream flavors. It was really turning out to be one of the best days ever. Who knew that Wizard Lenin’s demands would turn out to be so useful? Of course then Wizard Lenin had to do his best to ruin the moment.

“We may pay dearly for this later.” Wizard Lenin observed obviously not feeling the joy of ice cream given the sheer amount of doom that could be heard in his tone.

“Pay for what?”

Wizard Lenin didn’t answer, at least not directly, but continued on with whatever he was thinking about, “One does not steal from Lily Riddle. It simply isn’t done.”

Lily didn’t think it was stealing, the goblins had practically thrown the money at her after all, and besides she thought Lily Riddle was Wizard Lenin’s secret feminine alter ego so wouldn’t that be like stealing from himself? Not that she could ever see Wizard Lenin in drag, she had the feeling the look of utter death and destruction on his face would ruin any attempt at feminine charm.

“No relation, I assume, considering I’ve never met her in person it’s difficult to tell. However her reputation is rather infamous.” Wizard Lenin clarified not even touching on the drag comment, at this point in their relationship there were some things that Lily said that he would just pretend he never heard so as not to deal with it.

It was really weird hearing Wizard Lenin talk so highly about another person, she’d never heard that kind of tone from him before like this was someone he was actually forced to respect. The fact that there existed a person who earned Wizard Lenin’s respect was raising red flags in Lily’s head.

“Wow, that’s kind of neat.” Lily responded as she continued to eat ice cream. If she’d stolen from Wizard Lenin she was fairly certain she’d be vaporized within the hour by something much worse than green death lasers so she was guessing this mysterious Lily Riddle was sleeping on the job or dead.

“Try terrifying and you’ll be closer to the mark. Lily Riddle is Wizarding Britain’s only drug lord not because she hasn’t had competition over the years but because she is absolutely ruthless and demands a complete monopoly over the market. She appeared in the late 1930’s and has owned more than half of the black market ever since, the only reason she isn’t openly referred to as a dark lord is because she appears to have no interest in politics and is most likely a mudblood herself.”

Lily thought about that for a moment, the late 1930’s was a while ago, Lily wasn’t exactly an expert on the aging process but she thought she’d assume that Lily Riddle would look way older than her by 1986 so clearly the goblins were either way near sighted or there was something funky going on here.

Maybe Wizard Lenin had the wrong idea, after all the Dursleys had categorized Lily as being part of
the mysterious they, and big brother had sent an agent to her house to erase the memories of therapy and social services, what if this Lily Riddle was secretly her alter ego and not Wizard Lenin’s and that was why the they and the Dursleys kept such a close eye on her because she was a secret drug lord who would kill them all in their sleep if they dared move against her.

“No, I really doubt that’s the case.” Wizard Lenin said along with some muttered thoughts on level of competency and that not even Lily could reach that level of weirdness as to be a secret drug lord.

“Well, the goblins didn’t seem to have a problem with it, and you said it was impossible to steal from them so if they seem so sure I’m Lily Riddle then I probably am Lily Riddle.”

She could hear him agreeing that it was really weird that they had unquestioningly let her have access to the bank account, even after a standard blood test as well, but he was also incredibly certain that she was not the Lily Riddle they were thinking of.

“I said it was nearly impossible, not impossible. It could be done, it would just be incredibly inconvenient to bother with it. I might be a distant relative which could show up in the blood test and allow you access. She also was known to appear in the guise of a little or an adolescent young girl so you would have the right look to you.” Wizard Lenin mused seeming a little calmer.

After a little debate they decided that if someone was watching Eleanor Potter’s accounts it might be safer and easier for the moment to steal from a bloodthirsty drug lord. “Besides”, Wizard Lenin continued, “Lily Riddle no doubt has some formidable connections in the magical underground that could lead to a solution to my current predicament.”

“You mean the freeloading in my brain and having no body of your own?”

“Yes, that.”

In spite of Lily’s discovery of her alter ego, the member of the dreaded they, who apparently sold heroin at bargain prices, once offered to take care of the little Grindlewald problem the government seemed to be having if they would pay her a slight fee of 10% of magical Britain’s GDP, and had blood thirsty vampires as her goons Wizard Lenin seemed to be in a very good mood. She supposed this was because for the first time in half a year he was actually getting his way and taking the first steps towards restoring both himself and the great revolution to its former glory.

This good mood dissipated with their first real stop of the day, the book store, where he and Lily read certain facts he didn’t like in some book called Rise and Fall of the Dark Arts.

According to the book some wizard named You Know Who, who Wizard Lenin said was really him since his true name of Lord Voldemort was a thing to be feared, had terrorized wizarding Britain with the use of terrorism (not even really guerilla warfare by the sound of their attacks) and sought to take over the government and turn it into something called a pureblood regime. Unfortunately for the great You Know Who his reign of terror ended rather abruptly when, after massacring the Potter family, he attempted to kill their infant daughter Eleanor Potter and was blown up in an explosion along with most of the house. It was later listed that the whereabouts of Eleanor Potter were unknown save that some guy called Albus Dumbledore assured the ministry that she was in a safe place.

Wizard Lenin was not pleased by any of this and was silently fuming in her head projecting the image of the old man in a very brightly colored bathrobe with dancing cats on it being lit on fire, there was something about that old man that just made Wizard Lenin want to hurt things. Not sure what to make of that Lily continued flipping through the chapter and picking up various details about the incident.
“Hey, I guess you weren’t lying about the car, but why did you try green death lasers instead?” Not that Lily was an expert on homicide but she did consider herself fairly knowledgeable in the ways to kill a person and she felt that there might be options more reliable not to mention less tacky than green death lasers.

“It’s only been five years and I have already been written off as if I am finished.” He finally said, she could practically hear him grinding his teeth in her head.

It must have been about the revolution, from the sound of the book it seemed like without his leadership and ability to terrify the masses into following his orders the movement had sort of fallen apart without him. According to the book aside from a few really crazy dark arts addicts (who sounded a bit like slightly rational crack heads) Wizard Lenin had no comrades left, unless Lily herself counted, but she had a feeling that Wizard Lenin wouldn’t really appreciate her support.

“Well you did kind of blow up, apparently they found your very crispy body next to my crib, so you can’t hold it against them. How were they supposed to know you’d started squatting in my brain?” Lily pointed out, at least that’s what she thought, she wasn’t sure if it was normal or not for dead or dying people to become brain tumors. If that was the norm then it wasn’t something that anyone ever mentioned to her, from what television and the Dursleys had taught her hearing voices in your head that told you to kill things was generally not a good thing.

“Lily, don’t talk.” Even though his tone was soft and lacked inflection she had the feeling that he’d do something very painful to her head if she disagreed so she decided to abandon the conversation while the going was good.

That pretty much ended their adventures in Diagon Alley for the day, after the Goblins, the books, and Wizard Lenin’s feelings of betrayal as his comrades abandoned both him and the cause it was already late afternoon. Not to mention the fact that if they tried to do anything more Wizard Lenin would probably revert back to his roots and attempt to blow up the square and paint it red. She kind of wanted to come back, even if it was just a tacky mall, and she wouldn’t be able to do that if it was smithereens.

Overall she considered the trip a moderate success, Wizard Lenin was less happy than when he started but Lily had a secret identity and mounds of cash to go with it, sure that secret identity may not actually be her and could be a very scary drug lord who’d slaughter Lily in her sleep when she discovered a six year old had been stealing her gold but that was pretty unlikely. There was also the small fact that Lily couldn’t die, so even if the drug lord tried she wouldn’t get anything out of it.

The day had been topped off by her arrival home before any of the Dursleys and telling a rather confused and agitated Mrs. Figg who was standing on the front door that she had been in the attic playing the entire time and she had no idea where the day went and that Mrs. Figg was supposed to be babysitting her. Mrs. Figg hadn’t looked sold on the idea but had nodded in a dazed fashion before strolling back to her house.

Later that night she’d even decided to visit uncle Death and tell him about all the adventures of the day. Wizard Lenin had been forced into coming along but refused to actually talk with Death, apparently he just wasn’t willing to deal with that at the moment, and instead was looting some of the empty shops in the station by hurling garbage cans through the windows. So it was to the sound of distant breaking glass and screams of rage that the conversation took place.

“Lily Riddle?” Death asked with a frown, “I would have heard of her if she had existed in my dimension. I’m afraid I don’t know anything about her.” Death paused as if to think over the new information, “And your friend Lenin said she wasn’t a relative of his? A sister or… Well I suppose if she was an aunt she would have been slaughtered by the rest of the family when Tom Riddle
decided to clear his ancestral slate.”

“Yeah, no, he said he didn’t know whether they were related or not. He’s never met her in person, he just knows about her.” She shrugged then, she’d hoped Death might know something but it looked like he was in the dark as well.

In the distance Wizard Lenin could be seen with kerosene walking towards a ruined building with his trademark steely determination.

“Is he alright?” Death asked motioning to Wizard Lenin with a casual gloved hand. “He seems to be having some sort of a break down.”

Dressed in true revolutionary attire Wizard Lenin began methodically to slosh kerosene over the shop.

“He’s kind of upset.” Lily observed, “He didn’t exactly get good news, but I’m sure he’ll be fine once he starts researching how to get his body back.”

As the building burst into flames uncle Death turned to her with a haunted look in his eyes, “Are you so certain you want him to have a body back?”

“Sure, I mean, he can’t live in my head all the time can he?”

Death seemed so old then, and so very tired, he sighed as he looked out at Wizard Lenin, “If he can cause this much destruction in a world that doesn’t truly exist what will become of the real Kings Cross station?”

He didn’t ask like he expected her to answer, he just continued to look grimly ahead at the shadow of Wizard Lenin dancing against the flames. Lily found that she didn’t have any words for that moment just the image before her. Death said alarming things sometimes, she recognized that, but this was the first time that she felt she understood what he was saying.

On leaving she looked over at Wizard Lenin and in those pale blue eyes she could almost see the ruins of the train station reflected, “You okay?”

“I’m fine.”
Depression is Sad

In which Lily attempts to lift Wizard Lenin’s slowly but surely sinking spirits, Lily Riddle returns from what appeared to be an indefinite vacation, and Wizard Lenin manages to conquer his depression only to confront the seemingly overwhelming obstacles he faces.

It took Wizard Lenin a while to recover from the discovery of his abandonment and his supposed defeat in the wizard world. For a long time it seemed as if he was almost gone altogether, he stopped talking during the day, and at night in her dreams he would only have his back to her in some gray dreary place she had never seen with only a single window. There was only the constant headache, a sense of heaviness in her brain as he sat and festered. Whatever had been driving him to that point, whatever hope had been burning inside him, was gone and it left him feeling hollow and curiously old to Lily’s point of view.

Lily had never realized in that past year how much she had come to rely on the communication and understanding she shared Wizard Lenin. Before Death and then Wizard Lenin had entered her life there had only been Lily, Lily alone in the cupboard with her own spinning thoughts leading nowhere. It seemed looking back as if her life only really began with that meeting in the train station called purgatory. This is what they called friendship, she thought to herself, but she had only realized it when it was suddenly inexplicably gone.

Lily didn’t do things for others, she recognized this, mostly because she’d never had a need to and no one had ever asked but the sentiment remained. If there ever came a day that Dudley asked for her aid, even if it was for the smallest of tasks, she’d most likely tell him no. She’d realized at a very young age that people would never go out of their way to do things for her so clearly she wasn’t expected to go out and do things for them. The fact that they weren’t sentient, a conclusion that had solidified really only after meeting Death, only added to her reluctance to play along with their robotic schemes.

It was to Lily’s surprise then that she found herself setting out for the wizarding ghetto for him throughout August of 1986 without a single prompt from Wizard Lenin.

With black-dyed hair she’d prowl first through the streets of Diagon Alley and then through the seedier Knockturn Alley. She had no doubt some of his traitorous comrades were lurking about, perhaps as one of the men with yellow teeth on street corners, or even some of the women with more revealing robes in front of barred windows streaked with dirt, but she wasn’t there for them. The great revolution was Wizard Lenin’s business, that’s what she had decided when she first sought out to do Wizard Lenin a favor, her business then would be to find whatever it was he needed to get his body back.

At first, after talking to Death, she’d wondered if it was a good idea to get Wizard Lenin a body. He was rather destructive even on another plane and according to the history books he’d killed quite a lot of people before employing the green death lasers on her own family. However, Lily figured that that was all wizarding Britain’s problem and not hers. Besides, according to television friendship triumphed over all things thus friendship was labeled more important than national security.

She’d had the feeling, from images that occasionally stirred themselves from Wizard Lenin’s consciousness, and from a sharp moment of focus from the back of her mind when they entered the darker and somewhat dirtier looking alley that she was walking in the right direction of answers.

It was on her second trip through the alley, in a shop filled with mysterious looking artifacts, that
Wizard Lenin broker his silence and Lily officially took up the mantle of Lily Riddle.

“So, I don’t know if you’d happen to have any golem building materials on you.” Lily was asking the clerk, after a glance around the store she’d figured none of these items looked like whatever it was Wizard Lenin thought he needed. Not that she knew for her but she imagined immortality was a rather complicated business and involved a lot of supplies that weren’t severed limbs or eerie looking jewelry. Then again, what did she know? They were in the land of glitches after all, “Android would probably work as well but I have a feeling that’s not exactly what I want.”

Wizard Lenin didn’t like robots, or at least that’s what he’d said to uncle Death one day in the station when Death had been describing the century or so when artificial intelligence had been alarmingly close to sentience. The discomfort also could have been from the fact that uncle Death had casually said that androids were really the bigger and better version of what magic had been creating in portraits and various other talking artifacts. Despite being the leader of a revolution against this culture Wizard Lenin was always offended when either uncle Death or Lily pointed out discrepancies in the wizarding community; but she also was beginning to realize that Wizard Lenin would argue with Death on just about anything even if it meant he had to pick the wrong side of the fight.

Personally Lily was of the opinion that androids were smarter and shinier versions of golems but she was there to try and cheer Wizard Lenin up so she might as well play by at least some of his rules.

(In her head she heard Wizard Lenin rustling, annoyed at some comment she’d made but ignoring it because he felt too sleepy. At that thought she felt a somewhat familiar feeling of pins being stabbed through her forehead and she decided that it was best to stop that train of thought before the migraine of death happened.)

“A golem?” The store clerk asked with raised eyes taking in the sight of a dark haired green eyed girl staring back up at him.

“Or android, you know, something that can walk and talk and has a vague nervous system. A body really.” Lily shrugged wondering what people normally asked for in this type of shop and if they really only wanted ominous glowing jewelry that looked like it had been radioactive in some other life.

“Are you lost, little girl?” He asked finally looking a bit dumbfounded, probably more than he liked considering the impression he’d tried to give when she first walked through the door. She’d found that people in Knockturn Alley liked to pretend to be either dangerous or just plain sleazy, most of them had the sleaziness down pat but struggled when it came to the dangerous, Wizard Lenin looked more terrifying when having bored casual arguments with uncle Death and certainly he was scarier when depressed in her brain.

“No, I’m not lost.” She said probably looking as frustrated as she felt, she was beginning to feel why Wizard Lenin was so angry all the time, every single shop she had entered had asked her that questions even the non-sketchy shops had raised eyebrows when she’d tried to buy a pile of books.

“Listen, girl, this isn’t a place for kids you’d best get home to your parents.” The man said brushing her off with a single hand.

“They’re dead.”

“Oh… I’m… sorry for your loss.”

They stood there in awkward silence Lily staring flatly at the man and him staring right back. Why
was it, she wondered, that these wizards were always so greasy looking. They usually didn’t look so
greasy in Diagon Alley, sometimes looking too clean to be normal, but here everyone was covered in
some version of filth. She hoped Wizard Lenin, as deep in his depression as he was lingering,
appreciated the effort she was putting through for him.

Overall she was finding that she was very put out by the wizards. She’d expected more from them,
especially from the glitch manipulating seedy underbelly of society, but they all seemed like they’d
just escaped from the renaissance faire (some of them just were more authentic when it came to how
much people back then bathed than others). She wasn’t sure what she had expected from them she
only knew that she was sorely disappointed in all of it and felt she could (and probably was) doing
an all-around better job of manipulating the universe.

(In her head there was another irritated twitch from Wizard Lenin letting Lily guess that he probably
didn’t agree with her statement at all but being non-responsive she supposed she won the argument
by default.)

It might have been chance that brought the next customer in through the doorway, or perhaps it was
destiny, or perhaps it was that for the few hours that day there had been reportings of a black haired
poverty stricken looking girl wandering around shops wreaking with dark magic asking about the
transmutation of souls and the creation of golems.

Whatever it was someone walked through the door causing the little bell to ring and Lily to turn
around and stare at a very pale man who became even paler at the sight of her. They stood and stared
at each other for a while, the clerk and Lily at the new arrival, and the new arrival straight at Lily.

He reminded her vaguely of Wizard Lenin, in that he appeared genuinely dangerous but he lacked
some of Wizard Lenin’s basic intensity and focus. He looked like a watered down version of Wizard
Lenin who was just roaming around the streets doing his weekday evil magic shopping.

“So… I guess you’re back from vacation.” The man said rather awkwardly still looking somewhat
alarmed by the fact that Lily was standing right in front of him.

Lily hadn’t realized she had been on vacation, but it always seemed like the wizards and various
friends like the goblins, routinely mistook her for someone who wasn’t Eleanor Potter. Given the
general trend of things she’d guess that he was mistaking her for Lily Riddle, dreaded drug lord
representative of the they who was apparently violent enough to garner some respect from Wizard
Lenin. Still, it was best not to make casual assumptions, especially about drug lords so she decided to
respond in a normal manner.

“I didn’t know I had taken a vacation.” Last she checked doing business for a gloomy Wizard Lenin
wasn’t exactly a vacation but she supposed it was the closest thing to a vacation that she had ever
taken, “Was it nice?”

“…You look happy enough.” The man said after a bit of silence where he appeared to try to figure
out what she had just asked. “I assume you want to talk business?”

Business, Lily wasn’t sure what business she’d have to discuss. The last people, the goblins, who
had asked to discuss business with her had offered her oodles of cash by claiming she was the drug
lord Lily Riddle. So far she liked the current trend, “Yes, I would love to talk business.”

She walked up to the man and wrapped her arm in his smiling up at her with as much enthusiasm as
she could possibly muster. If it were possible he looked even more alarmed by the contact than he
had been at the mere sight of her. They then took off and began meandering down darker alley ways
that were filled with even seedier looking wizards each one staring first at Lily, then the man, and
then with a look of abject terror clearing the street before anyone could say a word.

Apparently she had pushed Wizard Lenin past the bounds of his depression because he was suddenly at the forefront of her mind again bringing agony in the form of headaches with him, “Lily, what the hell are you doing?”

“Oh, hey, you’re alive. Good, I was getting worried, when the voices in your head stop it’s kind of alarming.” She noted before continuing to answer his question, “Well, I noticed that you were barely in my head anymore so I decided I should probably get something that might make you feel better. You’re always complaining about not having a body and being stuck in my head so I thought it might be a good idea to start looking into some Lazarus opportunities for you.”

If the headache was any indication he was not satisfied by that answer, “I know that, it isn’t as if I’ve gone blind and deaf! I meant what are you doing now?!”

She looked at her guide and the streets thoughtfully, her guide twitched at the eye contact a nervous grin plastered on his face, “Getting more moneys.”

“Lily, that man whose arm you’re holding is a vampire. Not only is he a vampire he’s also one of Lily Riddle’s henchmen. If he finds out that you’re not Lily Riddle, and believe me Lily you are not Lily Riddle, then he will cut us both into pieces and feed us to the dogs.” He sounded pretty serious about all that, even giving her the lovely mental image of someone’s cut up remains left on the street and eaten by strays. It was rather realistic, it really made her wonder if he had done that sort of thing before.

“We don’t know I’m not Lily Riddle, they did a blood test at the bank, and remember I went again the other day and they still bought it.” She reminded Wizard Lenin.

“If you’re really Lily Riddle then I will have no choice to believe your ridiculous theory about magic being a side effect of the end of the world.”

“But that one is true.” Lily pointed out, not that anyone believed her, even uncle Death who tended to be a bit more compassionate and open minded than Wizard Lenin had shut that theory down when he first heard it.

“Whatever, the point is Lily, that you are six years old can barely talk to people and are now going to attempt to impersonate one of the most ruthless magical users in history. This is a terrible idea.”

The most ruthless, she’d always thought it’d be Wizard Lenin who’d be the most ruthless, or maybe one of those other people she’d read about in her recently purchased glitch books like Grindlewald, Dumbledore, or Baba Yaga.

“When they first sent the aurors to arrest her in 1938 she took one look at them and told her gang of vampire thugs that she was too tired to cast the killing curse that many times and they could just eat them raw.”

Lily thought about that statement for a few moments, “That sounds efficient.”

From the feeling in her head she was getting the impression that Wizard Lenin thought she had entirely missed the point of what he was trying to say. Normally he would give up then, especially with his recent bout of lethargy, but to her surprise he gave it one more attempt, “Lily, while I may not always appreciate the situation of me being trapped inside your head I do appreciate the fact that there is a head for me to be trapped in.”

She thought he was overacting especially in light of her apparent immunity to death.
“Immunity to death is not immunity to pain, believe me I’m quite an expert in both subjects, and Lily you’ve never tried coming back after being digested and I’d rather not push the limits of how far your affliction actually extends.”

It was too late though, she and her guide had stopped in front of a slightly cleaner looking building with a great red sign that read, “Riddle Inc: Abandon Hope All Ye Who Enter Here Or Just Leave it At the Door For Later.”

“Well here we are, the main office.” The apparent vampire said with that same nervous grin before quickly opening the door and ushering Lily inside.

All Lily really had to say about the place was that she liked it, she liked it quite a bit, it had everything. There were Star Wars posters on the walls, tacky lava lamps, a few glowing jewelry things for fun, and a recreation of the projection of the Wizard’s intimidating head from the Wizard of Oz. She stared around in appreciation, if Lily Riddle wasn’t her then she had to say that she very much appreciated her style. The vampire quickly rushed behind a green curtain and messed with controls cutting of the Wizard before he could even get out his name.

“Oh yes, the head, I had almost forgotten about that…” Wizard Lenin grumbled, in spite of his apprehension about being there Lily also had the distinct feeling that he was annoyed.

“I thought you’d never met Lily Riddle.” Lily pointed out wondering how Wizard Lenin could sound so familiar with the place if he’d never seen her before.

“I haven’t, but in the sixties, when I was beginning to plan my… revolutionary movement I suppose you’d call it I was a bit short on funds. I had enough money to live on but not enough to convince pure blood heirs that I was the descendent of Salazar Slytherin and refined in all ways they could never hope to understand. Lily Riddle is known for occasionally giving out loans, she’s also known a rather harsh collector who takes deadlines seriously but I wasn’t too worried about paying back so I figured it might be easier to go there first than to try my luck with convincing the goblins that revolutions are a lucrative business. This was before anything was really in motion, I had yet to appear as Lord Voldemort or even come up with an appropriate cult name for my underlings, it was purely at the planning stage I think it might have been ’66 or ’67.”

Lily was almost stunned by how much he was talking about himself, usually Wizard Lenin wasn’t one for specifics of his history, he let details slip every now and then. She knew he graduated Hogwarts in 1945 and that he hated some guy named Dumbledore but other than the occasional flashes of thought he rarely filled her in.

It was funny, she’d always considered revolutionizing to be his main occupation, she hadn’t realized he’d started it so late and had probably been doing other things before he became a Communist. However Wizard Lenin without Communism or revolution just wasn’t sticking in her head so there must have been some glimmer of it before he decided to put things into action.

“So what happened then?”

Wizard Lenin sighed, as if feeling his past frustration coming back in full force, “As it turned out Lily Riddle is rather famous for taking decade long vacations to God knows where and then turning up when least expected. I was ushered into this room and told to present my case to the Wizard Oz the Great and Powerful. I did end up getting the loan as apparently Lily Riddle had written a memo the last time she was working in 1945 that if ‘An intense looking communist with Clint Eastwood blue eyes that makes the punk think ‘I don’t feel lucky’ comes by spouting off his plans for the great revolution then give him the loan and we’ll collect after he loses pitifully.”
Lily was beginning to realize why Wizard Lenin had such grudging and wary respect for Lily Riddle. “Wow, she predicted that much?”

He felt a little insulted by that, mostly about the losing pitifully part of that note, but Lily couldn’t help but think that he had lit himself on fire after trying to murder a baby with green death lasers.

“There we go, it’s off now, that thing can get obnoxious…” The vampire said before turning back to her, “So, um, boss would you like an update on the situation?”

Lily grinned back at him shaking herself out of the stupor of conversation with Wizard Lenin, “I would love an update on the situation, so what’s the what comrade?”

“Lily, you are pretending to be a drug lord, a drug lord who isn’t known as a dark lord only because she’s never actively tried to take over the government. Try to sound like someone other than yourself.” Wizard Lenin didn’t quite think she was capable of this and in his mind he was picturing the various ways that Lily might end up after what he considered to be a terrible mistake.

The vampire however was seeming more at ease the more she spoke, like this meant Lily Riddle was in a good mood rather than the dubious suspicion he’d have if he’d think Lily Riddle wasn’t Lily Riddle at all. Lily didn’t know what it was but somehow thinking back on Lily Riddle’s words as quoted by Wizard Lenin, she did feel a little bit lucky.

“Well, as you may or may not have heard that revolutionary we loaned money to, Tom Riddle, did indeed have a revolution and did indeed die in a rather flamboyant and odd manner as you said that he would. By the way, I’ve always wanted to ask, he isn’t related to you is he?” The vampire paused looking at her with a genuinely curious expression.

Given that Lily wasn’t sure she was Lily Riddle she didn’t think that she and Wizard Lenin were related. In the end they really didn’t look too alike, not enough that she would guess they were relatives, but it wasn’t as if she had looked too deep in the family tree.

“We’re not.” Wizard Lenin said flatly as if the very idea of being related to her was an insult to him.

“I don’t think so.”

“Right.” The vampire continued, “Well we collected money from the government to put hits on the Dark Lord Voldemort’s minions, he changed his name, and on the whole made a profit even without managing to collect the money back from Riddle. That’s the biggest news really, was quite a mess for a long time, although the narcotic sales were through the roof as dark wizards attempted to have visions and light wizards attempted to escape their problems.”

“That is most excellent.” Lily observed, “Very good, you know it’s good to be back, vacation was kind of boring.”

Lily Riddle’s life was seeming way more interesting than normal Lily’s ever was, she could see how Lily Riddle had gotten into this sort of thing.

“Well, you were gone for quite some time.” The vampire observed, “LSD is now considered to be a viable potion to aid divination.”

“Huh, well how ‘bout that?” Lily said more for the sake of atmosphere than any real content. “Well, this all sounds great and I think we should keep doing what we’re doing…” She trailed off realizing she didn’t actually know the vampire’s name, he was looking at her expectantly and then with something that might be called hope as if he had just been presented the opportunity to change everything.
Finally he said, “My name is Constantine.”

“Constantine, really? I mean it’s just too vampire to be an actual name, you know. How about Frank?”

And the hopeful look was gone.

“I would prefer it if you didn’t call me Frank.” He sighed, looking defeated even as he spoke as if he secretly knew that he was going to be called Frank.

Wizard Lenin appeared to have reached another limit, this time to his sense of doom and the feeling that they were going to die horribly, instead he felt kind of prickly inside her head as if he was simmering with anger beneath the surface of her skull.

“Call him Frank.”

It was decided then, Frank it was.

“Yeah, your name is Frank now. Well, Frank, I think that’s all for today…” She concluded turning around to leave the room and return to the Dursleys before halting and doing an about face to look at him intently, “Wait no, immortality body android thing.”

“What?” He asked looking somewhat confused.

“I need a body, something like a golem or a robot, where it has a nervous system and everything moves but it doesn’t have conscious thought unless you put something in there.”

He continued to look confused and his wariness returned slightly, as if he had the feeling that this idea would not be pleasant for him, “Well there’s nothing like that on the market, as far as I know, you’d have to create something. I’m not sure how you’d build a… robot… I have heard though that the Philosopher’s Stone could help but Flamel has that guarded very well… That sort of thing really isn’t done, boss.”

Lily thought about it, apparently this was a bit more difficult than she had originally thought if a vampire wasn’t sure how to go about it.

“No, really, you think I’ve been sitting in your head this past year for fun?” Wizard Lenin sounded remarkably sarcastic, usually he didn’t do sarcasm, he did biting wit but sarcasm always seemed a bit too blunt for him.

“These people manipulate glitches for a living; raising the dead should be a cake walk, I mean I do it on a weekly basis.” Lily pointed out.

“…I’m not even going to respond to that.”

Wizard Lenin still seemed tired as they left the office and then Knockturn Alley altogether and more than a little depressed as his own difficulties were bluntly told to his face by a vampire named Frank but he seemed to be a little bit better than he had started. He wasn’t saying thank you, or anything, but Lily hadn’t really expected him to either. It was enough that he was there in her head and talking again, they’d figure it out, Death always said that eternity was a long time and that you could accomplish just about anything if you tried long enough.

Besides now she had a job and connections to the underground just like Wizard Lenin had wanted so surely it wasn’t going to be that difficult.
“You know, Lily,” Wizard Lenin said in a tone that was almost fond, “I pity Hogwarts for having to take you into their midst. They really have no idea what they’re getting into.”
“I think my imaginary friend is depressed, oh and I decided to enter a talent show and I must win and defeat my nemesis, well my cousin Dudders, but I don’t think I have any talents that are talent show esq.” Lily Eleanor Evan Potter was staring at the ceiling while sitting on the shrink chair across from one Doctor Alfred Mitchell. It showed how much their relationship had grown that he didn’t ask her to sit up and look at her instead because while Freud had some good ideas here or there he was not that great at therapy, staring at the ceiling while talking to your psychologist was just weird for everyone involved.

The eight year old Lily didn’t differ that much from the five year old or even the six year old Lily, at least this was how Lily saw it. She’d gained some responsibilities, like gaining territory, money, and more narcotics than she herself could possibly ever consume even if she wanted to but for the most part she was still Eleanor Lily Potter living with the Dursleys and going about her daily routine.

Wizard Lenin had asked her, back when she was six and the whole Lily Riddle thing was only just beginning, if she didn’t want to just leave the muggle world and work full time as a drug dealer. It wasn’t that Wizard Lenin wanted her to be a drug lord, she knew, it was more for his benefit of having more time to look into ways to stuff him into some sort of vehicle with opposable thumbs. He also wasn’t a fan of the Dursleys, not that she was either, but he was less tolerant of things he didn’t like.

Lily had thought about it, to tell the truth it had been tempting, she hadn’t had much of a reason to stay with her relatives. They charged her an exorbitant amount of interest for a debt she couldn’t even remember, they rarely paid her any attention and when they did it was usually to give her some new task or otherwise berate her, and various other things that Wizard Lenin called abusive but she just called obnoxious. Still, it was easier in some ways to stay with the Dursleys, being a drug lord was nice and all but it could get rather violent and time consuming.

Whenever she stopped in to work Frank, her dutiful secretary, was always there listing the foreigners who had to appeased, the latest shipment of poppy and other raw materials, the latest underling seller who had gotten out of line, the latest and greatest of muggle wares that had to be marketed as somehow being ‘magical’ and not at all muggle, and all this stuff that usually was solved by a quick round of violence (it turned out that the gong of death was just as useful in conditioning people who didn’t pay their debts as it had been with the Dursleys giving her a room) but sometimes took days if not weeks. Lily Riddle wasn’t really her life anyway, it was just a thing she did to pass the time and make bank, if school had been any more interesting and or lucrative she’d probably be doing that instead. School was certainly more legal, from what Wizard Lenin and occasionally Frank, told her.

There were other vampires who worked for Lily Riddle as well but Frank had been there the longest, since 1937, and knew his way best around the place. Everyone else, even the four others who had worked there since the late 1930’s, seemed to look to him to make sure everything was running smoothly and all the boxes were checked. It seemed that her responsibilities were more vague, as if she just came up with the big ideas and the wild solutions rather than the day to day tasks, when it came to actually running the administrative aspects of the business it was Frank hands down that was in charge. Frank was the dweeby little accountant, they often joked, while the rest got the fun and
glamorous position of being the hired muscle.

He, as well as the rest of them, seemed to expect her to disappear most of the time, for school and or other activities, and work more during the summer. It seemed that Lily Riddle had always kept her own hours so they had no problem with her showing up sporadically without explanation of where she’d been all week or why she was arriving so late.

Eventually things had settled into a kind of routine. She’d visit Death on Sunday, work nights and weekends in Knockturn Alley at the main office, and attend school or do chores otherwise. Mrs. Figg seemed to be less crazy, or she had just given up being crazy, because she no longer looked frantic around Lily but instead just vaguely frazzled as if she wasn’t even sure what to think anymore, the Dursleys returned to their pre-therapy Dursley ways (which really only had affected Aunt Petunia), and she never saw or heard from Big Brother’s greasy agent Severus Snape again. It wasn’t that it was boring, she kind of liked knowing that something interesting was going to happen each weekend, but it was hard on Wizard Lenin and as her personal brain tumor when things were hard on Wizard Lenin they were consequently hard on her.

It turned out bodies were harder to come by than she’d ever thought. At first she’d thought recycling would be possible, Lily Riddle’s business accumulated quite a slew of raw materials, but after some research and frank talks with Frank and Wizard Lenin it appeared that animating a corpse just wouldn’t cut it. The only option that the glitch manipulators, who really didn’t deserve that title at the end of the day, knew of was something called the philosopher’s stone which had been created by Nicolas Flamel. According to hearsay and research it was a really powerful red rock that held enough energy to create a body and sustain youth, it also could create gold at a faster rate than even Lily Riddle could manage. However no one ever went into the specifics of how to make one, how to use one if one did manage to make one, or how a rock could be anything but a rock even if it was a little pretty.

What she didn’t understand about the whole thing was why there was only one, she remembered remarking to Wizard Lenin at the time, “I mean if it really does the whole infinite gold thing and fountain of youth thing then wouldn’t a lot more people be trying to make it?”

Wizard Lenin had been in a somewhat bad mood, every time she researched his little problem he regained that lethargy he’d had when she’d first become Lily Riddle. Also there was the fact that apparently he had known all this beforehand, had been thinking about it for years, and Lily was just rehashing useless information that he hadn’t been courteous enough to share with her. Still though, he was apparently willing to enlighten her on things like these, “To be honest when I was younger I thought that as well, to ensure my immortality I went with a much faster (and to be honest probably cruder) technique and then thought I might come back to creating a philosopher’s stone later but I always wondered why no other witch or wizard bothered trying to recreate it. Flamel was very secretive about his research though, we only know that he used alchemy to create the stone, other than that he’s been very tight lipped. As you’ve noticed though, Lily, wizards on the whole often don’t make decisions based on logic.”

It seemed like Frank’s original assessment of the situation had been correct. The philosopher’s stone which was hidden somewhere in France by Flamel was probably the best bet, wizards turned out to know jack shit about robotics and everyone who knew how to make a golem had been killed off by Grindelwald and or Nazis in World War II, and the only other glitchy option seemed to be to make Wizard Lenin some sort of zombie body that could shuffle around for eternity.

His response to that idea was, “No.”

There were a few other options, which looked rather dubious in Lily’s opinion, and the books
reported as being rather sketchy even when they worshipped the ground the dark arts walked on, the
dark arts being glitches that maimed, killed people, and just dealt with dead things in general. Wizard
Lenin wasn’t so much a dark arts fan as he was a maiming and killing fan, the dark arts were just
convenient for accomplishing those goals. He did agree with her though on that those kinds of rituals
were not the best way to go about it.

“Dark rituals would be considered the Rube Goldberg machines of the magical world if wizards
knew the term and had any real common sense instead of mounds of superstition. They’re famous
for having many interconnected steps that, with little influence from the caster or the environment,
spiral out of control and blow up in the user’s face. Usually, even if miraculously it doesn’t fall apart
halfway through the process, the end result is a more powerful and crude bit of magic that could
have been produced by safer, lighter, means. Having been burnt alive once in the last decade I’m
not eager to try the experience again, we’ll look for something else.”

She also caught the mutterings that he didn’t have half the materials to pull it off and even if he did
he had no idea what he’d look like by the end of it. From the vague images in her head he could
come out looking like something described in the Lovecraft book about Cthulhu in Lily Riddle’s
library at the headquarters.

But as the clock ticked by in Little Whinging he was beginning to grow anxious.

A few years back they’d had a conversation that Lily often thought of, they’d been in her head sitting
in a dark cave by the shore. In the background the waves had been crashing but otherwise all had
been silent and she could see her breath like smoke rising into the cold air. He had looked almost like
Death then, wearing a worn and old expression that seeped out of his eyes like cold blue light. He
was in black then, there was no red that night.

“I find that what I worry about most isn’t that I will die or that I will be trapped inside your head
forever, rather it’s that I won’t mind being trapped, that I will succumb to the lull of your everyday
life and give up hope that I will one day return to my own. I fear that I am losing myself within you
until I truly am nothing more than Lenin.”

She didn’t say anything, neither did he later, but words like that weren’t to be taken lightly and she
pondered them whenever his silence was too heavy.

In the psychologist’s office Doctor Mitchell shuffled his notebook, flipping a page after writing
something down, he always felt he had to write a lot of notes during her visit or he would never keep
it straight, “Ah yes, your imaginary friend… Lenin, right?”

Lily nodded, “Yeah, a wizard named Lenin though not the communist, well he is a communist but
not the communist. Anyway, that’s not really the point. So for a while now I, or we’ve, been trying
to create him a real body so that he can function with the real world, the only problem is that it’s
difficult, because he’s an imaginary friend and well… people don’t just make bodies apparently.”

Doctor Mitchell didn’t say that he understood, or that he saw anything, but instead continued to stare
at her and wait for her to finish. When she’d first reappeared in his life with an appointment in place
under the name of Lily Riddle, since Wizard Lenin seemed fairly certain that the they were watching
Eleanor Potter, he hadn’t remembered a single thing about her just like she’d suspected. Of course
that hadn’t really mattered, she’d filled him back in on the more or less important details. She left out
the drug dealing, the glitch manipulation, most of the details with the Dursleys, and Death but all else
she considered fair game including Wizard Lenin’s existence even if she left out that he was a real
person and not just a thing she’d made up.

“I really don’t know what to do about it. I mean he refused robots, period. Robots I could probably
do, I mean we could call him HAL and he could call me Dave and everything would be great, he’s even got the murderous intent down. Wouldn’t even let me try, I looked up programming, and I was greeted with the migraine of death for even looking. I didn’t get a few sentences in and poof my brain was gone and pins of death were eating at my forehead instead. Is it too much to ask that we look into some other option? I mean really, is that too much?” She asked this time looking at him.

He always fidgeted during their meetings, never quite sure what to do with himself, because he wasn’t quite sure what to do with her. Without the immediacy of her suicide as a problem to focus on he seemed to be lost on a direction to progress. They had started with conditioning because Lily had brought it up this had slowly progressed to observational studies like the kind she had been doing on the Dursleys and other realms of psychology. It would mostly be her talking, she wasn’t sure he was entirely comfortable with the idea that a six year old girl who appeared to have no parental guidance and far too much intelligence was fascinated by psychology. Most of the time he just let her talk, sometimes asking questions here or there, but most of the time looking as if he had no idea why she was coming to see him.

“Perhaps, Lily, you should focus on friends that are not… imaginary?” He asked finally with eyebrows raised. He wasn’t quite sure whether to take Wizard Lenin as a metaphor, a hallucination, or a childish need for a friend. It was Lily’s frankness about the matter that threw him off, he said, her insistence that Wizard Lenin only lived in her brain and nowhere else because usually children weren’t that blunt about the state of their made up friends.

She thought about it, she’d never tried the whole friendship thing, not with people her age at least. The closest thing she had to a normal friend on the physical plane was Doctor Mitchell, and after that Frank who didn’t really count as human.

Inside her head, Wizard Lenin who was not speaking to her as she had once again dragged him to therapy, grumbled something about how she’d never even managed to hold a conversation with a child her age let alone approach friendship. How much could an eight year old and a drug dealing imposter have in common, anyway, he seemed to ask. Lily had stepped beyond the realm where reaching out to others was even possible; she had passed the point of no return years ago without even realizing it.

“I don’t think that would work out.” She concluded finally, “I’m not really a… people person, as you may have noted, doctor.”

Doctor Mitchell was not a rude person, he actively tried to be kind, and sometimes this lead him to stare at her blankly as he tried thinking of a way to not agree with her and tell her that she really was a people person.

“You mentioned a talent show?” He finally asked shelving the Wizard Lenin problem for another day. It was probably for the best, they’d get nowhere in therapy, not with Wizard Lenin’s stance on psychologists. It was one of the things he never lessened on, if anything his irrational hatred of the field only grew with Lily’s expertise in the area, something about the studying of the mind and its inner workings through him almost as off balance as the existence of Death did.

Besides Wizard Lenin’s depression was nothing new, it’d been going on for years, probably since she’d first known him she just didn’t know how to label it. She still stuck by her belief that once he got a body, and the ability to actually do something on his own, he’d be back to his old murderous self in no time leading the glorious (and somewhat nonexistent at the moment) revolution to victory. Personally, as she worked more and more in Knockturn Alley, she was beginning to understand his feelings on the whole issue.

The Ministry of Magic was not only bourgeoisie bureaucratic nonsense but it also made some really
questionable moral decisions that even Wizard Lenin admitted weren’t the best of ideas. Their main prison did not have guards, it had soul sucking demons who executed someone by slowly eating their happiness until they were a catatonic dolls whose bodies were thrown into the gutter and left to rot. Lily wasn’t sure how that was considered more efficient than just killing the prisoners it seemed like it would take a lot of work to keep soul sucking demons around and Wizard Lenin, as well as Frank, had assured her that it really wasn’t.

Really it seemed like the Empire of Glitch Britain needed a revolution.

Wizard Lenin, although he didn’t say anything, was quite pleased that she agreed with his sentiments.

Still, one thing at a time, and the talent show was the next greatest thing on the horizon.

“Right, so the talent show, so you remember how I told you that my aunt and uncle are convinced that Dudders is God in the flesh?”

“… Yes…” He said slowly as if he wasn’t convinced that her aunt and uncle really thought that but wasn’t quite willing to call her a liar either. He had once attempted to contact the Dursleys whose information she had still written into the application, or rather once that he remembered as the original conversations had been erased by Big Brother’s greasy glitch agent, and as Lily could have told him it got him nowhere closer to understanding and got Lily locked in her room for a few hours until she managed to make them forget the whole thing had ever happened. He still wasn’t sure what to think of that, or Lily for that matter, and instead looked like a man who had been given an immense puzzle but no idea where to start.

“Well anyway there’s this talent show coming up and Dudley’s been taking the piano lessons for the past few years, he’s pretty decent considering he barely practices and can’t read music, and I realized if he enters and I don’t then even if he plays terribly, which he will because he’s Dudders, then he will still be more talented than me and I will be told it every day of my life forever. So now I have to enter the talent show, the trouble is, and Wizard Lenin and I have been discussing it is that I really don’t have any stagey talents.”

She didn’t know how to play the piano and Wizard Lenin had considered music a waste of his revolutionary time in his youth so she couldn’t steal Dudder’s thunder there. She’d found that she was very athletic, able to outrun Dudley with ease, but you couldn’t exactly run on stage. After that had ended she had run out of ideas. Really, Lily was good at sounding smart, not like an adult, but smart. She was good at ideas and really just talking but other than that…

“I’m sure that’s not true, you’re quite a talented artist.” Doctor Mitchell commented perhaps thinking on the sketch of Wizard Lenin she had given him in the beginning of their reintroduction when he had asked her what specifically Wizard Lenin was like.

He’d been shocked when she first gave it to him, inspecting it then looking at her, asking if she had done it herself which was a weird question because who else would know what he looked like he lived in her brain after all.

“You can’t exactly draw on stage though. Well, whatever, I’ll come up with something.”

The rest of the meeting went on in a similar manner, him suggesting various things and her reminding him that she needed a stage talent. Finally the hour ended with him staring pensively at her, “Why are you so insistent on entering this talent show, if you don’t believe you will perform well?
She stared at him having moved to a sitting position and again reflected on her situation as Eleanor Potter and why she did anything at all, “It’s just something I have to do, school, chores, talent shows, they’re just things I have to do without any real reason for doing them. Reality isn’t always consistent, especially when it’s falling apart, who am I to try to find something meaningful inside it?”

Later that night, the talent show still looming only a few days away, she deviated from her usual schedule of visiting Death on a Sunday and instead visited him on a Wednesday night, the show she was signed up for was on Friday.

Seeing Death was like what visiting a relative should have been like, there was a certain comfort and steadfastness in it, where she could look across at him and know that he would remain as he was and that the events in her own world couldn’t touch him at all.

Sitting at a café, overlooking the wreckage Wizard Lenin had caused only a few years prior that Death had never bothered to clean up, they began to discuss the eminent problem of the talent show. Wizard Lenin had been of the opinion she shouldn’t enter at all, because really she didn’t have any talents like that, but she thought that might have been because they had been trying to pinpoint the location of the stone in France and hadn’t been making much progress. It could be because they weren’t visiting France themselves but rather relying on the rumor mill and wizarding tabloids, it was a little like the time he demanded she visit Diagon Alley, he wanted her to prance about the French countryside and while she was all for time away from the Dursleys it didn’t have to be in another country.

“And so I realized that I have no talents, well not no talents because I’m really good at pretending to be a drug dealer, or I guess I am a drug dealer but anyway not the point. I’m really good at being intimidating, but you can’t get up on stage and intimidate people into paying their debts, I’ve never heard of that being in a talent show.” Lily concluded over tea looking straight ahead at Death and trying not to listen to Wizard Lenin’s impatiently tapping foot.

Death hadn’t been thrilled with her idea of taking over for Lily Riddle, there was concern for her safety as there had been in Wizard Lenin’s case but there was also something else, some darkening of his features when he looked at her as if he didn’t recognize her at all and couldn’t find it within himself to be truly horrified merely slightly disturbed. Whenever mention of her role of Lily Riddle came up he always looked like that, that conflicted expression crossing his features if only for a moment, and she couldn’t help but wonder what he had expected in her place.

“It wouldn’t be.” Death muttered quietly a pensive look on his face that meant he was taking her seriously, “To be honest I can’t remember having talents like that either, in spite of the many theatrics in my life I myself was never much of a performer. But I’m confused, why do you have to enter the talent show, if you don’t have an idea of what to do?”

She sighed, she was getting tired of answering that question, did there really have to be a reason? Wasn’t the battle with Dudley enough or did there have to be something more than that?

“It’s a human trait, looking for reason where there is none, it’s called absurdism.” Wizard Lenin supplied from across the table, not looking at either of them but rather looking at the shards of glass and the charred bricks that still littered the station, “Philosophy aside though that’s hardly a reason to get on stage and act like an idiot and if you do pursue this you will look like an idiot.”

“I will not look like an idiot, please, I just have to find a talent; some really talent-like talent that will impress a whole crowd of people….” Lily’s frown became more pronounced as nothing immediate came to mind, perhaps she was just one of those people who lacked any of those cherished talents in the general public, instead she had…
And then it hit her, like Wizard Lenin with a migraine of death, she had the most talented talent of
them all and she hadn’t even considered it. “Glitches, I can manipulate glitches better than anyone.”

“I’m not sure that would be a good idea.” Death supplied looking slightly alarmed at the same
time that Wizard Lenin snapped, “Do you want another visit from the government?”

“Oh please, they don’t have to know I’m really manipulating glitches.” She said looking at the pair
of them ganging up on her, a thing they rarely did as it meant they had to pretend to be on the same
side for a few moments, “It’s called a magic show, I’ll just pretend everything’s fake like it is in
those, it’ll be great.”

There was an odd moment where Wizard Lenin and Death looked at each other, not glared, but
looked as if they were sharing a thought that had nothing to do with their dislike of the other person.
Finally Death became strangely somber and offered one final bit of advice, “Lily, you must realize
that the Dursleys will know it for what it is, and… I realize that you simply live with them but there
will be consequences if you push them that hard. You have to consider others when you act, not
simply yourself, a single simple action like a talent show has many far reaching consequences.”

There really was only one response she could give to that, and even then she had known it was not
the one he was searching for, but it was the one she had to give all the same, “The Dursleys are
hardly others.”

With that in mind she got herself a ridiculous looking outfit to perform in, a black tux, top hat, and
black and white plastic looking wand. She passed out invitations to everyone at work, Doctor
Mitchell, and even Death though he wouldn’t be able to appear in the universe. Soon enough it was
Friday night and the stage lights seemed to glitter before her as she listened to Dudley play piano
fairly well considering his level of talent in other areas, listened to stuttering actors, and other musical
players.

It looked like such a false and cheery world up there, the unreality of it made evident in a way that
just wasn’t so in the greater reality, and she couldn’t help but feel that the world was a darker and
more complicated stage in which she was always performing on. Dressed in the outfit she sat in
the wings waiting for her moment to confront the world.

“You do realize you’ll most likely have to erase your relatives memories after this, again.” Wizard
Lenin noted drily, not quite discouraging but an observation nonetheless.

“I’m prepared for that consequence.” She’d done it enough times before in order to sneak out for
work, cover up glitches performed around the house, and various other things. Besides, in its own
bizarre way she truly did feel like the talent show was necessary. As necessary as school, living with
the Dursleys, pretending to be Lily Riddle, having Wizard Lenin in her head, or visiting uncle Death.
All these events and actions were what made her and it seemed as if she had no choice in the matter.

“Any particular glitch you’d like to see?” She asked as the audience started applauding for the act
that was in front of Lily, the eleven year old girl with a flute bowing and looking very pleased.

“Not everything’s that easy, you know, magic can be quite difficult.” He started but then stopped
perhaps considering that nothing had seemed difficult so far, even when he had claimed that it should
not be possible, and finally he said, “You know, do a classic, pull a rabbit from the nothingness and
felt inside your hat.”

And then she was walking on stage, blinded by the lights, and staring into the black faceless pit that
was the audience none-the-less, “Good evening ladies and gentlemen, tonight I’ll be doing a few
classic illusions purely for your entertainment.” She tipped her hat to them, to Lily Riddle’s pale and
lean employees, to Doctor Mitchell who may or may not have decided to come at all, to the Dursleys who were dreading the very sight of her. “Reality, at the end of the day, is more of a squishy concept than most people give it credit for. It’s not always in the right place at the right time, sometimes it’s late, sometimes it’s early, and sometimes it’s inside a hat when it should have been right in front of you.”

Her hat fell into her hand and with the other she pulled out a snuffling white rabbit who had not been there before with a conspiratorial grin at her audience, “I’m a fan of the classics.”

As Wizard Lenin had predicted she’d had to wipe the Dursley’s memory or face being trapped inside the bedroom for days at a time which she really couldn’t afford with Lily Riddle’s job on the line. Still though, even when everything seemed unchanged, she didn’t regret that single rabbit that false thing that she had shaped from nothingness that still snuffled and hopped about her room just like any real rabbit would.

“I think I’ll name him Rabbit, he needs a name, since he doesn’t appear to be disappearing. Do you think Rabbit needs food?”

Wizard Lenin was even dumbfounded enough not to be depressed, “You conjured a rabbit, a true rabbit and not a solid illusion, at the age of eight without a wand. This isn’t possible.”

Rabbit hopped around as if to refute Wizard Lenin’s point, he did have some non-rabbit like qualities though, he hadn’t once gone to the bathroom or looked in need of food. He seemed more like the idea of a rabbit than an actual organism, perhaps Lily hadn’t been specific enough when she tugged on the universe with the word ‘rabbit’ lodged in her head.

That had been a particularly odd sensation, more so than most glitches, it had seemed like she’d reached past something beyond some barrier and into the unknown and plucked Rabbit from it and placed him into her hat. For a moment she had seen everything extending beyond her, light and dark and the swirling universe before her, but then there had just been the glittering stage lights and a rabbit.

“Well, Lenin, you know what they say. Reality is that which, when you stop believing in it, doesn’t go away.”
The Snape Returns

In which Severus Snape has the worst day ever, Wizard Lenin manages to find some decent entertainment in life, and Lily goes on her first official shopping trip as Eleanor Potter rather than Lily Riddle and finds the whole experience to be much less fun.

The second time she met Severus Snape was not in her bedroom as he tried to wipe her memories but it was with him standing at the front door to Number 4 Privet Drive and her on the roof.

The fact of the matter was that the now eleven year old Lily was slightly late in returning her reply to Hogwarts. Sure, she had meant to, but then she’d never gotten around to reading the thing and she didn’t have an owl to reply so she’d just thrown it away somewhere and lost it between Riddle Incorporated, Number 4 Privet Drive, and Doctor Mitchell’s office. It just hadn’t seemed all that important, school had never seemed important, and she didn’t know why a magical school would be any different.

She’d been unconvinced if she even wanted to go, it had taken talks from both Wizard Lenin and Death to convince her it’d be a good use of time. The turning point had been only a little while after summoning Rabbit from the universe beyond in rabbit form. She’d taken him to see Uncle Death, who had been impressed if somewhat horrified by the implications of his existence and had relayed her doubts about the educational system.

The conversation had taken place to the quiet sounds of the snuffling Rabbit as well as Wizard Lenin’s usual irritation at visiting Death.

“No offense, but it seems like I have the glitch manipulation thing kind of covered. I get a lot of experience at Riddle Incorporated and from what I’ve seen most wizards can’t do half of what glitch manipulation is capable of. Besides, if it’s anything like normal school then it’s probably a complete waste of time.” With a sigh she’d sipped at her tea, that wonderful tea flavor you could only find in purgatory, and thought about the merits of just stealing Lily Riddle’s job full time.

“They’re going to make you go to school somewhere, would you rather it be the magic school or the muggle school?” Wizard Lenin asked, she didn’t really know why he was so annoyed about it, technically if she didn’t go to magic school she’d have more time to look into his little body problem but he seemed personally offended that she didn’t want to go to Hogwarts.

“Well, the glitch school I guess, if I have to go to one or the other.” Lily said watching as Rabbit hopped over the glass remains of Wizard Lenin’s wrath from years before and remained miraculously uncut, “But do I really have to go to school?”

Death for his own part looked at his hands with a serious expression as if attempting to solve a very difficult problem. He was often very serious about topics that he really didn’t need to be serious about, such as her schooling, the existence of Rabbit, Wizard Lenin’s influence on her decisions, and her part time job as Lily Riddle, “How can you be so certain you won’t enjoy it? I realize you don’t care for children your age but perhaps you’ll find friends there. Until I attended Hogwarts I had no friends to speak of.”

Wizard Lenin spared Death a glance conveying all his doubts about that statement without even having to open his mouth, “I can’t speak to your ability to make friends but your ability to meddle in the affairs of great wizards will be highly increased should you choose to attend Hogwarts.”
In later years Wizard Lenin had come to know Lily slightly better than Death, he was around her more often, and he lived inside her head so she tended to follow his line of thinking more than she did Death’s. Death would always be kinder and in some ways Lily did appreciate that but she felt for the most part that Wizard Lenin was the one who truly understood. For whatever reason this sparked some resentment in Death that always made him glare at Wizard Lenin as if he was the incarnation of freaky business that so plagued uncle Vernon.

So while she, like Wizard Lenin, highly doubted her ability to communicate effectively with her peers she didn’t doubt her ability to meddle.

“I’m a drug lord, I think that’s a lot of meddling already.” Lily noted to both of them with a shrug.

“Perhaps, but then again, there are many opportunities at Hogwarts that will not present themselves anywhere else and if you never go you will miss them completely. Have you thought, Lily, that maybe this is simply another one of the numerous inexplicable things that Eleanor Potter must do?”

And that had been the clincher because at the end of the day there were many inexplicable tasks that Eleanor Lily Potter had to accomplish that seemed to serve no greater purpose to Lily. Hogwarts would simply be one of them.

Three years later that would bring her to the roof at Wizard Lenin’s prompting to send a response to the school’s letter before she was denied admittance simply for not responding, attempting to make use of one of Mrs. Figg’s many cats, in place of an owl.

She’d initially tried with Rabbit, but apparently beings from beyond the bounds of the comprehensible universe didn’t know what to do with mail, he’d just stared at the letter with that blank look in his black little eyes and then proceeded to hop slowly away from her. After that she thought she’d try her luck with one of Mrs. Figg’s many cats.

“Lily, you can’t just pick an animal and have it send your response to Hogwarts.” Wizard Lenin said as Lily slowly approached the cat after having cornered it on the roof with her letter in hand.

“I don’t see why it has to be an owl, besides, we’ve known there’s something off about Mrs. Figg’s cats for years. They have to be glitchy, their herd behavior cannot be explained otherwise.”

In her head Wizard Lenin sighed, she caught the image of him mentally rubbing his temples, as if he knew she was doing something profoundly stupid but had no means to stop her. Like watching a train wreck, he’d often say.

“Even if I did agree with you on the cats that doesn’t mean they have the ability or the inclination to deliver your mail to Scotland.” She caught mutterings then of something along the lines on how she never listened to him, how she was going to fall off the roof and break her neck, and how that wasn’t even going to make a bit of difference because she’d just rise from the dead like she always did and pretend it never happened in the first place.

“Well where am I going to find an owl, Lenin? At least I know where the cats are.” She responded not quite irritated but getting there as the Wizard Lenin Frustration headache built up in her scar. The cat, for its own part, stared at her unblinkingly, large yellow eyes taking in her very determined expression. She had the feeling, in spite of all signs to the contrary, that this was one of those moments that would change her life forever it had that heaviness to it that could only be associated with destiny.

“Somehow I doubt that.” Wizard Lenin couldn’t help but cut in.
Just before reaching the cat it scampered off with a hiss disappearing off the roof and making its way across the street to its safe den where it would relay all her secret secrets into the spy network and then onto Big Brother.

“You know none of that is accurate.” Wizard Lenin commented drily before letting out another frustrated sigh that came with living as a brain tumor for the past ten years, “I was going to say that you could just use one from the owlery in Diagon Alley for relatively no money. However, you didn’t seem inclined to listen.”

She got the feeling that he expected there to be some sort of a lesson from the experience of not managing to corner Mrs. Figg’s cat but for the life of her she couldn’t figure out what it was supposed to be.

It was at that point that they caught sight of the awkward greasy looking man standing at the door to Number 4 Privet Drive looking as if he desperately wished to be elsewhere. He had abandoned his wizard bathrobe for a cheap, ill-fitting, dark suit that looked very uncomfortable in the heat. He was a very thin man, more so than the tall thin men she was normally surrounded by like Wizard Lenin, Death, and the vampires working for Lily Riddle. Where they were elegantly slim, containing a hint of danger as well as ethereality in their forms, this man was bony and seemed too tall for his frame. His features seemed slapped on, crudely fashioned, so that he resembled more of a scarecrow than a man.

She crouched down on the roof and surveyed him in silence, just taking him in, and seeing what Wizard Lenin might make of him. “Is that who I think it is?”

She could feel Wizard Lenin’s attention burning inside him, a pounding of adrenaline, hate, and the desire to hurt. “Oh yes, I do believe Mr. Snape has decided to pay us a visit once again.”

In her head there was an image of a smaller, younger, version of Severus Snape bleeding on the floor with a look of terror on his features. Insult to Wizard Lenin, even when by proxy of Lily, would be repaid in kind. She wondered if the man had any idea that his life was in mortal danger because he’d once snuck into Lily’s room with the guise of a pedophile in order to erase her memories.

“Do you think he’s here for memories?” She asked as they watched the man’s shuffling irritated movements on the doormat as he finally brought himself to ring the doorbell.

“Dressed like that?” Wizard Lenin said bringing up the suit with disdain as if the man shouldn’t have even tried, “I highly doubt it, no, my guess is he’s here for Hogwarts. Although why they would send a man like Severus Snape is truly beyond me.”

She considered him, he did seem like he wasn’t thrilled to be there, and Wizard Lenin did have a relatively good fashion sense so while she saw the outfit as just not fitting he saw it as an abomination to humanity. Wizard Lenin responded with something akin to her not having any fashion sense at all since she’d been raised wearing her obese cousin’s oversized and brightly colored sweaters but he obviously didn’t feel strong enough to say it directly to her.

As they observed him the door opened, Lily couldn’t see who it was in the doorway, but judging by the hand that rapidly slapped the man across the face she would guess it was aunt Petunia. Before the man got a word in edgewise the door was slammed in his face.

“That went extraordinarily well, I suppose Severus Snape must have known Petunia Evans, he certainly knew Lily.” Wizard Lenin commented feeling amused by the whole situation, not enough to allow Severus Snape to live, but enough to watch him suffer from a distance. It seemed they were in soap opera mode again with the new character Severus Snape, who had a mysterious past of
The man simply stared at the door, seeming to be in shock, and then began pounding on it again receiving no response from aunt Petunia who was probably at that moment calling the police. His frustration apparently mounting to a point where he could no longer contain it he brought out his wand.

“I do believe he means to break down your door.” Wizard Lenin observed.

“Uncle Vernon won’t like that, he’ll probably blame it on me.” Normally incidents like doors disappearing, mysterious rabbits appearing, or therapists calling the house were byproducts of Lily’s actions but it seemed as if even if the mysterious events weren’t her fault if they were in any way mysterious they’d be pinned on her.

“Most definitely.” Wizard Lenin concurred as they watched the man’s hand begin to swish this way and that, with the increase of swishes signifying the increase in power level, it seemed the man was not going so much for unlocking the door as for obliterating it entirely.

“I should probably stop him.” Lily said, she could probably fix the damage, she’d been able to fix all of the other damage she’d caused over the years but that didn’t mean she was inclined to.

“No, no, Lily, let’s leave him alone for a moment. This is getting fairly interesting.” Drawing on Wizard Lenin’s soap opera thinking it seemed that after blowing the door into tiny pieces aunt Petunia would probably start screaming, there’d be some sort of cat fight between her and Mr. Snape, and then Mr. Snape would probably end up accidentally killing her and then there’d be one less Dursley in the house for Lily to deal with and the greasy agent would be able to be convicted of murder and would have to cover the whole thing up.

Lily didn’t necessarily like her aunt but having her murdered by the greasy agent of Big Brother seemed like a harsh way to do it. If Lily really wanted her aunt dead she’d do it herself.

“Yeah, I’m stopping him.”

By that point though it was too late for the door, it was a pretty destructive piece of magic, there really was nothing left of that door by the end of it and just as Wizard Lenin had predicted aunt Petunia had started screaming.

“Too late.” Wizard Lenin sounded awfully smug about that statement.

“Yo, guy at my door, hey!” Lily called out to the man, his head swiveled up to meet hers, “Can you not blow up my house for two seconds? I assume you want to talk about the letter.”

Squinting in the sunlight he caught sight of her on the roof and staggered back into the front yard accompanied by the crescendo of aunt Petunia’s panicking shrieks which were growing less intelligible by the minute.

“Eleanor Potter?” He asked, sounding almost incredulous.

“And how my I help you today kind sir?” She gave him a slight bow, the hand with the letter sweeping across the shingles of the roof, and she offered him a bright grin.

“What are you doing up there?!” He asked sounding panicked not even paying attention to aunt Petunia who had come running out of the house with a frying pan aimed at his head.

Lily for own part was walking towards the edge of the roof preparing to jump down with the aid of a
glitch in the form of lessened gravity, a trick that had turned out to be very useful when needing to
get down from high places as well as look flashy, so it was only as she floated down from the roof
that she offered a warning to the man, “Watch your head.”

He didn’t, so by the time Lily’s bare feet touched ground he was out cold, and aunt Petunia was
hysterically attempting to grab her and drag her inside.

“Still going well?” Lily asked Wizard Lenin almost feeling him smile in response.

“I’m entertained.”

With a raised hand a bit of concentration the door remembered its prior, not destroyed, state and aunt
Petunia found herself back in the kitchen where she had been previously with only vague
recollections that something unpleasant had occurred. The man for his own part remained
unconscious on the ground.

Lily nudged him with a bare foot causing him to twitch slightly and then groan, “Come on, it was
aunt Petunia, I’m sure she didn’t hit you that hard.”

At that the man attempted to roll over but became nauseous from it turning from the sickly white
color to a curious green. At Wizard Lenin’s suggestion she backed up a safe distance so that when he
vomited it wasn’t on her feet.

“Did… You were on the roof.” He groaned rubbing his head and looking altogether miserable.

“Yes, and you were at the door, but that’s irrelevant now. I’m afraid I wasn’t quite sure how this owl
to mail business thing worked and did not send in my letter on time, that’s why you’re here, isn’t it?”

He nodded slowly, closing his eyes and taking deep breaths, probably still feeling somewhat dizzy.
He seemed incapable of too much talking.

“Oh, goody goody, my answer is yes. I would love to attend your glitch academy.”

He nodded again, eyes still closed, “Good… that’s good.”

He attempted to get himself in a sitting position then which again turned him slightly green but he
persevered and did not vomit twice.

“…The roof… You were on the roof… How did… How did you get down?”

Lily sighed, “I walked.”

He didn’t nod at that, in fact he looked somewhat puzzled, but clearly his addled brains weren’t
helping him to come up with an answer that he liked. Lily was just wondering how much longer
she’d have to babysit him in her yard for.

“Ask him to take you to Diagon Alley.” Wizard Lenin suddenly cut in with a forcefulness that only
could mean he was scheming something.

“But I go to Diagon Alley all the time.” Lily pointed out, besides the man could barely move, she
doubted he was in any condition to teleport to London.

“Lily Riddle visits Diagon Alley all the time, not Eleanor Potter, now that you’re attending
Hogwarts people will expect to see you. Dumbledore, specifically, will expect to see you out and
about but not without the guidance of one of his pawns.” It was heavily implied there that Severus
Snape was a pawn. The man had, apparently, at one point worked for Wizard Lenin as a young revolutionary but Wizard Lenin had never really liked him. Wizard Lenin would never go into the why but in spite of the young man’s talent at potions as well as dueling there was some major point of contention that Wizard Lenin had never forgiven. Now that the war had been over for ten years and the dark lord Hindenburg was assumed dead Wizard Lenin would not have been in the least bit shocked if Severus Snape jumped ship with everyone else. He was just a little miffed that the man had somehow avoided jail, and for that he blamed his go to resource of irritation, Albus Dumbledore.

“Don’t refer to me as Lord Hindenburg. Ever.” For a man who called himself lord of the airplane disasters he sure was picky about which disaster he referred to.

Wizard Lenin had a point, she also got the feeling that he was looking forward to making the man spend the whole day with them and thereby make him suffer, which if it made Wizard Lenin happy it made her life easier.

“I’d be happy to leave you here, but unfortunately I don’t know where this glitch shopping district is, so you’ll have to take me. You cool with that?” She asked to which he didn’t quite shake or nod his head, appearing to be in the process of understanding her words and trying not to feel sick, but Lily decided that his opinion really didn’t matter.

“Great, that’s super, let’s get going.” With that she hauled the man up and began to steer him towards the public transportation.

One of the first glitches she’d started to actively manipulate, besides memories and repairing collateral damage, was teleportation. Wizard Lenin referred to it as apparition but whatever it was called it cut her travel time to London’s glitch underbelly by a ridiculous amount and therefore she loved it. Unfortunately it was also apparently illegal for underage wizards, which normally wouldn’t concern her as laws for the peons, but with Severus Snape dragged along behind her she doubted casually breaking the laws would get her through the day any faster.

On the train ride over he seemed to pull himself together, mustering himself enough so that he glared at her even as he was leaning against the window, “I am not going to Diagon Alley with you.”

He said it as if it was the last thing he could possibly think of doing, as if she was an abomination of nature that must be thrown into the deepest pits of Hell, it was an impressive amount of hate that no one had actually directed at her before even as Lily Riddle.

Lily’s eyebrows raised, a mannerism she had picked up from Wizard Lenin, “Well, you’re already on the train there, so you might as well.”

“Ask your relatives to take you; I have much better things to do with my time.” He seemed to be conveniently forgetting that he had just been hit over the head with a frying pan for the casual destruction that came with the territory of manipulating glitches by those same caring relatives.

Well, she supposed if he wanted to go that was his decisions, but if Wizard Lenin’s line of thinking was correct that might cause some problems later on.

“Bring up the fact that he would be leaving an eleven year old girl alone on public transportation to down town London where she’d be trying to find a magical shopping district.”

“If you leave now I’ll probably just start wandering around the east end looking for a magic shopping district.” Lily commented gravely causing the man’s eyes to snap back towards hers faster than lightning.
He seemed to evaluate her then, but it seemed looking at her too long was painful, because then he turned his head away and looked out the window.

“…We will make this quick.”

“You remind him of your mother.” Wizard Lenin commented quietly, almost tenderly, and she wondered what had prompted that kind of emotion from him.

What an odd thing to think of, Lily thought to herself, when looking at her face.

On exiting the train Severus Snape seemed to have regained himself enough to take charge and drag her behind him and teleport them as soon as they were out of sight of muggles to the entrance behind the Leaky Beaker.

“If you ever need to come here just look for the pub, got that?”

“Yes sir.” She said giving him a slight salute as it sounded more like an order rather than actual advice, he glared at that a little and then seemed to decide to pretend she didn’t exist. He tapped the bricks quickly in the order that Wizard Lenin had originally taught her, and then dragged her through.

Without any explanation that one could expect from a tour guide he brusquely brought them to Gringotts approaching the nearest available teller whose expression, almost as if on clockwork, widened at the sight of Lily probably mistaking her as Lily Riddle in disguise.

“Nope, it’s Ellie Potter today.” Lily said before he could run off to find the manager, he looked possibly more alarmed at that.

“It’s… Eleanor Potter, today?” He parroted his eyes shifting to Severus Snape who had turned to look at her with raised eyebrows as if trying to figure out what that meant.

“Miss Potter would like to make a withdrawal from her vaults.” Severus Snape said slowly and reached in his pockets presenting a key to the goblin.

“… He had your key? Severus Snape has your key?” Judging by the use of rhetorical questions and the force of the oncoming migraine Lily felt that Wizard Lenin was feeling very insulted for her at the present moment.

“Why do you have my vault key?” Lily asked voicing Wizard Lenin’s concerns but apparently this was one of those questions you didn’t ask because the only response she got from Mr. Snape was a menacing looking glare.

One awkward cart ride through the vaults, piles of galleons that were much smaller than Lily Riddle’s piles of galleons, and an awkward ride back Lily waved goodbye to the goblins who seemed to grow more alarmed as the rumor that Eleanor Potter was really Lily Riddle spread through the bank. She had the strangest feeling that she’d just caused there to be some sort of emergency meeting among the management, as goblins could be seen glancing at her and Severus Snape and then rushing to the back room as if their lives depended on it.

“I trust you can collect the rest of your supplies on your own, I’ll meet you here in a few hours.” With that Severus Snape abandoned her in front of the bank with a pile of money and very few instructions.

“Goodbye?” But by that point he was already gone, his clothes transfigured into black wizard robes, and lost somewhere in the crowd.
“Well he’s just as distasteful as always.” Wizard Lenin commented, “I suppose it’s time to get your wand and school robes.”

So Lily and Wizard Lenin went about the rest of the day getting all the supplies on the list, Wizard Lenin suggesting various things that might be more useful than the generic supplies suggested in the letter, all of which Lily wasn’t sure why she needed.

They ended the round of errands with the purchase of her wand, a ceremony that Wizard Lenin took far more seriously than her, there was a sense of nostalgia in him as they entered Ollivanders and something religious.

“Ah, Miss Potter, I was wondering when I might see you.” The man, Ollivander she assumed, greeted her with the tinkling of a bell above the door. He looked old but still very with it, a wise sort of old that Lily respected.

“Well, it’s what all the cool kids are doing, getting their wands I mean.” She said as she walked in surveying the boxes and boxes of wands in the back of the store.

“Yes,” He said with a slight chuckle, “I suppose it is. I remember your parents coming in here, getting their first wands, and now you’re here as well.”

“Funny that way, isn’t it?” She asked with a slightly strained grin.

“I suppose we’d best get to it then.” He then brought out a tape measure and began measuring her arm and peering at her curiously.

After that he disappeared into the back and brought several boxes with him. The glitch sticks that wizards were so fond of, wands, turned out to be rather volatile. After the fifth one the store had almost burnt down a number of times.

“You sure you want to keep doing this?” She asked him wondering if it just wasn’t better to go without one altogether.

“Not to worry Miss Potter,” He said looking rather worried himself, “The wand picks the wizard just as much as the wizard picks the wand, sometimes it takes… patience.”

“Well it’s not really the patience thing it’s more that your store might actually explode next time.” Lily pointed out but he appeared to ignore that comment instead choosing to shuffle through wands in the back looking for one in particular.

Finally he returned with one, looking to Lily’s eyes fairly similar to all the others, but it appeared to agree with her because instead of flames bursting out of the end as it had in the prior cases golden sparks showered out instead.

“Interesting, that’s very interesting.” He said as a relieved smile made its way onto his face at not having his shop burnt down.

“I know, you know compared to the flames that was pretty tame.” Lily commented wondering if she should have gone with one of the more flame inducing sticks instead.

“No, no, believe me Miss Potter that is the wand for you. No, that wand’s core was donated by a phoenix who only gave out one other feather. The wand whose core that was in, your wand’s twin, gave you that.” He pointed to her forehead and the scar. “Great and terrible things, so many great and terrible things it accomplished.”
Inside her head Wizard Lenin grew uncharacteristically quiet and somber, as if he was thinking deeply on some unknown topic.

“Oh, well that’s great. Bye.” Lily said and promptly left the store letting out a breath of exhaustion now that all her supplies seemed to be in working order, the giant pile of them she had been carting around Diagon Alley.

She’d spend the next several hours glumly waiting in front of the bank waiting for Snape to reemerge from wherever he had slunk off to. If he hadn’t left with the vague promise of returning she would have just teleported back with the stuff, but as it was he might be expecting her to be lost and helpless in Diagon Alley, so lost and helpless she had to remain.

By the time he finally seemed to remember her the sun was close to setting and she had gotten several offers to help look for her parents by kindly looking strangers.

Lily and Wizard Lenin had both decided that one day they were going to kill Severus Snape slowly and painfully.

“You took your sweet time.” Lily commented as the man approached still staring glumly out into the crowd.

“What I do with my time is none of your business, Miss Potter.” The man responded, “I take it you are ready to return to your muggle home?” The way he said muggle there, as if it was an insult, well it didn’t endear him to Lily any.

“I’ve been ready for a while, not that you seem bothered by that, nope you just disappear without even mentioning your name and say ‘I’ll be back.’ Only without the sunglasses or the gun or just the general robotness of the Terminator so it just sounds lame. So yeah, it’s been fun.” She said with a slightly strained smile, she wondered if people thought they could get away with treating Eleanor Potter this way, because no one would have said that to Lily Riddle.

“Professor Snape to you, Miss Potter.” And with that he grabbed both her and the purchases she had made and teleported them back to the front of her house.

“I trust you will safely find your way to King’s Cross for the start of term.”

And with that he was gone leaving Lily, the piles of ridiculous materials, and Wizard Lenin seething in her head standing outside Number 4 Privet Drive as if nothing had happened in the first place.
A Train to Somewhere

_In which Frank wins a bet, Lily manages to strike a tenuous friendship with Ron Weasley, and Hermione Granger becomes very upset at the notion that reality doesn’t work the way she thought it did._

“I hate this place already.”

Lily was becoming less and less enthused with the idea of attending Hogwarts the more she’d heard about the place. First there’d been the frankly obnoxious visit to Diagon Alley with Snape and from there it had just gotten worse.

She’d returned to Riddle Inc before leaving for Scotland to let the employees know that she’d be reachable at Hogwarts, even though Lily Riddle was known for taking vacations without means of contacting her Lily didn’t feel like not working just to go to Hogwarts. There weren’t too many who worked for her full time, seven who were really dedicated, and a few others who were more consultants or specialists who’d be called in on an as needed basis. Generally on any given day there’d be two or three lurking around along with Frank and so it look a little organization on Lily’s part and therefore on Frank the secretary’s part as she dumped the work load onto him; he seemed strangely resigned to it at this point.

So it was standing on top of a soap box addressing a group of pale-faced, crimson-eyed, and all around shady looking young men who looked at her with varying degrees of attentiveness. No one was not paying attention, Lily Riddle had something of a reputation even among her workers, so while some might not be looking at her with the intensity of Wizard Lenin they were still watching closely.

“So, I’ve recently come to the decision to attend Hogwarts and from what I can understand apparating from Hogwarts is next to impossible. I’ll be reachable by owl, or post, or whatever and I may be able to come in on weekends but it probably won’t be regular.” She said all this with a sigh but she’d said she’d go not only to Wizard Lenin and Death but also to Snape so she figured she’d be held somewhat accountable if she just didn’t bother showing up. Also the last time she’d considered it Wizard Lenin had dutifully reminded her that not attending Hogwarts was just asking for Dumbledore to come to the house and attempt to rewire her brain and that was not acceptable.

There were a few moments of silence where they just stared at her in varying degrees of shock even from some of the more stone faced men, finally one of them, one of the more recent and as far as Lily could tell naïve employees named Friedrich spoke up, “Does she normally go to wizarding school?”

Frank seemed to shake himself out of his stupor, “No, not that I’ve ever heard of, she actually had a rather low opinion of wizarding schools…” He eyed her with speculation, looking for a moment like Wizard Lenin working on a puzzle, “Lily, I remember you inviting us to a… muggle talent show a few years back where you were entered under the name of Eleanor Potter. Is Eleanor Potter, savior of the English wizards, you?”

“Oh, well, yeah.” Lily said, she’d been surprised no one had brought it up after the whole rabbit show. She’d gotten some weird looks from everyone, but no one had said anything, Frank was the first person to even say anything about it. She’d just thought they had all forgotten about it, which was fairly reasonable, other than procuring Rabbit from nothingness it hadn’t had too big of an impact.
It was interesting seeing horror on a vampire’s face as the implications of Lily Riddle as Wizard Britain’s savior set in, it seemed they lost the capability of speech collectively for a moment, and then Frank was grinning, “I guess this means I win the bet.”

The spell seemed to be broken and there was groaning on mass as well as muffled curses, one of the other vampires, Stefan who had the air of hired muscle and general badassery stood in the air, “Goddammit you sneaky bastard she probably told you herself!”

“Well it was hardly difficult to figure out, she left a note saying the dark lord would be conveniently disposed of in 1981. What were the chances that it was done by an infant rather than Lily Riddle herself? If there ever would be a wizarding messiah then it would be Lily Riddle.” Frank looked absurdly pleased with himself, pulling out an old leather notebook and flipping through it until he found the entry he wanted. He’d never looked more the secretary to Lily than in that moment.

“Well, let’s see. I have written here that you had your quite substantial bet riding on spontaneous combustion being the cause of Tom Riddle’s unfortunate demise. Friedrich and Claude are down for Eleanor Potter being unrelated to Lily Riddle completely and yet still somehow destroying the dark lord. And well… there’s all these other explanations I’m sure you remember, I really do like the Elvis one by the way even though it’s completely incorrect. So the way I see it, it seems that I’ve managed to win the entire thing, and no one agreed with me how sad for all of you.”

“You’re such a whipped piece of shit, Frank!”

In the following eruption of arguing in various languages, most of which weren’t English, and vulgarities accompanied by various objects thrown at the cheerfully smiling Frank Lily felt hopelessly confused. She got that it was a big deal that she was Lily Riddle, or rather that Eleanor Potter was secretly Lily Riddle, but sometimes she thought everyone was taking it a bit too seriously. After she and Snape had visited Gringotts the bank had been closed the next day, the news had been all over the Daily Prophet, as the goblins decided to address what they thought of as a national emergency. But at least it made more sense than whatever this was.

She’d expected Wizard Lenin to give some sort of explanation for the behavior but judging by her increasing migraine he was too upset to think properly.

“They made a betting pool… They made a betting pool off of my demise?!” If he hadn’t been so wary of picking fights with Lily Riddle, or benefitting off of her establishments, he probably would be egging her on to slaughter all of them as it was he just pictured their heads exploding.

“Well, you see, you left us a note saying that in 1981 the dark lord would disappear but you never said how. With the whole Eleanor Potter thing we weren’t quite sure that was a legitimate explanation, some of us anyway. So we decided to make a betting pool for how it really turned out and… I guess Frank won.”

“Yes, yes I did.” Frank said and Lily felt it might have been her vision but there seemed to be this aura of happiness surrounding the man as if everything he had ever said or done in his life was justified. “Still, why the decision to go to Hogwarts? From what I remember you said it would be a complete waste of your time and all that it really would accomplish was increasing the unsuccessful assassination attempts against you.”

She expected it to be a waste of her time, she didn’t expect there to be assassination attempts, “Wait,
what?"

Frank shrugged and offered a very brief explanation which didn’t really explain anything. “Well, it is filled with wizards.”

“Lily Riddle would expect assassination attempts at a school however I’m sure we can accept her view as somewhat biased. Believe me, Hogwarts isn’t the complete waste of time you’re making it out to be and it’s not exactly crawling with murderers and fiends.” Wizard Lenin finally grumbled having calmed down enough to hold a conversation although he still seemed grossly insulted by the existence of the betting pool. She didn’t see why he was so upset, by the time they had made it he had already been burned to cinders by his own green death lasers anyway.

“Don’t bring it up.”

Lily thought about that for a moment but noticed a rather large contradiction in his reasoning, “Didn’t you go to Hogwarts?”

“That’s not the point.” He said shortly not quite failing to connect the dots but not looking into it further either.

“And doesn’t Snape, who snuck into my bedroom and worked for you chopping people into tiny bits, also work at Hogwarts? So there are a lot of murderer and fiends there.”

“If you never go to Hogwarts then we never get to chop Severus Snape into tiny pieces! More importantly, if you don’t go then I don’t get to chop Severus Snape into tiny pieces!”

Judging by the rapid increase in her headache Wizard Lenin was dead set on Hogwarts and making Severus Snape miserable. Lily decided it would be less painful to just go to the glitch school and let Wizard Lenin feel like he was getting his way.

“Eh, that’s okay, death really isn’t that much of a problem for me anyway. Besides it’s just one of things you have to do for no reason, you know?” Lily said with a sigh and a slight wave to her dumbfounded audience, “Anyway, I’ll be back later, keep up the good work.”

So that was how Lily eventually found herself standing in front of a brick wall between platforms nine and ten at King’s Cross station. Being there, in that bustling and crowded station, it seemed so wrong and bereft of Death. When she’d arrived all she could do was stare at the place, walk through it silently, and think how surreal it seemed that this place could exist in the physical world. Even Wizard Lenin, who normally despised such sentimentality, agreed that the place was haunting and that in every shadow they expected to see Death’s tall and dark form waiting for them.

“So I just run through the wall then and that’s platform nine and three quarters?” Lily asked as she looked down at her letter to confirm that it was the fractional platform rather than platform ten or even nine.

She was wondering why wizards even bothered with trains when they could just teleport to the school, Wizard Lenin said it had something to do with tradition as well as some other arguments she hadn’t really bothered listening to.

Unfortunately it’d seemed like taking the train was a requirement of going, at least for Ellie Potter, so she’d made her way to King’s Cross earlier that morning pushing along her oversized trunk that held the most ridiculous objects imaginable so that she could go to wizard school. Rabbit was perched on top of her head, looking forward unblinkingly, like some dread hat. That had gotten a few stares but she wasn’t about to leave the being from the netherworld at the Dursleys without supervision, she
had a theory that when not observed Rabbit transformed back into his basic natural form that was never to be witnessed by sentient eyes, she’d never caught him in the act but sometimes things would go missing and Rabbit would stare unblinkingly at the scene of the crime.

“That’s how it was done when I was a school boy, I realize it seems ridiculous, but it’s just best to get these things over with.” Wizard Lenin said with the equivalent of a mental shrug, Lily frowned at the brick wall thinking that it would be just like Wizard Lenin to have her run into a real brick wall at full speed.

Wizard Lenin was vaguely entertained by that notion which was not at all a good sign.

“Are you alright, dearie?” Lily turned to look over her shoulder seeing what could only be described as a gaggle of gingers. Being red headed herself Lily was used to sticking out in a crowd but to see so many at once was almost blinding sort of like being confronted by all of Riddle Incorporated in one room or all of Mrs. Figg’s cats.

A middle aged woman and five children, two of them appearing to be identical to each other, stared at her each with slightly different expressions on their faces.

“A herd of children, poor as dirt, red hair they must be Weasleys.” Wizard Lenin stated, not quite with disdain, but about as much disinterest as he gave anyone in the mortal plane.

“Ah, um, yeah… Is this brick wall really the entrance to platform nine and three quarters?” Lily asked with a small hesitant grin.

“Muggle born, dearie? They really should explain that in the letter.” The woman said her concerned expression shifting into something tender although she still looked a little dumbfounded by Rabbit’s presence. “That’s right though, all you have to do is run through the wall.”

“And don’t think of an elephant.” One of the identical, either the facsimile or the original she couldn’t tell on sight, said with a grin.

“But now that you’ve said that I have to think of an elephant. Of course it’s not a real elephant but rather the idea or image of an elephant so perhaps that doesn’t quite count. Will the gate bar me entrance if I don’t think an elephant into existence?” Lily asked somewhat confused as to why an elephant would bar admission through the gate. Maybe glitch manipulators, as pathetic as they were at manipulating glitches, were deathly afraid of elephants and the chaos they could cause.

“It’s a bad attempt at humor, you can think of an elephant as much as you want, but please don’t. I live in here and I prefer it when there’s something vaguely interesting going on, elephants aren’t one of them.” Wizard Lenin sighed, clearly he didn’t find doppelganger number one to be all that funny. For living in her brain and deriving entertainment at watching others he had rather high standards for things like humor and fashion.

Meanwhile they were all blinking and staring at her, the youngest boy’s mouth hung open a little, “Blimey.”

“Wasn’t expecting that, Forge.” Doppelganger number one said with a somewhat stunned expression on his face.

“You can say that, Gred.” Doppelganger number two countered with an identical expression.

On her head rabbit twitched slightly, an omen whose meaning Lily had never quite discovered over the past three years of his existence in the physical plane.
“… You can think of an elephant as much as you want, dearie.” The woman said with a somewhat strained expression, probably on the verge of asking how old Lily was, although adults asked that less and less as she grew older. Apparently it wasn’t quite as alarming to see an eleven year old talking the way she did as compared to a five year old.

“Oh, goody-goody, are you all going first then or should I?” She said motioning to the brick wall with a smile.

“Why don’t you give it a try?” The woman said motioning for her to go on ahead.

A running start later and Lily found herself in a very familiar setting, Death’s train lingering in the station, the very same train she had seen six years ago that had changed her life forever. Among the crowds of people she walked a little away from the entrance so as not to be run over but couldn’t tear her eyes from it. The train, Death’s train, she hadn’t realized she’d be taking that train to Hogwarts. It looked strangely beautiful.

Soon enough though the family behind her was all through the barrier the little girl clinging to the mother, the two doppelgangers grinning at each other and trying to keep up their mirror image routine, and the boy looking very eager at the sight of the train.

“It’s always exciting the first time.” The mother said, “I’m Molly Weasley, by the way and these are my children Percy, Fred, George, Ron, and Ginny.” She motioned to each of the children in turn, “Ron here is your age, his first year at Hogwarts, he can sit next to you on the train. Ginny will be going to Hogwarts next year.”

At this the boy beamed and the girl looked very depressed although why she would look depressed about not going to Hogwarts was beyond Lily. As far as Lily could tell not going to Hogwarts was far superior than actually going to Hogwarts.

There was some other conversation there that Lily didn’t really pay attention to, still distracted by the sight of the train, and slowly but surely the others drifted away until it was just Lily and the youngest boy in a compartment on the train. Even when on all she could do was stare at her surroundings in awe thinking that she was truly on the train, seeing the inside of it, and taking it to elsewhere.

“I’m Ron, I mean I think my mum introduced me kind of, but I never got to hear your name.”

The eagerness he had to talk with her was more than a little strange, as if he was very excited by the prospect of friendship. All the children she knew, by the time they became interesting enough to hold conversations with, had been convinced for years that she was Dudley’s crazy freak cousin. She hadn’t minded, she’d never had any real interest in children her age, but all the same she’d wondered what that vaunted friendship was really like. Even Wizard Lenin said he had once had a friend.

She held out her hand to shake his, “Ellie Potter.”

(Wizard Lenin had stated, and she agreed, that the world would be simpler if she simply introduced herself as Eleanor Potter even if Ellie Potter was more of a role to play than anything else. Sitting in her own mind as she slept he had looked strangely distant as he had said it staring out with pale eyes into the horizon, “They never understand the need to transform or change, they wouldn’t grasp why Ellie wasn’t good enough, or why it wasn’t even a name to begin with.”)

At her name Ron’s eyes became wide and his mouth opened, “Cor, are you really Ellie Potter?”

“What’s a cor?” Ellie asked Wizard Lenin in her head.
“I have no idea nor do I care.”

“Hey do you have the scar, from you know when...When You Know Who...” He didn’t finish but Ellie knew what he meant, she shifted Rabbit slightly on her head and lifted red curls to reveal the lightning bolt.

“You mean this thing?” Lily asked, she never really looked at it too often herself, other than being Wizard Lenin’s land of residence and the source of her migraines it wasn’t all that useful. She felt a bit like a thing on display and Wizard Lenin didn’t appreciate Ron’s words much more than she did; he always a bit unhappy whenever anyone brought up that night he wound up in her brain.

“Wow, do you... do you remember anything from it?” He asked looking thoroughly awed by her presence.

There were certain things Lily couldn’t remember, when she was very young things got fuzzy, she wasn’t entirely sure she was capable of thought back then. Her earliest distinct memories, of being Ellie Potter before Lily Potter, was around when she was three but before then there were only impressions, “Not really, it’s all kind of a blur back then, I suppose that’s what happens when your sentience is still in development.”

Of course Wizard Lenin remembered exactly what had happened but she had a feeling that wasn’t exactly what Ron had meant.

“...Oh, right...” Ron said looking a little thrown off, “I guess that’s a good thing then.”

“I don’t know if I’d go so far to say it’s good, bad, or purely neutral it is an irrefutable statement of reality and you can take it or leave it as you will.” Lily stated as she began unpacking the trunk and inspecting the various text books she’d been forced to buy Rabbit was still perched precariously on her head never slipping in spite of the fact that she was almost falling into the trunk. Wizard Lenin had thrown in his own recommendation of books, those were vaguely interesting, but they all seemed rather useless and inaccurate. Wizards, she decided, really knew nothing about manipulating glitches and it was kind of sad.

“Oh, yeah... I guess...” Ron said staring at her as she flipped through the books one by one, trying to see if she missed anything interesting which it didn’t seem like it so far even with her scribbled notes on each of the pages.

“...So, what’s your rabbit’s name?” Ron asked clearly attempting to regain her attention and shift them to a different topic of conversation. Lily looked up from the text, taking in his somewhat confused expression, and then decided that she wasn’t gaining anything out of analyzing him so she went back to reading.

“Rabbit, of course Rabbit isn’t really a rabbit. He’s a creature from beyond the abyss who has been coerced into rabbit form. In truth I have no idea what he is or what his original form looks like, I think it’d be a very bad idea to find out.” Lily said with a grin causing Ron to pale and look at Rabbit and his unblinking dark eyes and then back to Lily.

“Lily, I do believe you’re traumatizing poor Weasley before he even reaches the castle. As entertaining as it is to set you loose on the unsuspecting masses do try to keep yourself in check, if you terrify them into submission now what fun will you have later?” Wizard Lenin said and she could almost feel the cold shark like grin on his features, the scent of blood heavy in the water. He was enjoying himself far too much to make her comfortable.

“... Right.” Ron said after regaining some speech, “That’s, um, well...” He trailed off and appeared
to decide that he didn’t believe her, which was unwise considering it was Rabbit, but perhaps it was better for his psyche not to know about the things that went bump in the night, “I have a rat, well he used to be Percy’s, his name is Scabbers.” Ron motioned to the fat and diseased looking rat he had brought with him which was currently munching on candies that had spilled onto the seat.

They watched him eat for a little while and Ron clearly felt the need to justify, “He’s pretty much useless.”

“I see.” Lily really did see, the rat did look singularly useless, Rabbit didn’t exactly do much in his rabbit form but he was miles ahead of Scabbers.

Lily was beginning to think her original opinion of children being boring was correct, no matter how Death felt about it, these wizarding pseudo glitch manipulating children really weren’t that different from their normal counterparts.

Ron did seem determined though, he brought out his wand, “My brothers, you met them earlier, Fred and George said that there’s a spell to turn him yellow. You want to see it?”

Lily looked at the rat, she didn’t think turning him yellow would make him less useless but she shrugged, “Sure, yellow’s a good color.”

Just before he started the yellowing process the door opened revealing a pudgy shy looking boy and an overbearing bushy haired girl, “Hi, we’re looking for Neville’s toad Trevor and… Oh are you doing magic?”

The girl apparently took that as an invitation to enter the compartment and immediately sat down next to Lily pulling the boy, Neville, with her. Something about the name Neville sparked immediate interest in Wizard Lenin, Lily found him focused singularly on the boy, taking in his features and attributes and dissecting them for further analysis. Wizard Lenin thought something was very important about Neville, but he wasn’t sharing the details.

“I’m Hermione Granger by the way, I was very excited when I got my Hogwarts letter, I’d never known about magic before all this. I’ve been practicing spells though, they’ve all worked for me so far, and I’ve been reading all the text books too so I won’t be behind.” The girl prattled like a steam roller and for a moment Lily wondered if that was what she sounded like.

“Multiply that by ten and you come closer, if she’s a steam roller you’re a hurricane, you’re a bit out of this girl’s league Lily.” Wizard Lenin cut in but it was distracted his mind was still unnaturally focused on the boy.

“Right, well, I guess it’s time for the spell then.” Lily said not bothering to introduce her and Ron since Hermione’s eyes seemed so focused on the wand. Neville was looking out of the compartment, probably thinking about finding Trevor the missing toad, but was too shy to point out to his new friend that he’d rather be doing that instead.

Ron said a little rhyme swishing his wand at the rat and then nothing happened. It was all rather anticlimactic, “I’m going to a glitch school for this?”

“Don’t be daft. That wasn’t actually a spell, his brothers most likely made it up so he could have this exact moment of humiliation.” Wizard Lenin said, “Most people aren’t like you Lily, they need spells and a wand to do magic. To them it is not simply will and perspective that brings thought into reality.”

It was an inconceivable idea, to be so crippled as to depend on a stick and gibberish, these people
were so limited.

Ron grinned awkwardly up at his audience, “Um... I guess it didn’t work.”

“Are you sure that was a spell? It doesn’t seem like a very good one.” Hermione said with a huff, which was rather funny in Lily’s opinion since all these spells seemed a bit like the instant ramen of glitches, you seemed to pay for what you got.

“He shouldn’t need the spell; the universe hardly splinters at the threat of language hurled against it. You just didn’t want him to turn yellow badly enough, which is fine because Scabbers looks a bit alarmed at the whole idea of changing color anyway.” Lily said with a shrug pointing out the twitching rat on the pile of candy, “Glitches are not controlled by such pesky human ideas like words; that would be dumb.”

They stared at her with varying degrees of disbelief, Ron seemed to be getting a handle on her language but wasn’t quite sure whether to decide if he liked it or not, Neville looked vaguely confused, and Hermione looked offended and confused in the same moment.

“I’ve never heard that written anywhere in any of the books and I’ve read all of the ones we’ve been given so far.” Hermione said unusually affronted for someone who just learned about glitches and then she seemed to realize that neither Ron nor Lily had introduced themselves, “Oh I’m sorry I never learned your names.”

“Ron Weasley.” Ron said with a little bit of a sneer put off by the girl’s insulting of his not-spell and the whole issue of his possible glitch impotence.

“Ellie Potter.” Lily said and on cue both the girl’s and the other boy’s eyes lit up and they stared at her. She was wondering if she was going to have to start getting used to that expression, it was a little better than ‘that’s nice dear’ but not much.

“Really?” The girl asked, “You’re in books you know, like Rise and Fall of the Dark Arts. I heard you were on the train, but I didn’t know if I’d get to meet you. They say all sorts of things about you defeating You Know Who.”

“I’m told the death of Lord Hindenburg is rather infamous, I’d rather not talk about it though, it always gives me a headache.” That and Wizard Lenin didn’t seem thrilled with the prospect of children casually speaking of his demise.

“...Lord Hindenburg?” Hermione asked looking a bit confused to which Lily nodded. “Well he is the French lord of Airplane Disasters and since everyone seems to get so spazzy about the non-translated version I just go with the English.”

There was nothing that could clear a crowd and cut conversation like shouting the word Voldemort in public wizarding spaces. Whenever she needed to get into Gringotts on any particularly busy day it always seemed to do the trick. However for normal conversation it was considered fairly taboo.

The three of them blinked at her then, the two boys looking hopelessly lost, the girl slightly less so but still somewhat confused. Finally the girl seemed to snap out of it, “Right, what did you mean about spells, everything I’ve read says your dead wrong.”

“That’s because everything you’ve read is dead wrong.” Lily said with a sigh, “Believe me, I’ve read it too, these people have no idea what manipulating glitches is all about.”

“Manipulating glitches?”
“Well the substance of the universe is falling apart, that’s why magic exists, it’s a glitch.” Lily said with a shrug, she really didn’t get why no one believed that, not even Wizard Lenin who had seen all the signs along with her.

Hermione seemed to take this as a personal attack, “The universe is not… Where did you even hear this stuff, did you just make all this up?”

“Well no one ever told it to me… So I suppose in a manner of speaking.” Lily said which strangely enough seemed to outrage the girl even more.

She was turning red, her anger a physical symptom now, her buck teeth grinding as the boy next to her looked slightly concerned. Finally the boy said, “Look, I’m gonna continue looking for Trevor so…”

The girl stood dramatically with him, “That’s right, we’ve got to look for Trevor, sorry Neville I forgot all about him for a moment I’m just so… Everything you’ve said is wrong!” Were her parting words to Lily and with that the pair of them strode out the door.

“Well, that was weird.” Ron summarized.

“Agreed.”

Wizard Lenin had a different take on the whole thing, his eye was still strained on Neville who was keeping pace with Hermione as they knocked at the next compartment, “Keep an eye on that boy looking for the toad, Neville Longbottom. He may prove important later.”

Lily had barely even noticed him in the girl’s overbearing presence but if Wizard Lenin said so who was she to disagree? Wizard Lenin had that quiet dangerous intensity, the kind he got when he was truly thinking, where his eyes seemed frozen over and so very sharp. Lily turned her attention back to Ron, “If you really want him yellow…”

He cut her off, “No, that’s okay, thanks though for all that…” By all that he probably meant offending away the overbearing girl Hermione which hadn’t necessarily been intentional but wasn’t a complete disappointment.

They sat in silence for a few moments before Ron thought of a question, “… Did you really mean all that about the universe and magic and…”

“Glitches?” She prompted for him.

“Yeah, those…” Ron said nodding.

“I generally say what I mean, it’s hard enough to communicate as it is, if I started lying well there’d be no getting anywhere with anyone. Still, Ron, Ragnarök is a process that takes millennia so the end is hardly the end.” Lily explained with a shrug, flipping through her book with a frown, noting the fact that there really was nothing interesting in them at all.

Ron looked at her as if he didn’t quite believe her but was willing to go along with it for the moment anyway. She was used to that look by now, even from those close to her like Death and Wizard Lenin, it still was rather disheartening to see it.

Before the next silence lasted too long the door opened again to reveal some punk who was trying to steal Lily Riddle’s style. At least that’s what she assumed as the small silver haired boy stood in the doorway attempting to be menacing with two overgrown boys standing behind him. He lacked the sense of danger though to make it work, instead he just looked kind of ridiculous. His two apparent
minions were interesting though, taking a closer look at them they seemed to be flat representations of humanity as if they weren’t quite real. Replications, those were true golems at work, and everyone had said it couldn’t be done.

“No, that’s just Crabbe and Goyle. They’ve been serving the Malfoy family as goons for generations now and they are unfortunately quite human.” Wizard Lenin cut in before she could get her hopes up in the plans to get Wizard Lenin out of her head and into the real world.

Lily was unconvinced, staring at them, they seemed to be robot minions who had been highly developed to loom menacingly behind the white haired boy. Judging by their expressions this seemed to be the most reasonable explanation.

“It is not the most reasonable explanation.”

“I heard Ellie Potter was on this train,” The boy drawled with his robot minions looming behind to add to the effect, “And I thought I’d come and see where she’d gotten off to.”

“…Hi.” Lily said with a half-hearted wave wondering just how these people kept finding and hearing about her, Wizard Lenin had told her to expect it but Ellie Potter in her own way was more infamous than Lily Riddle but without the terror that accompanied being a drug lord people became ten times more obnoxious.

“What are you doing here, Malfoy?!” Ron started without introduction looking angry at the mere thought of the wanna be pimp’s mere presence.

“Red hair and no manners, you must be a Weasley.” Malfoy sniffed at Ron, also seemingly offended by his very presence and then directed his gaze at Lily but then seemed caught by the fact that Rabbit was perched on her head.

He stared at it for a few moments before looking down at her and attempting to remember his place in his speech, “…Surely you can’t be impressed with Weasley’s company, Potter? And why is there a rabbit on your head?”

“Hm, what oh Rabbit? Well he’s not really a rabbit. He’s a being from the outer abyss that probably lives off of a diet of souls, he doesn’t really eat anything physical, and has chosen to take the form of a rabbit when I summoned him into this realm. As for why he’s on my head, I think he likes it, it’s also best to keep tabs on him as when unobserved he most likely reverts back to his natural state. His natural state is bad. Also while we’re doing the whole talking thing can I ask you where you got the robot minions? I’ve been trying to build golems and or robots for ages and while yours are not quite up to my par of realism they’re very good.”

The three stared at her for a few moments, the blonde at a seeming loss for words, his robot minions incapable of speech as it hadn’t been programmed, and Ron was looking at her with something resembling awe as if he was just growing to appreciate her presence.

“Well you would have to be as mad as a hatter to sit with a Weasley. Clearly the killing curse addled your brains. You’d better hope insanity doesn’t run in families Weasley or your children will be known for more than just being blood traitors.” The boy scoffed, “Come on, Crabbe, Goyle.”

With that the trio left from whence they came back into the bowels of the train. Lily, for her own part, was wondering where these random wandering eleven year olds kept coming from seeking out the holy grail that was Ellie Potter.

“You know, for someone trying to look like a pimp he has a lot to learn, that was not a good
recruitment pitch.” Lily said because really it was like he had barely even trying. Ron laughed at the statement, a startled sound as if he hadn’t quite expected it himself.

“Ellie, you’re really not that bad… or crazy.” Ron said with a grin as if relieved to come to the conclusion on the question of her sanity, “I’m planning on getting into Gryffindor it’s the best house, maybe you can too, and then we can be in the same house.”

“Maybe.” She said a little dazed at his expression, so this was friendship she thought, and almost unwillingly she smiled slightly back at him.
The Choice

_In which Lily is not sorted into Gryffindor, Wizard Lenin begins scheming once again after a significant break, and the sorting hat begins to show more than a few performance issues._

It seemed, given the stares of the students on her as she sat on a stool with a hat on her head where Rabbit had previously been, that this moment was the culmination of Eleanor Potter’s entire existence. Unfortunately for them, and perhaps for the idea that was Eleanor Potter, Ellie Potter didn’t really exist and never had. For Lily, it was all a bit anticlimactic, as it always was.

“Oh dear,” The hat on her head said, “This won’t do at all.”

She fully agreed with the talking hat and she found that a telling statement in and of itself.

The rest of the trip to Hogwarts had been uneventful, she hadn’t seen the pimp in training or his robot minions although she had looked for them you didn’t see minion robots like that every day, mostly she’d stuck next to Ron as he’d prattled on about the glories of Gryffindor the house his family had been sorted into for generations and that he was fully expected to get into.

According to Ron the breakdown of the four houses was quite simple, Gryffindor was the best, Slytherin was full of evil psychopaths that ate babies, Ravenclaw was for nerds, and Hufflepuff was eh. It seemed like a simpler explanation than _Hogwarts a History_ had given and since Lily didn’t really like overthinking the pseudo glitch manipulating society she was willing to take him at his words even if she could feel Wizard Lenin disagreeing wordlessly in her head.

“You have to get into Gryffindor.” He’d concluded with a bright grin, restating himself from earlier that day with more confidence.

“Well if I have to then I suppose I have no real choice.” That’s what necessity was after all.

Stepping off the train he frowned at her a bit, as if that wasn’t quite the answer he had wanted from her, but he didn’t say anything about it. Instead they walked over to the giant shouting firs’ years firs’ years. At least, she thought he was a giant, he was certainly big enough looking quite wider and taller than even uncle Vernon. He also had an impressive beard which just gave off that giant feel to him; if he had been wearing plaid and had a blue ox been around she wouldn’t have been surprised if he was Paul Bunyan.

“He’s employed, at a school filled with children, you know the more decisions I see Dumbledore make the more questionable I find his whole thought process.” Wizard Lenin commented inside her head and through her brain she saw images of herself locked starving in a cupboard, professor Snape entering her bedroom and later accompanying her in an ill-fitting suit, and finally this giant of a man flashing through her head.

She eyed the giant warily then, she didn’t see any skulls, and so far he hadn’t talked about grinding the bones of Englishmen into dust so she wasn’t sure if she should be concerned or not. Although, considering her deathless status as Death of the universe she supposed it wouldn’t be her who she should be concerned for it. Ron would be the one who would stay digested.

“Hagrid here was found to be responsible for the petrification of several students and the death of one in 1943 by raising and setting loose a giant, intelligent, man eating spider in the school that he affectionately called Aggy. And he’s a half-giant, not a giant, so eating Englishmen probably comes
“Was he responsible?” Lily asked catching Wizard Lenin’s clever wording in his explanation, found responsible was not the same as responsible after all.

“Had the spider continued to grow unmolested in the castle walls I’m certain there would have been several dead students by the end of the year, as it was though no, the spider never got a chance. Hagrid had the misfortune of playing the role of Occam’s Razor, he provided the simplest and most reasonable explanation for the terror stalking the walls, and the wizards took him gratefully.”

It was left unsaid but Lily highly suspected that it was Wizard Lenin who had, at least in some manner, been responsible for the events instead. However being in the business of drugs, blood, and money herself she was hardly one to judge and besides one could hardly have a revolution without violence.

As she passed by the half giant with Ron he took a look at her and beamed, “If it isn’t little Ellie Potter!”

“Oh, hi, do we know each other?” Lily asked, she hadn’t remembered running into him during the whole Diagon Alley thing and other than that she had never really gone into the shopping district as Ellie.

“It’s Hagrid! I knew you when you were just a baby, carried you in a motorbike to your aunt and uncle, you were so small then.” He sniffed dramatically, as if the very memory of her as an infant was touching.

“Oh, neat, I don’t really remember things from that early.” She said as he continued to beam at her but it didn’t seem as if he expected her to reminisce with him and instead nodded. Next to her Ron shifted impatiently as if waiting to reclaim her attention so he could continue talking about the troll they had to slaughter in order to be sorted.

“Who’s your bunny friend?” Hagrid asked looking at Rabbit still sitting on top of her head as if he was an adorable little creature rather than a terror from beyond the universe, then again Hagrid had apparently once had a man eating pet for a spider so perhaps he was merely unconcerned.

“This is Rabbit, he’s not actually a rabbit though, he’s… Something else.” Given the reaction of everyone else so far she felt it would be best to keep the explanation of Rabbit short. Hagrid nodded, not in understanding, but as if he felt nodding was necessary.

“Well, he’s got to go to the school with your trunk and everything else, he’ll be just fine.”

“That,” Lily said flatly, “Would be a singularly bad idea.”

Hagrid pursed his lips, “I know it’s hard to stay away from your friends…”

“Rabbit is not a friend,” She interrupted, “And the consequences of leaving him unmonitored are beyond even my imagination.”

She didn’t manage to convince him though and soon enough Rabbit was off her head and staring back at her with cold black eyes from atop her trunk looking like the ancient and terrible being he truly was. She wondered if she should warn them that Hogwarts was unlikely to be standing by the time they got there, if Rabbit was travelling on ahead. However none of them had listened to her warnings thus far, so she decided she’d let their future be a surprise.

Other than that the journey had been fairly boring, there had been boats, lanterns, castles, and all
sorts of things but nothing of any real significance. Her only real surprise was that the castle was somehow still standing and populated even with Rabbit sent faithfully on ahead, as far as she could tell, no damage had been wrought so far.

So it seemed that Ellie Potter’s life had reached its first climax with an old singing hat on her head and hundreds of eyes on her small black robed form.

The hat talked a bit like Wizard Lenin, not out loud but in her head, the difference was that it lacked inflection. It had some shallow resemblance to emotion but it lacked Wizard Lenin’s undertone of unspoken thought and emotion, it seemed flat in comparison. A program, she decided, a very sophisticated program but it was artificial intelligence none the less.

“Don’t, please, stop thinking.” The hat said haltingly, “It makes the process very difficult if you think.”

“I don’t think I can, not think I mean. Besides I sort of like being sentient, being resorted to the Dursley status would be almost sad, I think.” She commented but the hat had not been programmed well enough to respond to such queries.

“I think that perhaps our combined presence is a bit much. It was only designed to sort one head at a time after all.” Wizard Lenin commented with hesitance, she could feel the gears in his head turning, as if he was slowly being drawn to the conclusion that she had just broken the sorting hat.

“Surely it doesn’t make that much of a difference, all it has to do is shout out a word.”

She could almost see Wizard Lenin, in his usual black and red, shrugging slightly with a bemused expression, “Spells and enchantments aren’t as flexible as your glitches, they are designed for certain conditions and perform very well within those conditions, however as with a program situations that were not accounted for can crash the magic causing it to… malfunction is the word I suppose. As with memory charms, and I suspect any charms having to do with the mind, the arithmancy used to design this hat did not take into account a mind such as yours where there is more than one consciousness present. I doubt the founders dreamed such a thing was possible when they designed the stupid thing.”

The hat did not say “error” after that explanation but she could tell it was close to saying it, it seemed very distracted on her head, darting between her and Wizard Lenin in confusion. She also wondered when Wizard Lenin had learned so much about programming since he had forbidden her to even look at the books. If he had known so much about it she didn’t know why he was so touchy when she suggested his robot form, like Robocop only cooler.

“Robocop, only cooler, that perfectly summarizes why I will not allow you to design and create a body for me using robotics.” He responded shortly, as if that very name gravely insulted him.

“Doesn’t it have a default or something, an else clause?” Lily wondered with a sigh as they continued to sit there in silence, she could feel the room going quiet, as if the long and drawn out process was simply adding more tension to the monumental event.

“I doubt it; for one thing it would be highly unethical for the founders to have labelled one house as being the default, although many would argue that this is Hufflepuff’s function. They also probably never considered that they’d run into this problems, eleven year olds no matter how complicated they are, aren’t you.” Wizard Lenin concluded.

So they sat there, the hat still on her head, slowly but surely losing the free memory space to communicate via language with her and instead appearing stuck on some infinite loop of darting
between her and Wizard Lenin wondering which one was the bona fide student to be sorted. She was starting to wonder if the thing would ever recover.

In her head Wizard Lenin was becoming almost philosophical, thinking back to that night his body had been burned to cinders by green death lasers, in his mind’s eye she saw herself as she had been as a five year old; a thin, bright-haired, and very odd little girl who had bled power as if it was the most natural thing in the world. Even then, though he had not thought it at the time, even then she had never looked truly human.

If a dark lord could not touch her how had they expected a hat to fare?

“All we have to do is just shout a house, right, do we even need the hat?” Lily asked once it seemed as if far too much time and more had passed. Most of the children had been under for a few seconds, the long ones had been under for maybe half of a minute, Lily’s time was extending far past any of these.

“I suppose, it doesn’t seem as if anyone is going to do it for you.” Something in Wizard Lenin’s mind sparked, something that had been still for a long time, and gears began to turn once again.

“Alright, then, what are my choices again?”

She lifted the hat slightly so she could stare more easily into the sea of students marking the different tables as Wizard Lenin offered explanation for each, “The green and silver table with the very wealthy and elitist looking children is Slytherin. It is known for ambition, cunning, and cleverness however this is only what is known for. It actually tends to house either the racist government elite who have been conditioned to follow in their father’s footsteps or else the abused and desperate children who grow up only knowing their own ruthlessness as a guide.”

After a pause Wizard Lenin reflected and said, “Given that it was my house as a school boy I would say that it’s the best of the four.”

Her eyes flicked to the right and settled on a table featuring blue and bronze students who were looking at her with a little more anticipation than the last table had. “Ravenclaw is known for housing intelligent and curious students, those inclined to become academics. I never had any particular problem with Ravenclaws, however academics without purpose was never my inclination.”

She’d only just looked at Hufflepuff before Wizard Lenin cut in, “Hell would freeze over before you would belong in Hufflepuff, don’t even bother looking.”

Finally her eyes rested on that table of red and gold, red was a good color, it was Wizard Lenin’s color at the end of things as well as her own hair color. At the table she could see the rest of the Weasley gaggle that she had met at the station as well as Neville Longbottom and Hermione Granger. “I doubt you could be a Gryffindor if you tried.”

“Why not? It’s just a word after all.” Lily said and it was expected of her, as Ron had pointed out, it seemed the eyes that looked at her constantly looked at Gryffindor.

“Gryffindor is supposed to represent honor, nobility, valor, and heroism; words that you can’t even comprehend because their subjects are so alien to you. What it does represent, what it has transformed into, is a house of hooligans who are constantly attempting to prove themselves to be more than they were meant to be and failing hopelessly; the incarnation of youthful stupidity and foolishness. Lily, having lived in your head for ten years now, I can tell you that Gryffindor escapes you in every capacity.” Wizard Lenin said.
He was taking his position of sorting hat very seriously, she found herself thinking, or perhaps he had something against Gryffindor. He didn’t seem to like it, looking at them, but it wasn’t so much the idea of the house although he found such things like honor and nobility to be wastes of time as much as she did. No, she saw that when he looked at them, all he could see were hypocrites who thought themselves morally superior than the rest of the world based on the words of a talking hat.

For that alone her path to Gryffindor was closed, and perhaps he was right, because there were things she couldn’t understand that even Wizard Lenin could grasp. Honor, valor, heroism these things were byproducts of her actions but they were not the actions themselves.

“No, I’m afraid Lily there’s only one house for you if we’re going to do this honestly.” In her head an image of a younger Wizard Lenin appeared, a green and silver tie on his next, and pale blue eyes burning ahead with all the determination and dissatisfaction of the proletariat.

“Really? Slytherin?” She looked back over at them, she didn’t eat children, so she didn’t see how she fit Ron’s criteria of Slytherin.

“Lily, if you aren’t sorted into Slytherin then Slytherin has no reason to exist. Manipulation is second nature to you, you lack cunning only because you have no use for it, I think it’s clear from your actions regarding everything in this universe that there is no other place for you.”

That was true enough, she supposed, most of her life was spent coercing the Dursleys through operant conditioning as well as sometimes classic conditioning into giving her what she wanted. Drug lording was certainly an art form in getting junkies to pay their bills on time. So she supposed it was somewhat true that her life did seem to revolve in getting the uncooperative obstacles, that took the form of people, out of her way but even so she felt as if something was lacking in that.

She also felt that Wizard Lenin was scheming. He wasn’t looking at the headmaster but his thoughts were more on the old man than they were on Lily’s future house. Wizard Lenin felt that Dumbledore fully expected, and desired, his girl who lived to be a Gryffindor or perhaps even a Hufflepuff and would be highly unnerved to have her within reach of the Malfoys and the other pureblood families who had once joined Wizard Lenin’s revolution. It would be easier, to get the revolution rolling once again if Wizard Lenin had access to these wealthy influential children and to have access to them then Lily need access to them as well.

They’d be much more receptive to a girl who lived who did not follow all the rules of the political faction known as the light.

“You want me to recruit the mini pimp?” Lily asked wondering what possible use he could have with him, unless he really was considering his robot golem minions.

“Mini pimp, as you call him, is exceedingly wealthy and his father practically owns the government. The government Lily Riddle doesn’t own that is, he certainly owns the only reputable paper in magical Britain and thus most of the public’s opinions. Taking the country is much easier when you have money and a good newspaper behind you.” Wizard Lenin cut in, mildly annoyed that she had been snooping in on his thoughts. She surveyed the Slytherin table, they all looked kind of small to support a revolution, even if she wanted to recruit for Wizard Lenin.

She wasn’t sure why he wanted her to do it anyway, he was very protective of his movement, and she’d always assumed that he’d want to do his own speeches and recruiting.

“That’s not the point.”

“Really? I kind of thought it was the point.”
“No.” He said shortly, “The point is that it’s a chance to see what they’ll make of a wrench in their plans, the best way to know your enemy is to see how they twitch when they’re in trouble. And besides, if you remember, it appears that Severus Snape is the head of Slytherin’s house and it will be much easier to make him suffer if we have close access to him as a student in his house.”

Well, she couldn’t say no to an argument like that.

The hat seemed to have almost lost all processing ability in the meantime but she supposed it was worth nudging it to see if it was still functioning correctly, “Yo, hat, we’ve come to a decision. You can shout, Slytherin, or not, you know whatever you feel like doing.”

The hat wasn’t responding, “Lenin, I think we broke the hat.”

“You broke the hat Lily.” Wizard Lenin corrected stiffly reminding her that he had once attended this school and his sorting had hardly resulted in a broken hat.

“Well, it’s just a hat.” Lily said, she’d fixed a lot of things, some very complicated. Houses, doors, stoves, what was a hat in comparison to those.

“It’s not just a… Oh why do I even bother? Go ahead and try, who knows, the result will certainly be more interesting than the original was.”

With Wizard Lenin’s permission she closed her eyes and concentrated, focusing on that feel of splintering in the air around her, of the universe in flux and giving it the vision of a talking hat that resembled thought but did not truly own it.

“SLYtherIN!” The thing shouted, on cue.

“There we go, problem solved.” She stood with a grin and placed a hat on the chair before realizing that the room was still silent each and every one in the room staring at her in fascinated horror as if they had just seen a great airplane disaster and had not yet come to terms with the dead people falling out of the sky.

“Just keep walking.” Was Wizard Lenin’s advice.

So she walked purposefully down to the green and silver table, each member staring at her with open mouths, as if they still couldn’t quite believe she was walking towards them. “Hey, hey, hey everybody. I have completed the great trial of having a talking hat on my head and thus have entered this fine establishment of glitch manipulation and thus have brought honor and glory to my family.”

“What the hell is Potter doing here?” A rather bulky eleven year old with dark eyes and thin hair said with a frown.

“The hat shouted a word. I wasn’t aware that there was any other prerequisite, if there are trolls that need slaying then I can and will slay them if that’s what you require.” Lily explained taking a seat across from him and next to the mini pimp; she smiled at her new house mates who were showing no move to smile back. Strange, that had always been the polite course of action to take, perhaps she had been wrong on that as well as it was her cheerful smile made them exceedingly uncomfortable.

“Well, clearly Potter, knows the best house to pick, Nott.” The mini pimp said coming to her defense slowly as if trying to decide if he was pleased or not that she was sitting next to him. He turned to her then with raised eyebrows, “Trolls?”

“I heard it was a possibility, however given the lack of blood and dead children I thought that it might have gone out of fashion.” She said with a shrug, as far as she could tell unlike what Ron had
said, the hat was the end all be all.

The mini pimp regarded her for a few moments, looking as if he wished to comment, and then looked away and back towards the sorting. The hat, as good as it worked for Lily, was appearing to have some trouble working correctly.

For the first couple students after her it seemed to work fine, shouting Gryffindor, Slytherin, Ravenclaw, or Hufflepuff as necessary couple students after her it shouted a new house, “DEFAULT!”

They all stared at the student on the chair, a shivering thing looking horrified at the prospect of being in the dreaded Default house.

“Default?” She heard from across the table.

“Well, it does need an else clause, otherwise the enchantments would crash and the thing would break. Really, it’s only reasonable.” Lily explained although she was wondering if she should, wizards weren’t very reasonable creatures, and she doubted they’d like the idea that she broke their fancy hat.

“There’s no Default house, what does that even mean?” A girl whose face looked a bit like a pug said in a whining tone as if the very idea of a Default offended her.

Lily was wondering why it had to mean anything; Default was clearly Default, as it was she was wondering if she couldn’t redo her sorting and switch to Default instead of Slytherin it seemed much more exclusive and therefore cooler than the other houses. The fact that it had halted the entire sorting ceremony made it seem very important. Professor McGonagall was staring down at the red faced and crying little girl who thought she had failed some sort of life altering exam in stunned shock and finally seemed to reach some decision sending the girl rushing off to Hufflepuff. No one said a word to contradict this action and the Hufflepuff table started a forced sort of clapping when they realized the girl was coming to them.

“I guess Hufflepuff is the default house after all.” Wizard Lenin commented drily in her head as if this was what he suspected all along.

“I should have gone to Default, look how underappreciated their awesomeness is.” Lily commented to Wizard Lenin, the little Default student was trying to choke back tears through a smile at her new table, and pretend like the whole thing never happened.

“There is no Default, Lily. Be happy in Slytherin, torment Snape, it’s why you’re here after all.” Wizard Lenin added when he realized that Default not existing wasn’t enough of an argument for Lily, as it was even with the prospect of tormenting professor Snape she was still drawn to the house that didn’t have a banner or table and was causing McGonagall and every other professor to look at the sorting hat dubiously.

That was the sort of reputation that Lily Riddle had, the kind that made everyone stop what they were doing and swivel their heads, where she walked into a bank with aviators and a jig in her step and five managers were running to her at once with detailed reports of all her accounts. If Lily Riddle had gone to Hogwarts she would have gone to Default, the best house there never was.

“Is it too late to switch?” Lily asked the table causing them all to glare at her as if she had just spat on their mothers in the street.

“Slytherin too dark for you Potter?!” Nott spat with a dark look in his eyes. He might have said
something else but they were all clapping to welcome some girl, Romilda Vane, into the fold. As they were sitting she responded.

“No, it’s perfectly well lit, it’s just well… Default sounds so much cooler.”

“Cooler?!” The mini pimp spluttered in offense, “It isn’t even a house!”

“That’s not what the sorting hat says, and that thing does seem to be the authority on this sorting business.” Lily noted drily and if anything this seemed to offend her new housemates even more, mini pimp slamming his hands on the table and attempting to look intimidating with his two minions looming behind him to add effect. Nott’s sneer became more pronounced and would be dangerous if it wasn’t on an eleven year old’s face, and the pug faced girl’s face was turning a Vernon Dursley shade of red.

Their little Mexican Standoff was interrupted by the introduction of a final member to their house, one Blaise Zabini, and with it the students who had been sitting near her slowly but surely moved away so that she was surrounded by the familiar bubble known as isolation. She had known that bubble well in her school days, it seemed Hogwarts wasn’t that different after all.

She turned to survey the staff table, most members were still looking at the hat with raised eyebrows, whispering to each other as if trying to decide whether or not they should do something about it. Severus Snape was staring straight at her, death in his eyes like the mangy black crow that he was, and Lily gave him a small salute and his hand that was holding a goblet of wine clenched. Her eyes travelled down the line, next to Snape was a man twitchy enough to be a junky wearing a turban that looked rather ridiculous, it seemed every loud noise had him jumping out of his seat and looking around for the source. Finally they came to rest on the esteemed headmaster, the ultimate source of Wizard Lenin’s frustration, a man in bright yellow robes looking like Santa Clause on a serious diet.

“Albus Dumbledore.” Wizard Lenin finished for her, and for a moment it seemed as if Albus Dumbledore was staring right at her as he stood, but soon enough his eyes were turning to the room as a whole.

The room fell silent under his gaze without him even having to say a word. “Thank you all, welcome to Hogwarts. For those of you new and old there are a few rules to go over this year. One is that the Forbidden Forest is forbidden, as implied by the name. Another is that the locked corridor on the third floor leads to certain death, if you feel the need to meet certain death you may trespass as you please, but if you wish to leave I advise leaving that particular door be. The sorting hat will be inspected for next year’s ceremony. With that, I give you these final words. Nitwick, blubber, tweak, DEFAULT. Thank you.”

He sat back down leaving Lily as well as everyone else to stare back at him.

“Fool,” She heard the mini pimp who now sat a decent ways away from her, “My father says it’s only a matter of time until he’s removed as Headmaster.”

Lily thought it was the most sense that any wizard besides Wizard Lenin had ever made, certainly the best speech she had ever heard given by one of them. That very thought though caused her brain to catch on fire as Wizard Lenin’s migraine of rage came in without warning.

“You will not respect Albus Dumbledore, particularly not for that performance.” There was fire in those words, cold fire that he had not used since that first day she had met him, when she was still the girl who lived and he was still an unnamed dark lord realizing he was trapped in her head.

That was not a battle she was willing to wage, not for something as inconsequential and irrelevant as
Albus Dumbledore. However what battle she was to wage instead on Wizard Lenin’s behalf remained unsaid but hanging in the air none the less. There would be blood before the year was out, she could almost taste it.

With that thought the food appeared and they each began to dig in.
Dawn of the First Day

In which Lily’s tenuous friendship with Ronald Weasley comes to a shuddering halt, the Albanian Liberation Front is founded, and Wizard Lenin doesn’t see dead people.

“Frank,” Lily started, writing with a ball point pen that had been transfigured from its original quill, writing in quills apparently was not a talent she possessed but luckily enough distorting the universe was, so ball point pens were always readily available with a thought and some other more useless raw material in reach.

It was the end of the first day of classes and she had learned many things. One of these things had spurred her sudden letter to Frank. She hadn’t planned on contacting him so soon, especially since business had appeared to be going as business always appeared to be going. Other than the occasional rumors that Ellie Potter was secretly Lily Riddle in disguise there really wasn’t that much new in England and business was as steady as it had always been since the end of the second war.

But there had been a change and so there she was at the desk next to her bed writing a letter back to London that would change the world forever or at least make her slightly less bored.

“I have just had a wonderful idea, an awfully wonderful idea.” She continued, because she had and it had surprised her as well because who knew that Hogwarts, as boring and disappointing as it was, could provide anything of worth, “I have just heard of Albania…”

Although the hat, after a bit of coercion and repairs, had wanted Lily in Slytherin, Slytherin had not really wanted Lily. After leaving the Great Hall, finding the common room located in the Dungeons, and being split up into their different rooms, her with her fellow first year girl Slytherins Pansy “Dog Face” Parkinson, Millicent “The Boulder” Bulstrode, and Tracy “Completely Normal and Boring Looking” Davis, Pansy Parkinson had made this very clear.

“Listen, Potter,” Pansy spat in a manner similar to Uncle Vernon in a foul mood, “The hat may have screwed up and put you in here but don’t think that makes you belong. You better watch yourself, blood traitor, because we’ll… be watching you…”

Despite Pansy’s lackluster threatening ability, up there with mini pimp’s ability to be a pimp, Lily got the general idea that Eleanor Potter, savior of Wizarding Britain and destroyer of all things evil and Hindenburg, was not wanted in her new house. However, Lily had never really been wanted anywhere so it was hardly anything new.

She’d been more concerned by the fact that at that point Rabbit was still missing, he hadn’t relocated to her trunk or inside it, and she had the nagging feeling that a missing Rabbit was a very bad sign. She supposed she’d be less concerned if it was just Hogwarts at stake, she didn’t even really like Hogwarts that much, but considering his origins she wasn’t really sure what Rabbit was capable of and given the fact that Wizard Lenin wasn’t telling her that she was being paranoid and that a demon rabbit from beyond the abyss couldn’t possibly eat Scotland she was growing fairly concerned.

“That’s great, but I have to look for my demon companion from the outer abyss before he eats Scotland.” Her response was not appreciated by any of her roommates.

And that was how a Rabbitless Lily found herself the next morning still Rabbitless, separated by at least three feet of space from any of her class mates, and sitting in her first class of the day Potions with the Gryffindors and Professor Snape.
Potions was also in the dungeons, it seemed to be the lurking place of Slytherins and other greasy things. Want to find something vaguely disreputable? Then off to the dungeons with you.

Personally after hearing Wizard Lenin, as well her book’s spiel, about Potions she thought it was an absolutely useless topic. Sure it was great so long as a nuclear holocaust didn’t happen, destroy magical life on the planet and potions as a subject was doomed and it seemed that most of the effects could be reproduced by a well thought out glitch if she really wanted. It was the topic that tried to get everyone else to take it seriously but never quite managed, being a step above Astronomy but many steps below the far superior Transfiguration.

Lily had been ostracized to an empty table at the very back of the room but still on the Slytherin side as it had very quickly became clear that sides were necessary in this battle for dominance known as Potions class. There was a war going on, a silent war, one of furtive glances, insults, and sometimes even various violent episodes which were quickly broken up by a professor. As it was only the first day it was difficult to tell who was winning but the war was clearly in full force and even though Lily wasn’t Slytherin enough for Slytherin she was still too Slytherin for Gryffindor so to the back of the Slytherin side she went.

After the positions had been settled the glaring matches began with haughtiness from mini pimp who sat in front of her with one of his two robot minions and Ron Weasley, between Hermione Granger who sat in the very front of the Gryffindor section to Lily herself who sat in the very back of the Slytherin section and stared blankly back, as well as a myriad of other well matched matches. Only with the dramatic footsteps of professor Snape and his cultured, sharply pronounced, introduction did the class turn from their glaring to look at him.

“Today, you will learn the subtle art of potion making. It is not a subject that suffers tom-foolery or any other… foolishness.” Here his eyes slid to the Gryffindor section where some bristled at the unspoken insult, Lily didn’t think it was a very good insult, certainly not very clear but Gryffindor Foolishness appeared to be a well-known term and judging by the redness of Ron Weasley’s face was equivalent to calling his mother a whore. “If you play around in this class rest assured that there will be consequences.”

At this point Lily raised her hand, she saw Professor Snape’s eyes meet hers across the class, she saw his eyes darken but he didn’t call on her or make any other motion to acknowledge her existence. Instead he started calling out names from a list somehow making each sound like a subtle threat. It was almost like listening to Wizard Lenin talk, he was very close to that same soft tone of destruction that was laced in Wizard Lenin’s every word, but he wasn’t quite there. Lily thought he was trying just a bit too hard to be intimidating, true threat and fear were effortless to produced, or so said Wizard Lenin.

“You should have seen him when he was twenty.” A very bored Wizard Lenin commented in her head. It had all sounded well and good to attend Hogwarts in the beginning but sitting in the dungeons Wizard Lenin was beginning to realize that he was going to have to sit through school again. Not only school but school for eleven year olds, which he related to Lily’s experience of sitting through school and being forced to learn the alphabet, if that was the case she sympathized completely and he was in for a rough time.

Lily tried to picture the young Severus Snape but Wizard Lenin provided the image before she could conjure one up. He was still tall, lanky, and too bony for his frame but he had a sort of nervous gawkiness and need to prove himself that was just lacking in the middle aged version. This younger Snape had no confidence, no self-esteem, and it showed desperately in his attempts at straightening his posture as Wizard Lenin walked through the ranks and his desperate eagerness in being
dispatched on missions. With it Lily got a tinge of disgust from Wizard Lenin as well as that undercurrent of utter loathing as if this man, perhaps as much as Albus Dumbledore, was what he despised most about life.

“*It’s terribly funny, how desperately he’s trying to look like a killer, as if it’s in his blood. He has enough blood on his hands to terrify children, perhaps even to cause disquiet in housewives, but he never had the true knack. He always tried far too hard, as if that could wipe his wife-beating drunkard muggle father from existence for him.*” She caught the idea of a cruel smile on Wizard Lenin’s face, one he had given Severus Snape before though the man had been unaware, it was a smile that promised pain and suffering with no kindness at all in it.

“The books say that the Hindenburgists were quite dangerous.” Lily commented, she’d also heard it from people on the street here and there in Diagon Alley. Traces of the war were everywhere; Wizard Lenin’s revolution had certainly left its impressions, even ten years later.

“Dangerous to school children, certainly, but Severus Snape could never stand amongst the ranks of Albus Dumbledore, Gellert Grindelwald, me, or even Lily Riddle.” She got the feeling that he didn’t think too highly of the general public, as if anyone could be dangerous to them if they had the right motivation, and given what she’d seen of glitch manipulation perhaps he was right.

As it was though the Gryffindors looked a bit like how some people did at the mere mention of Lily Riddle’s name.

Eventually Lily’s name came up, at least the one she went by, glancing at her and her still raised arm, “Potter, Eleanor” He looked as if he wanted to add something, sneer out some insult, but then he looked at her and seemed to remember that she was on his side of the war room and that friendly fire was not allowed. It was with a somewhat pained expression that he moved on to the next name.

He finished the list, after much dramatic pronunciation and glares, sending children cowering into the backs of their seats as if to avoid painful death. Lily’s arm was beginning to cramp as it had been in the air the whole time and she was beginning to wonder if there was even a point to the motion. Instead of answering her question though he began to ask his own.

“Where would one find a bezoar, Mr. Weasley?” He demanded causing Ron to fluster in his seat, Ron sputtered and flushed looking hopelessly lost and not at all acquainted with goats’ stomachs. Hermione’s hand meanwhile had quickly raised to join Lily’s only to drop when Snape specifically called on Ron.

“I.. uh… I don’t know, sir.” He said finally to which he earned a particularly nasty glare from Professor Snape.

“Unprepared as all your siblings, Mr. Weasley, it must run in the family.” There was a bit of mandatory snickering from the Slytherin side of the room, Pansy’s being by far the loudest and the most obnoxious of all of them.

“What is the difference between Monkswood and Wolf’s Bane, Mr. Longbottom?” Again Hermione’s hand skyrocketed upwards with a speed that was worthy of Bruce Lee and dropped just as swiftly when professor Snape ignored her in favor of the terrified looking boy from the train.

She hadn’t even really looked at Neville Longbottom when she walked in but she remembered Wizard Lenin’s words and focus, to watch this boy, and she took a second look at him. He was a bit pasty looking, quivering in his seat, as well as fairly out of shape. Altogether he looked unimpressive, like Snape would squash him like a teeny-tiny bug beneath Dudder’s foot. Still though, even then, Wizard Lenin was roused from his ennui to look at this boy and the wheels in his
“Speak up, Mr. Longbottom.” Snape demanded.

“I… uh… I… don’t know, sir.” He finally concluded looking as if someone had just kicked his beloved puppy in front of him.

“Another star of the class it seems.” Snape concluded with a cold but delighted smile, “You will prepare for this class, you will read the text book, and you will not waste my time nor my ingredients. Five points from Gryffindor for their lacking preparation.”

A unanimous look of outrage came onto the faces of the Gryffindor students, particularly Hermione’s, while a look of leering joy appeared on the Slytherin side of the room. She felt like she was in one of the game shows that Dudders sometimes watched that never seemed to make any sense where people did bizarre things for money, the only thing was no one had bothered to give her the Slytherin instructions.

At that point Lily decided that raising hands was just as useless here as it had been in the non-glitch school and just interrupted the game of twenty questions, “Yo, Snape, I seem to have misplaced my arbitrary rules of conduct for the class. I also was wondering if consequences included certain death or if it was just mildly unpleasant staring, I mean either is fine, or less fine I suppose I just wanted to be clear on my vaguely defined rules before things got rollin’.”

One by one all the heads turned to stare at her, both Gryffindor and Slytherin and finally Snape himself until everyone was just looking at her as if she had clearly broken the greatest taboo of all in even mentioning the existence of the rules.

“You see, sir, if I had my rules right now this wouldn’t be happening.” Lily pointed out.

The anger seemed to well in him, slowly and quietly, until it was bleeding out of his stance and his expression. “Potter, detention, tomorrow night at seven.”

“Oh, so it’s just detention then, not certain death? Unless the detention is certain death, or is it Russian Roulette, so uncertain death. Are my uncertain death chances less than one in six?” She asked and judging by the looks of horror on the faces of the other students she had just broken an even worse taboo.

“Detention for the week, Potter, at seven.” He said through gritted teeth as if the words pained him to say.

“Yes, I know detention, but what’s in the detention?”

“Twenty points from Slytherin for brazen stupidity!” He finally shouted causing the room to collectively gasp, Slytherins and Gryffindors alike, and then chaos. The Gryffindors were high-fiving one another while the Slytherins were all turning to her with murder in their eyes if their small eleven year old hands were capable of murder.

“Silence!”

And there was silence in the room and they all turned back to the front, instructions had written themselves on the board along with a list of ingredients. “You will all start brewing, now.”

So they started brewing with little to no instruction from Severus Snape, Lily was lucky enough to
have Wizard Lenin in her head telling her what to put into when and how much to put in, it was all
like a more explosive and dangerous version of cooking and there proved to be many Dudders
incapable of bacon cooking in the room.

Robot Minions one and two had not been programmed to brew strange colored liquid and had
quickly destroyed their cauldrons in the style of Arnold Schwarzenegger’s nemesis the silvery robot
of death, Ron Weasley had lasted a bit longer but his too had followed suit and melted into silver
doom, and finally Neville Longbottom had shown up them all when his cauldron had exploded
altogether leaving chunks of cauldron embedded in the walls of the classroom and soot all over his
face while everyone else hid behind furniture to avoid being impaled.

“I don’t remember my Potions classes being this exciting.” Wizard Lenin had commented drily as
Lily had dove for the safety under the table when she saw the bubbling angry mess inside Neville’s
cauldron. Lily, for her own part, was thinking that Frank really had a point when he said there would
be a lot of death in the castle, it wasn’t pointed at her yet but she could see how children died in this
place.

“Holy shit, it’s Rabbit.” Lily said when she reemerged from underneath the table as Snape and
Neville stared in dumb shock as from whatever doom and destruction had been brewing in Neville’s
cauldron emerged the demon from the outer abyss as pristine and white as always with beady eyes of
death.

Lily quickly made her way to the front of the classroom and over to the Gryffindor side intercepting
Snape and Neville before Snape could put on his menacing act again and scooped Rabbit up from
the debris. “Ah, um, sorry this is Rabbit he’s a creature from the outer abyss who might one day eat
Scotland if unsupervised. He somehow caused your cauldron to explode or the explodingness of
your cauldron summoned him, unclear, but Hogwarts is still standing so it’s all good.”

Snape’s head slowly turned towards her and finally he spat, “Potter, you had a hand in this
abomination?!”

“Well, it was originally me who summoned him, so I suppose… To be fair though, I just was trying
to get a rabbit out of a hat.” The cheerful smile did nothing to appease him, strange, she wasn’t really
even attempting to ruin his life at the moment but he looked as if she had just declared war against
him.

“…Just like her father…” He muttered under her breath making it sound as if this was the worst
condemnation he could ever speak against a man, “Fifty points from Slytherin, Miss Potter, and
twenty from Gryffindor as well as detention with me at seven tomorrow Mr. Longbottom.”

Neville again looked now as if Snape was not only kicking his puppy but had also lit it on fire and
forced Neville to watch. Lily just quietly attempted to walk back to her seat with Rabbit held in her
arms ignoring the way both Gryffindor and Slytherin were staring at her some with more venom than
even the non-glitch members of Dudder’s barbarian horde had managed to acquire.

Day one class one and Slytherin, as it was, was already in the red.

“Well there were more exploding things than you mentioned but it’s really not all that great.” Lily
recapped to Wizard Lenin during lunch, which they spent alone at the very edge of the Slytherin
table with Rabbit sitting ominously by the food, the bubble of isolation had only grown stronger after
the Potions incident and from quite a distance away she could see the occasional glances of distaste
from her fellow housemates.

“Yes, there certainly were more exploding things. It’s a wonder nobody died.” Wizard Lenin was
still in shock of that and the fact that Snape somehow hadn’t been fired for allowing his class to get to the point where cauldrons exploded. Of course, it might not have been Neville’s fault, since Rabbit was in his cauldron.

“So, Neville, do you think he summoned Rabbit or that Rabbit summoned his explosion?” She wasn’t quite sure what Wizard Lenin thought, his first impulse seemed to be to dismiss it, but then he thought about Lily and he thought about something that was vaguely related to Lily but was blurred in his mind from her; something involving Albus Dumbledore, an older looking version of her, a crazy cat lady with glasses like coke bottles, and the young dweeby looking Severus Snape. Whatever had been in that scene, it also appeared to involve a tavern, was enough to give Wizard Lenin some pause in outright dismissing Neville.

“Correlation is not causality, there could be some third factor we haven’t even considered… That being said are we sure the… rabbit… didn’t cause some sort of damage?”

Lily mentally shrugged and surveyed the school, it looked fine to her, everything in place but Wizard Lenin was more familiar with the place than she was so she couldn’t tell. He took more time, looking at the paintings, the tables, the students and staff, until finally he seemed to pinpoint it.

“There are no ghosts.” The words were slow, almost disbelieving, but then they grew more forceful as he stared around and looked for spectral beings.

“There are also no aliens.” Lily commented not really seeing the point, she had never thought Wizard Lenin would be a true believer anyway, glitches were one thing spectral dead people were quite another. In fact, believing in ghosts sort of went against his whole not dying policy, and made his struggles against her and Uncle Death just seem petty and ridiculous.

“No, Lily, ghosts aren’t sentient… they’re like the Dursleys, not really people, they simply are under the false impression that they are. They’re afterimages of the soul, nothing more.” He said but it was distracted, if he wasn’t trapped in her brain he’d be swiveling his head right now searching for images of dead people.

“Oh, that’s kind of boring, are they supposed to help with the revolution?” She asked, she couldn’t really picture Casper the friendly ghost spouting off Marxist ideals but Wizard Lenin was quite the persuader.

“No, Lily, Hogwarts used to be filled to the brim with ghosts. I haven’t seen one since our arrival, not the Grey Lady, not the Bloody Barron, not even Peeves the Poltergeist. They’re all gone.” Wizard Lenin did not panic, it wasn’t in his nature to panic, panicking was beneath him however feeling slightly disturbed by a turn of events was not.

“So… I guess Rabbit ate a bunch of dead people? It’s better than Scotland.” If Wizard Lenin wasn’t so very disturbed by the fact that there were no floating dead people she got the feeling he’d be slightly annoyed at her lack of understanding. As it was she was fine with the events and judging by the student population they seemed to be fine with it too, only Wizard Lenin cared if the dead people weren’t around being dead anymore.

“That’s right, they’re normally here for the sorting ceremony, they weren’t even mentioned… Lily, ask someone about a Hogwarts ghost… Any ghost…”

Lily looked around, her bubble of isolation at the Slytherin table was quite impenetrable, Pansy growled at her while clinging to mini pimp’s arm for support like a real pit bull and next to her Millicent did her boulder impersonation quite well.
“Right, you alienated them alarmingly fast.” Wizard Lenin commented rather drily, “Try Gryffindor, the Weasley from the train, he might be more receptive.”

So Lily got up from the table, placing rabbit on her head, and sauntered over to the Gryffindor table. They didn’t look as if they appreciated her presence any more than the Slytherins did, Ron was sitting next to two other boys whose names she hadn’t paid any attention to as well as Neville, Hermione Granger was in her own bubble of isolation pushing her food around on a plate at the edge of the table glancing miserably at her own house mates who were pointedly ignoring her.

“What do you want, slimy snake?” Ron asked, glaring at her with a flushed face that indicated anger rather than embarrassment. Next to him the two boys showed similar sneers while Neville just looked exceedingly uncomfortable as he appeared to do with everything.

“No, not a snake either I don’t think, you see I doubt Rabbit has any known physical form and rather takes what he pleases. Granted I don’t know as I’ve never seen it but it’d be weird for a snake coated in ooze to be trapped in the outer abyss and then take the form of a rabbit, possible but a bit weird.” Lily commented patting Rabbit on her head who stared unblinkingly forward at the residents of Gryffindor.

“I meant you, not the rabbit.” He said after a moment when the words seemed to register.

“Also not a rabbit, but we’ve been over that one.” Lily commented, there was a little bit of space next to Neville, between him and Hermione’s bubble of pariahdom and so she took it and leaned in close to them, “However I’m not here to discuss Rabbit or whatever his true form may or may not be.”

“You shouldn’t be here to discuss anything, snakes like you don’t deserve to be at this table, you’re all evil gits!” Ron smashed his hands against the table dramatically looking quite betrayed the words “et tu Lily?” echoing in his gaze just before the fall.

It was the first time anyone had called her snake and she wasn’t sure what it was supposed to mean. She’d never seen a snake in person, the Dursleys had never taken her to the zoo and so most of her animal companionship centered around Mrs. Figg army of spy cats, but she had the distinct feeling that they spent most of the day sleeping and smelling things with their tongues.

“He called you sly, untrustworthy, cunning, and I suppose for lack of a better term sneaky.” Wizard Lenin clarified in her brain bringing up, instead of a snake, the image of Severus Snape in the potions classroom looking like he was trying to look like he could kill anyone at any moment.

Lily brought up the image of the snake again and found it didn’t quite match that idea. If he had wanted to call her those things he should have just said it. People were much better at being rude to Lily Riddle, of course they never lived long afterwards, but they got right to the point without the snake business brought up.

“It’s a metaphor, Lily, just a metaphor. You’re right, real snakes are quite boring and terrible conversationalists, but he isn’t talking about real snakes.” Wizard Lenin sighed in her head, a migraine of frustration creeping outward from her scar, “Just ask him about the damn ghosts already.”

“…Okay, but anyways, more important conversation than snakes. So I couldn’t help but notice that they’re no silvery looking dead people flying around the room, is that a normal thing, because between the trolls, the former assassin and cult member Snape, evil giant spiders, Rabbit, and exploding cauldrons you think there’d be Shining blood flooding from the elevators by now. You know, if Hogwarts had elevators, I guess it’d flood out of supply closets.”
Even with the cheerful smile it seemed that the question was somewhat beyond them, they stared at her with varying degrees of alarm in their expressions, even Hermione Granger who was eavesdropping from her bubble looked somewhat distressed by the idea of flying dead people.

“…Use the word ghosts Lily, ghosts, don’t literally describe what a ghost is.” From the feeling of her mounting headache that was not the result Wizard Lenin had been looking for.

“I mean ghosts.” Lily amended into the awkward silence.

“What is wrong with you?!” Ron asked, again with that betrayed expression, whereas Neville just looked vaguely ill like the puppy that Snape had been beating and lit on fire had been placed in front of him and he was told to eat it.

“Are you going to answer the ghost question?” Lily asked, from the look on his face she was beginning to doubt it.

“No, there are no such things as ghosts in Hogwarts. If you’d read *Hogwarts A History* you would know that.” Hermione interjected before Ron’s face could become the danger-zone shade of red.

Lily glanced at her, the thing was that she had read *Hogwarts A History* and it had listed quite a number of dead people floating around Hogwarts she just had thought it was the usual pseudo-glitch nonsense that a wizard would come up with.

“That’s very interesting, thank you, Hermione.” Hermione preened slightly and then appeared to remember that she disliked Lily quite a bit and went back to pretending that she wasn’t eavesdropping.

“Get out of our table!” Ron yelled grabbing his plate as if to throw the food at her face, “Go back to Slytherin with all the other evil snakes where you belong!”

She eyed the Slytherin table, all of them were looking at her either in stunned horror or pure fury, apparently she had broken another unspoken taboo in approaching a different table. “I think you mean Default, Slytherin isn’t exactly my number one fan either.”

“Default doesn’t exist.” Hermione interrupted again, she was very keen on things not existing, and apparently Ron agreed enough to not bother contradicting her.

“What’s very interesting, thank you, Hermione.” Hermione preened slightly and then appeared to remember that she disliked Lily quite a bit and went back to pretending that she wasn’t eavesdropping.

“Whatever, we don’t want any snakes over here!”

“Alright, alright, I’m gone.” Lily said raising her hands in surrender and making her way back to the Slytherin table.

“Have fun with your blood-traitor friends?” Nott sneered with an accompaniment of sneers from various other housemates and they made no room to remove her from her bubble of isolation when she returned.

“Fun is an exaggeration but it was rather informative.”

As it turned out the day was only beginning.

Defense Against the Dark Arts was in a setting much less dramatic than the dungeons, it appeared to be a normal lecture hall, chairs on the sides and the lecturer standing in the middle. As with Potions the room clearly divided into Slytherin on one side and Gryffindor on the other with Lily pushed to the far back of the room and Hermione Granger taking her seat as close to the front as physically possible.
She’d noted Quirrel the night before and she’d thought he was missing an ‘s’ in his name because he reminded her a bit of a squirrel. He constantly fidgeted, looking like a junky who’d missed his payment and was begging for her to give him another month leeway. He also wore a turban that smelled like where garlic went to die, of course she only knew that after he walked into the room.

“G..gg…g…gg…ggood.. good afternoon..cl.cll.class…”

“Oh hell, he stutters.” Wizard Lenin had liked Defense quite a bit when he went to school, most likely because it involved beating up his classmates and getting credit for it, but he’d been dreading having to repeat his first year and the introduction of the stuttering nutty professor had just dimmed his hopes even more.

“T..tt..tt.today we.. we… we… will be co..co..cov…” He continued like this for some time, unable to get through the sentence, and Lily found herself drifting just because of how awful it was to listen to. It was exactly like listening to a broken record but even worse, because you couldn’t smash the record.

“I can’t do this.” Wizard Lenin stated blandly, “I can’t sit here every day and listen to this.”

“It’s not every day,” Lily thought bringing out her timetable, apparently it was only once a week, every Monday but with that thought she was beginning to dread the idea of Mondays more than usual.

She was also starting to get a major headache, which was odd because Wizard Lenin wasn’t really angry so much as somewhat depressed, he was too shocked to be infuriated about it but the headache just kept growing. It felt like Wizard Lenin when he was really angry, like when he learned that he was trapped inside Ellie Potter’s brain like a tumor, that sort of angry except that she had no idea where it was coming from.

Finally Quirrel stopped and addressed the class, “Q…Que…Quest…Questions?”

Ron raised his hand, “Is it true you were attacked by vampires this summer?”

Now that perked Lily’s interest. Wizards knew of vampires but as far as she had seen they didn’t really know them, Lily Riddle however had a very close association with the vampires not even necessarily the British. Whenever they needed things dealt with internationally there would always be some vampire or organization of vampires that would be willing to lend a hand if only because it was Lily Riddle asking. As Lily Riddle she dealt with vampires on an almost daily basis so hearing a story about an attack, and how Quirrel the squirrel survived such an attack, was definitely worth listening to.

“We… Well… yes…” Quirrel coughed into his oversized purple sleeves looking decidedly awkward about the whole thing. He then, in a ridiculous amount of time considering his stutter, relayed the story of his trip in Albania and vague details on how the vampires ambushed him and how he now wore a turban filled with garlic for protection from them. After that experience he’d realized how important defense against the dark arts were, apparently.

Lily had learned her lesson about handraising from Snape so she just blurted her question, “Question, you were attacked by vampires, multiple Eastern European vampires who are notoriously nasty and you lived?”

“We… Well… Miss… Miss Po… Pott.. Potter, I wa.. was… lucky.” Quirrel said ending with a twitchy sort of smile that was fairly shaky.
“No, nope, I do not believe that.”

“What do you mean you don’t believe it?” Quirrel asked abruptly but Lily was on a roll and her headache had just gotten ten times worse for absolutely no reason.

“Most of the Eastern European vampires this day and age, if they were turned recently, probably came from a work prison camp in the Soviet Union and made their way to Albania. These guys, even if they were starving, are tougher than nails and go for the kill. So you have Quirrel and let’s say five vampires in the woods in Albania, and they’re hungry, and you’re Quirrel. Tell me, do you think Quirrel lives?”

“As a wizard Miss Potter, I have many resources that…”

She cut him off, “Sure you could light them on fire, but you need two syllables and a swishy hand movement to do that. That’s two syllables and one swishy hand movement that they have to break your arm and crush your wand into splinters which given how fast it takes you to say qu… que… questions is a pretty damn long time. And we all know that wandless wizard equals dead wizard.”

She smiled at him and he stared back, no longer twitching, simply staring straight at her as if into her very soul. Finally he said, “Ten points from Slytherin for ridiculous conspiracy theories.”

After that he gave a large twitch, he must have been holding it in, and resumed his stuttering lecture, “N..now…cl.cl..class…tur…turn in your…boo..books…pa..pa…page 13.”

But Lily had just had an idea, a much better idea than chapters in Defense textbooks. If the Albanian vampires had been pathetic enough to let something like Quirrel slip through their grasp then they needed all the help they could get. More importantly there would be little competition when Lily Riddle spread her wings internationally.

And so hours later that night, with Rabbit perched safely on her head and her transformed ballpoint pen in hand, she wrote Frank with the details of the latest and greatest plan, “I think it’s time we went international and aided A.L.F., the Albanian Liberation Front.”
Dungeon Crawl

In which Lily regales Hogwarts with epics of epic proportion featuring communism and Hans Gruber, Slytherin in fighting begins, and Neville Longbottom is full of surprises.

By the next morning Lily’s bubble of social pariahdom had extended far past the Slytherin first years and on into the older Slytherins so that even the prefect was glaring down at her from the other end of the breakfast table.

Frankly, Lily didn’t understand it, even when Dudley had been purposefully attempting to ruin her reputation at normal school she hadn’t been this unpopular.

She had been known as crazy freak for years, had been chased on the playground by mobs of children with sticks, but even then she hadn’t been as hated as she was now. No, then it had been an exercise in boredom, something to do during recess that wasn’t playing with the ball or on the jungle gym. It was the excitement, the hunt, and really had barely anything to do with Lily other than that Dudder’s enthusiasm to make her suffer was so very contagious. Dudley himself, when she got down to it, probably wasn’t entirely sure why it was one of his goals in life to cause her discomfort.

They had actually had a discussion about it at one point, as much of a discussion as one could have with a ten year old Dudley. He had been sitting moodily at the piano practicing a piece and messing up in the same exact place over and over when Lily had walked in preparing herself to teleport to downtown London and spend the day as a drug lord. He’d glanced at her as she’d walked past, looking glum and somewhat miserable, but hadn’t said anything. This could also have been conditioned into him after the operant conditioning disaster and its few sequels, he’d learned (even if he’d forgotten later) that receiving attention from Lily led to pain and suffering and that while it was all well and good to chase her with friends it was a bit different to chase her alone.

Ordinarily she rarely thought about what Dudley thought of her, their feuds with each other over the years, or anything else. As it was though their war had grown less and less prominent, both on her end as she invested her time in uncle Death and being a drug lord, and on his as the Dursleys involved him in music and he hung around with his own friends.

However that lack of interest on his part, that glum look at her as if she was barely even there, somehow that had been worth addressing.

“Hey, Dudders.”

“Hm, what do you want crazy freak?” He’d asked, not even looking around to talk to her but still just playing those same few measures over the piano.

“I was just wondering, what do you think of me?”

He turned then, a confused expression on his face as if he didn’t quite comprehend the question, “What?”

“Think of me, I mean yes I’m the crazy freak with no parents who’s a delinquent and doomed for prostitution and alcoholism… But those are merely words, what do you really think about me?”

He’d looked at her for a few moments and it looked as if there was something in his brain trying to reach some sort of conclusion. He’d finally ended with, “Go be weird somewhere else.”
Lily took that as inconclusive and it’d remained that way ever since. So Dudley called her names, some rather foul for an eleven year old, and gathered his friends to hunt her down when it made him look tough but there was little beyond that. Dudley Dursley, when it truly came down to it, was indifferent to her presence and existence in his life. If there was any emotion at all it was wariness, for half remembered days of conditioning, and perhaps a spark of annoyance but just as he was not a person to her she was not a person to him.

At Hogwarts it wasn’t like that.

These students, elite sons of lords and the next leaders of the bureaucracy, stared at her from the across the table bitterness, betrayal, and something bordering on hatred in their eyes; as if she had done far more than break a few unspoken rules, but as if she had destroyed their very culture with her mere existence.

She had seen eyes like that before, they were the eyes that the Dursleys had always had, and once during their first meeting Wizard Lenin had looked at her in a similar manner but his was more refined, there was only the hatred then, all other emotions had been cast aside.

It wasn’t a surprise then, when they began acting out against her, that morning she had woken to find her trunk scratched and tarnished from attempts at breaking in the night before and the clothes she had left out, the green and silver tie, her shoes, had been shredded into a cheap imitation of confetti.

Staring at the wreckage, at the slights against her, hearing the snickering across the room from her roommates she felt something in her go cold.

She had never cared about people, about these illogical stupid things she was forced to put up with for reasons she had never been told clearly, but in that moment a small part of her indifference cracked.

Inside her head Wizard Lenin had said nothing as if there was nothing at all to say.

It was in this frame of mind, after eating breakfast alone and checking the ingredients for tampering and keeping Rabbit on hand so as to not tempt more disaster, that she entered her first class of the day History of Magic.

She thought it very telling, and perhaps very accurate, that there was no professor teaching History of Magic. Shuffling into the room with the Hufflepuffs they had settled into their various positions, still segregated but not as much as with the dreaded Gryffindors, and had looked to the front of the room where no one had appeared.

“So, is there a professor here, or not?” Lily had eventually asked after ten minutes had passed and no adult had come wandering into the room.

Pansy in spite being possibly the dumbest of Lily’s Slytherin peers was the most vocal and was the one to address her, “Who cares what you think Princess Potty?”

Wizard Lenin, who had been somewhere in the back of her head thinking for most of the morning, oddly nostalgic roused himself at that, “Did she just attempt to insult you by calling you Potty?”

From the tone of the question it sounded as if he couldn’t fathom the idea of anyone addressing her like that, whether she was Lily Riddle or Eleanor Potter, that sort of insult against her just didn’t compute. It was like someone trying to insult Wizard Lenin by calling him sponge, it just didn’t click.

“Listen, Dog Face, I just want to know if I have to sit here or if the secret purpose of this class is to show us that pseudo glitch manipulators have no history.”
The comment was not appreciated by anyone on the Slytherin side of the room, the Hufflepuff side just looked alarmed and mildly confused. Pansy’s face began to grow the danger zone shade of red and she turned to Draco who was sitting a few rows in front of her, “Draco, do something about her!”

Draco flushed and looked at Lily, his eyes narrowed, but he did not have time to react as the more volatile and burly looking Nott beat him to it.

“Who do you think you are!” Nott sneered out reaching into his robes and pulling out his wand as if to intimidate her. He continued as soon as the stick was pointing straight at her, “No one loses eighty points in one day, we never asked for you to be in Slytherin, the least you could do was play by the rules! Professor Snape, our head of house, docked you seventy points in one class! Professor Snape never docks points from Slytherin! So I’m wondering who the hell you think you are that you can get away with shit like this?”

“Me, I think therefore I am. No, Nott, the question is who do you think I am?” She said and stood up placing Rabbit on her head and slowly with measured footsteps began to make her way to the front of the class turning her back on Nott and the other students, “You know, maybe it’s not that you have no history but that the history is in flux, this is a culture that prides itself on manipulating reality after all. So let’s manipulate reality a little bit, I’ll tell you the History of Magic.”

Once she reached the front she eyed her audience, one half glaring at her, and the other half staring at her in something akin to bewildered fear and a little bit of awe. Nott’s wand was still pointed straight at her head, “Put that away Nott, all we got out of Quirrel the squirrel’s class was stuttering.”

The class held its breath in anticipation, watching both of them, her at the front of the class with Rabbit perched on her head and him standing with his wand directed down at her as if the high ground gave him impossible advantage. It was the duel, the standoff, that moment where they all simply looked at each other and measured the steel in the other’s eyes.

And here it was only the second morning.

In her head, to Wizard Lenin, she commented, “I am so very tired of dealing with these people.”

“They will never change. If you must fight don’t merely win, make them bleed, and they will remember that when they invariably try again.” His voice was not flat as it sometimes was when he commented on her situations, there was true emotion in it, and in her mind flashes of pale half-starved looking children looked across at her with jeering faces and cruel smiles.

He didn’t even manage to get in a syllable.

Now, Lily was very good at glitches, at first she had assumed that wizards were pathetically horrible at manipulating them but she had come to acknowledge that she was talented at it. She also had quite a bit of practice both as Lily Riddle and in her daily life at the Dursleys. Knocking people out, like rewriting memories, was something of a routine for her as sometimes when people sought out Lily Riddle there was a bit of violence involved.

And then there was silence.

“Any other questions?” She asked, there appeared to be none, only blank disbelieving stares at her wandless hands and then at the unconscious Nott.

“Goody goody, so I thought we’d start off with something important and interesting. Like the epic battle between Hans Gruber and the Goblin Nation… and let’s throw in communism for fun,
because why not?"

One of the Slytherin girls who by chance wasn’t her roommate, a pretty but somewhat distant girl called Daphne Greengrass, shook herself out of her stupor, “What are you talking about?”

“Hans Gruber, think German Snape, getting beat up by a mob of goblins.” Lily said moving to the board to draw the picture of German Snape with a beard facing off a horde of angry looking goblins in proletariat uniform.

“But that never happened!”

Lily sighed, “But wouldn’t it have been so much more awesome if it did?” Adding finishing touches to the drawings she turned to face the class, “Besides, I told you before, history isn’t really history in a questionable reality. If reality itself is in flux now, in the present, how can we possibly give any claim to what’s happened in the past. For all we know the universe was created five seconds ago and all our memories were simply provided for us giving us the illusion that it has been in place longer.”

The class blinked at her as a unit, each looking as bewildered as the last as if that explanation had just pushed them further off the edge, until Robot Minion One short circuited and said, “You’re not a professor.”

“There is no professor, Robot Minion One, the professor is a lie.”

“Are you going to wake up Nott?” The Italian asked, Zabini she thought his name might have been, sitting next to the unconscious boy himself he was looking a little uncomfortable being near Nott as if not quite sure what to make of him or the whole situation in general.

“At the end of the class, he was pointing sticks at me and saying words, it wasn’t polite.” Lily said with a frown before adding with a narrowed gaze to Pansy, Millicent, and Tracy, “It also isn’t polite to trash people’s things while they’re sleeping.”

Pansy opened and closed her mouth as if she couldn’t quite think of anything to say while Millicent and Tracey just went slightly pale. The Hufflepuffs in the meantime were looking as if they were watching an entertaining but rather bizarre television show and couldn’t make up their minds whether the whole thing was real or not or even whether they enjoyed it.

“Any other questions?” She asked the class, to which, again they just stared blankly at her.

“Good, now, back to Mr. Gruber and the Goblins. You see, Mr. Gruber had the unfortunate idea to try to invade Gringotts in the aftermath of the Goblin revolution, planning on obtaining the gold from the various wizarding accounts that were still inside. The reason this was unfortunate wasn’t simply because it was filled with angry Goblins who own dragons and kill people who try to steal things but also because on that particular day Chuck Norris was visiting Gringotts to bless the bank with the awesomeness of his round house kick.”

At the end of class she woke up Nott as promised and had watched as they all shuffled out with her, some glancing over their shoulders to stare at her.

“It’s only the second day.” She commented to Wizard Lenin, and it was so tired sounding, even in thought.

“Yes, I suppose. On the other hand though you got to teach a class, and you acted with swift retribution.” He paused then and in that pause they both acknowledged that she had merely delayed their next act against her, that sometime in the near future they’d be confronting her again. Because the bitterness in their eyes; their hatred against Eleanor Potter, the girl who saved one half of the
nation and destroyed the other, the girl who had the audacity to enter their house and slander their name within the first day, was not something that could fade so easily as that.

Lenin was a revolutionary, he knew all about festering passion and hatred.

“People, people like them, are fickle. They will sway one way or another with the very breeze, today they might spit at your feet and shred your clothes, but tomorrow they will be in worship of you. I’ve seen it.”

She looked behind her at the drawings on the board, which had grown more elaborate and detailed as the class had progressed, and knew that not one of them had truly appreciated the sight of Chuck Norris’ foot in German Snape’s face, “And what am I supposed to do in the mean time?”

“And what am I supposed to do in the mean time?”

And in her head she saw a letter to Frank with the word Albania written, there would always be something to do, whether trapped in the Dursleys or trapped in Hogwarts there was always something out there to do.

The next course was much calmer by comparison. The professor existed for one thing, and was less nutty than Quirrel or Snape combined. Professor McGonagall began her lecture promptly and quickly went over the rules for Transfiguration, what they weren’t allowed to do and what they were and what they would be covering over the year, nothing truly interesting or pertinent. It was all very organized and detailed leaving no time for the Slytherins to react in any way to her. Instead she had been pushed to the back of the class to a table by herself as was habit.

As it was she spent most of the class thinking that really it wasn’t so bad, perhaps with Death and Wizard Lenin’s opinions she had come to expect more from Hogwarts. Moments like learning about Albania, the creation of Default, and rewriting history were powerful but they weren’t the entire day. Hogwarts did not merely consist of downs but it wasn’t entirely ups either, it was just Hogwarts, just as Surrey had been Surrey, nothing more and nothing less. So you do what you can, you write letters to Frank, and you think about the world that spins somewhere outside your cupboard and you picture yourself there until it is reality. That’s what glitches were all about, really, reality falling apart in your favor.

These thoughts were interrupted by professor McGonagall offering her a matchstick to turn into a needle, “Miss Potter, surely you have realized that familiars are not permitted in class.”

On top of her head Rabbit twitched and she attempted to explain remembering how well all the other explanations had gone, “Rabbit isn’t really a familiar, he’s… Well the last time I left him alone… It wasn’t a good idea so I decided to keep him with me.”

“Regardless, your rabbit is not permitted in class, he shall remain in the dormitory like all other familiars starting tomorrow.” McGonagall said in a tone that brooked no argument and Lily wondered if all her thinking about Hogwarts would soon be made pointless as each and every professor seemed determined to see it eaten by Rabbit.

In her head Wizard Lenin added, “In their defense they aren’t exactly aware of the consequences of their actions. Still, perhaps this time we’ll get lucky and it will eat something else unimportant and ultimately insignificant, like that Parkinson girl.”

Even he didn’t sound too confident about that statement though, after all who could be satisfied with eating just Pansy, it was like settling for scraps. On second thought Lily decided that she’d best make Rabbit somehow less conspicuous the next day, or else Scotland would be devoured without
question.

With that in mind she changed the matchstick in her hand into a needle.

The professor blinked and took it from her, tapping against the table to hear the sharp pinging noise, “Miss Potter, did you Transfigure this matchstick into a needle already?” She then looked down at Lily’s hands where her wand wasn’t present and back to the wand.

“Twenty points to Slytherin.” She said in a voice that was almost disbelieving and took the needle from Lily, “Now class… here is a successfully transfigured matchstick. You may not reach this point by the end of the lesson but it is something to strive for none the less. Excellent work, Miss Potter.”

The Ravenclaws, none of whom had managed to turn their matchsticks into needles, turned to look at her with bitter envy. Meanwhile her Slytherin peers had once again turned to look at her with confused and flabbergasted expressions.

“You got twenty points, from McGonagall!” Tracey looked back at her, her normal and rather boring features transformed into awe and disbelief as she whispered the words, “I hear no one gets points from McGonagall!”

She paused then and added, “Of course, I hear no one loses points from Snape either, not in Slytherin anyway.”

It was strange, nowhere in her was that bitterness from the morning, a trace of fear but for the most part it seemed as if the morning had been overwritten. There wasn’t that intense hatred that had been there before.

She guessed they were fickle after all.

“I don’t know what to think about people anymore.” She concluded when the classes for the day had finished. No one walked near her or talked to her but since Nott’s pitiful failure in the morning they were a little more edgy and a few others besides Tracey were looking at her in confusion after McGonagall’s awarded points.

There was something in the points, something she had written off as being unimportant, that was integral to Hogwarts.

“You’ll pick it up, as a general rule humans are not complicated creatures.” Wizard Lenin had said with a mental shrug, he had always envisioned humans as more complicated chess pieces, who were manipulated easily enough and made for a more interesting game of strategy.

After a moment he tried to equate that thought to Lily though and soon revised his statement, “Of course, you may never truly understand people. Perhaps you’re simply not capable of it, as they will never understand you, you will never fully understand them.”

It wasn’t as if it mattered, really, she rarely paid too much attention to any one person’s opinion. Her employees at Riddle Inc., Wizard Lenin, and Death but beyond that she found people to be a nuisance to deal with. They often failed to get to the point and were so easily offended by the littlest of things like house points and pedigree that in the great scheme of things meant so very little. And the things they truly should note, such as the world splintering around them and the existence of Rabbit, they ignored or overlooked and even condemned her for bringing it to their attention.

“It’s like they want to die.” Lily said in exasperation.

“That is one argument for the eternal stupidity of mankind.”
Snape’s moods were anything but fickle though, loitering outside the Potions classroom at seven p.m. with the nervous looking Neville Longbottom his first action had been to glare at her and spit out the words, “Miss Potter” as if they were the worst vulgarity he could throw at anyone.

“At least he’s consistent.” Lily said to Wizard Lenin.

After a moment of staring at her he turned his attention to Neville, “And Mr. Longbottom, detention on your second day of school. It’s quite… pitiful.”

“Well, sir, it was you who assigned the detention.” Lily pointed out but he ignored the comment instead motioning them into the room and then handing them two brushes and pointing to a row of cauldrons on the far side of the room.

“You will clean those.” He said shortly, “And you will do so without any of the foolishness you displayed in class, do I make myself clear.”

Lily looked down at the brush and then over to the cauldrons, most of them caked in a dramatic amount of ooze, and then back over to Snape. Tugging at the ever present strings of the universe she searched for the appropriate glitch, the idea of cleanliness and prior states before the cauldrons had been coated in goo, and the cauldrons were sparkling.

“Done.” Lily said with a sense of accomplishment, History of Magic had gone well enough, as had Transfiguration but she felt that cleaning Snape’s cauldrons via glitches rather than on her hands and knees was something to truly be proud of.

“What do you mean done?!” He snapped, he walked over to the cauldrons and peered inside, looking with an alarmed expression into each.

Next to her Neville shifted slightly and looked at her, an uncertain expression on his face, different from the ones in Slytherin but similar in nature.

“I mean done, as in clean, as in ta da we can go home now.” Lily said motioning to her and Neville, she figured as they had both been given brushes that they were included in the cleaning and thus both free to leave.

“That’s impossible!” Snape said, “First year students are not capable of that kind of…”

“It’s quite possible, the cauldrons speak for themselves I’m afraid.” Lily said with a shrug dropping her brush on the floor, “If you wanted it to be more exciting you should have picked uncertain death.”

With that she began to make her way out of the classroom leaving Neville to stand there, still in shock, just staring between her and Snape and the cauldrons as if he had no idea what was going on.

“Where do you think you’re going?” Snape snapped, “You still have detention, Potter!”

“But the cauldrons are clean.” Lily pointed out, looking at him over her shoulder.

“Sir, Miss Potter, you will address me correctly. And the cauldrons are not the point!”

With that she turned back to face him, standing by the cauldrons looking into each one, and looking at her with that same look as his students. Hatred, betrayal, bitterness, and she couldn’t help but wonder what pointless thing she had done to offend him.

“So it is an exercise in tediousness, I am rather familiar with those.” Lily said, “Am I to clean the
cleaned cauldrons, professor?"  

He only stared at her, and in a cold voice said, “Twenty points from Slytherin, for your disrespect, Potter. Pick up the brush.”  

And with that he turned from the room and walked out slamming the door behind him and leaving Lily and Neville behind.

“How… How did you do that?” Neville asked after they had stared at the door for a few minutes.

“Oh, the glitch? Years of practice and will, it’s easy enough.” Lily eyed the brush in her hand and looked over to the cauldron, Snape wasn’t in the room and given that the cauldrons were already clean she was hardly going to clean them again.

“Wandless magic… I wish I was good at magic. I’m terrible at everything.” Neville said blandly looking over at the cauldrons with a strange expression in his eyes as if he wasn’t seeing them at all but rather seeing something else entirely.

“I doubt as terrible as anyone else,” Lily said with a shrug, “Most people aren’t very good at it you know, as far as I can tell anyway.”

“No, I’m…” He trailed off and looked at her again, “How are you not scared of Professor Snape either? He’s…”

Lily laughed aloud at that, and it was funny because she rarely laughed, even in the presence of Death or Wizard Lenin but the idea of seeing Snape taken so seriously was ridiculous to her, “Oh he tries, he tries very hard, but he’s not as dangerous as he makes himself out to be.”

She motioned to the door where he had exited, “He’s trying much too hard to be scary to really be scary, the really scary people, Neville, they’re the ones who don’t try. They don’t need to, and besides, what kind of a forty year old spends his time making children cry as his profession? That’s just kind of sad.”

He tried to smile, it was a half attempt at one, but it was as if he couldn’t quite bring himself to believe her even if he wanted to. Finally he looked at his brush and frowned, “I guess I don’t have to clean cauldrons either then.”

“Nope.”

They stood in silence for a few moments and finally Neville said as if concluding something, “You’re too nice to be in Slytherin.”

Lily blinked at him, nice was a word that was rarely used to describe her, and she wondered where Neville had pulled it from, “Well, if that was a backhanded compliment I’ll take it, but most of Slytherin would agree with you in one regard or another. They think I don’t belong in Slytherin either.”

He looked as if he wanted to say something for a moment there, he looked down at the floor for a moment his cheeks flushed, and finally back up to her, “Sorry about Ron, yesterday I mean, he just… Slytherin kind of has a reputation, you know.”

“Oh, yes, well I just thought he had a thing for snakes.”

The conversation was becoming steadily more awkward as it continued and yet it was the most positive interaction with anyone on the physical plane that she’d had all day and possibly ever. He
smiled at her, and it was hesitant, but it was a smile even after snakes and house points and every other unspoken rule that she’d broken.

“Yeah… You know if you want to come and sit at Gryffindor table… Even though you’re in Slytherin I mean, well you can… I think it’d be nice.” Neville finally said, and there was just that hesitant smile on his face, and that spark in his eyes. She had seen this only once before with Ron on a train, and that had fallen apart almost without her noticing, but it had been interesting while it lasted.

She wondered how much it had taken him to say those words, because there was still that hesitation on his face, that fear of having made some terrible mistake from which he could never recover. She tried to remember if anyone had ever offered her an invitation like this one, perhaps it was only Death in another dimension, but even he had needed persuaded in the beginning.

Neville Longbottom, as far as she could tell, was the only being who had ever asked her to join him anywhere of his own free will.

“Alright,” Lily said slowly tasting the words even as she said them, “The Gryffindor table is very red, it’s my imaginary friend’s favorite color, you know.”

And all she could think, even after Snape had returned and she had sauntered back to the Slytherin common room, was that she really didn’t understand people at all.
At the end of the day it was just her and professor Snape in the Potions classroom with the words, “I will respect authority” written out multiple times on the board at the front of the room in thin white letters.

Lily and the Potions professor stared at each other and on an empty desk Rabbit snuffled patiently watching the scene unfold with black beady eyes.

“My uncle did everything he could to get the magic out of me, he didn’t beat me but he came close a few times, he certainly starved me, and according to everything I’ve read in psychology he did his damnedest to see that I was too emotionally traumatized to function correctly.” Her eyes bore into his as she said it and though her voice was light in her stillness there was an unspoken threat that any person who worked in the business of murder and violence would recognize, “It never worked.”

He didn’t say anything but something in his expression wavered as if he was only now coming to the realization that perhaps he had stepped somewhere where he should not have.

“It’s in the house points you see, your authority, they allow a sort of faux nationalism to present itself where Slytherin is so much more than being in Slytherin. It makes a stupid cup, a cup that does nothing and means nothing, worthy of an entire year’s worth of sweat, blood, tears, and quidditch. There are men who would sell their souls for that cup but I wouldn’t.”

And then she grinned over at him, not a normal grin, but Wizard Lenin’s grin that had no happiness in it but only pain and suffering, “You think that by giving me enough detentions, by shaming me with loss of house points, you can reign me in or else somehow remove meaning from my existence; as if I could be daunted by cleaning cauldrons, words on blackboards, or an abstract currency that can only ever buy me a cup. You’ll never accomplish that, but you will accomplish something else that’s far more interesting. I may not care about a cup but for some unfathomable reason everyone else in Slytherin does, to an absurd degree, and I can take that from them. With every point you take you bring them closer to ruin and to the day they turn to me and try to take revenge. And that day, Mr. Snape, will be very interesting.”

Oddly enough she had not started Wednesday with the intention of pulling the Lily Riddle in front of a debtor routine during detention with Snape but as usual things progressed throughout the day until it became the natural thing to do.

It’d started when she’d taken Neville up on his offer that morning at breakfast. She’d sat across from him and thus also Ron who was sitting next to him and the two Gryffindors from before whose names she didn’t know. Hermione Granger’s bubble of isolation had grown impressively, not as much as Lily’s, but she was further down the table than she had been the day before and looking slightly more miserable for it, as if misery and distance from peers had a positive relationship.

“It’s odd, how is it that Transfiguration which deals with the direct manipulation of the universe is only one day a week, and potions which is ultimately useless is not only three but four times a week if we count double potions on Fridays? You know, I always knew reality was falling apart, but this just kind of confirms it for me.” Lily said in greeting, shifting Rabbit from her head onto the table as she sat down.
“Oh, uh, hi Ellie.” Neville said with a sheepish expression that was a bit alarmed as well, as if he had expected her not to take him up on his offer or at least so soon, certainly Ron was beginning to grow red at her presence.

She wondered for a moment whether he was going to take back his offer, and if he did whether she should heed it or not, but he didn’t say anything even as he looked uncomfortable with the situation so she remained at the table.

“What do you think you’re doing here?!” Ron asked and Neville quickly interrupted him.

“I, uh, invited her… It’s allowed I think…”

“You what?! She’s a snake Neville, an evil snake!” Ron exclaimed his wild hand gestures causing the croissant he was holding to fly into the air and onto the other side of the table but he was so upset he didn’t even seem to notice. Neville for his own part held up his hands in defense and began to get that extremely nervous look that she was beginning to associate with him.

“Not a snake,” Lily interrupted before Ron could really get moving and terrify Neville, “You do seem to have an unhealthy fixation on them though, you might have a complex.”

“I… No I don’t!” Ron said to her before remembering himself, “Go back to Slytherin!”

Lily looked behind to Slytherin where they were once again gaping at her, as if more insulted by the fact that she had abandoned the Slytherin table than the fact that she was in Slytherin at all, really it seemed like they just couldn’t make up their minds. “Well, I suppose I could, but I’m not going to.”

Ron’s face got decidedly more red, not Pansy or Vernon red but getting close, and next to him the two Gryffindors he’d recently become friends with looked at each other and then looked at her and Ron, “Uh, look, Ron maybe you should just let her stay…”

“Are you saying we should let snakes eat at the table, Dean?!”

“Still not a snake.” Lily interrupted as she began to grab her own breakfast food, it was very nice, she thought to have three meals a day without having to alter someone’s perception of reality for it. It was one of the few things she really enjoyed about Hogwarts.

“No one asked you!” Ron said whipping his head back to her. It was such a dramatic difference from the train. It was as if his internal programming had crashed by the fact that she had been sorted into Slytherin and he was in a Dursley loop, but rather than normality and non-freakishness his consisted of snakes, so very many snakes covered in goo.

It was at this point that Neville interrupted with a nervous laugh, “So… um… Ellie, is that… is your rabbit… is he still coming to class?” He pointed at Rabbit who had snuffled his way over to Neville’s plate, staring at him with his usual intensity. Neville, having had Rabbit confront him from the bowels of his exploding cauldron, appeared to be the only one who was coming close to appreciating the danger that Rabbit could pose to the greater reality. Certainly, staring down at the white fluffy animal he looked more than a little unnerved.

“Considering the last time I left him alone he ate all the flying dead people in the castle from existence I thought it’d be a good idea.” She sighed as she looked down at Rabbit, changing Rabbit’s form had been a complete failure. Oh sure, it’d worked for a few seconds, she’d turned him into a tie or a pen or some other inanimate object, but always as soon as he was just out of sight she’d look back and he’d be in rabbit form again.

Because of it Pansy, Tracey, and Millicent were woken to the sounds of her screaming, “The rabbit
was a suggestion you weren’t supposed to take it so damn seriously!”

They hadn’t been thrilled with her before they went to sleep that morning seemed to only cement their tense relationship with each other. The only thing that kept them from shredding her stuff for a second time was the image of Nott being disposed of the day before but judging by their expressions they had dearly wanted to.

“I guess it just means I’ll lose more of those house-pointy thingies or get detention.” Lily said with a shrug and they all blinked at her as if her nonchalant attitude towards both detention and house points was inconceivable.

With that thought she turned to look at the front of the room where four great hour glasses stood all with various amounts of sand inside, personally she thought it was a little disappointing that there was no Default hourglass but she supposed Hogwarts was still not acknowledging the house’s existence and superiority, and with a quick glance she noted that Slytherin’s glass wasn’t empty but instead was filled with a small pile of black sand representing the growing debt in house points.

“…How many house points have you lost, Ellie?” Neville asked with a concerned glance towards the hour glasses.

“Well, I lost eighty on Monday…”

Ron spluttered into his orange juice even as she continued, “And yesterday I guess I broke even by the end of it so only eighty.”

She must have said it fairly loud because even from a fair distance away Hermione Granger screamed, “You lost eighty points in a day?!”

“Blimey, even Fred and George… Not in a day.” Ron said looking somewhat awed and horrified as if he wasn’t quite sure which expression to pick so much so that he even forgot to call her a snake.

“It is an extreme amount,” Wizard Lenin commented inside her head, “In a day a particularly gifted child might only earn ten or perhaps twenty in two different courses.”

Usually it took quite a bit for Wizard Lenin to start commentating in the morning, she had the feeling that he wasn’t much of a morning person and less interesting things tended to happen, it was only once the day got rolling that he settled in for an episode of the only soap opera he got to watch, “The Life and Times of Ellie Potter: Pseudo Glitch Messiah and School Girl”.

“Yeah, about these house points, what do they do?” Lily asked motioning vaguely to the glasses at the front.

“Do? They’re house points!” Ron said as if it was self-explanatory gesturing with his hands for dramatic effect as if that made the house points even more house point like.

“Hermione?” Lily shouted looking at Hermione for information, although she’d only interacted with the girl once or twice she got the feeling that Hermione Granger was a more efficient version of an encyclopedia and knew lots of random and mostly irrelevant facts about British wizarding culture.

Hermione looked as if she didn’t want to acknowledge Lily’s existence even while blatantly eavesdropping, her own face flushing red, but finally her desire to prove her wealth of knowledge won out and she replied, “Well, according to Hogwarts: A History the house point system wasn’t introduced until quite a while after the founders deaths. It’s meant to inspire students and instill pride for their houses and in the end the house with the most points earns the house cup for the year.”
To Wizard Lenin she commented, “I don't understand wizards.”

“No, you're understanding perfectly well, all the house points do is by the end of the year they earn you a cup.” There was a touch of cynicism here from him, not so much against the cup and the idea of it, as for young children clamoring over it as if it was a thing of worth. He felt that it was a way for pitiful humans to give themselves a false sense of worth.

“Does the cup do anything?” She asked, if it was a cup that shot out green death lasers she might understand or maybe if it was a cup that made liquid gold.

“No, it’s just a cup.”

She had the feeling that at one point Wizard Lenin had liked Hogwarts, that he had loved it even, there was a sense of nostalgia along with the bitterness every time he spoke of it and there were some aspects of it that he just didn’t question at all but rather looked on with fondness. The more time Lily was spending here though the more ridiculous pseudo glitch manipulators seemed as if in attempting to manipulate the destruction of the universe they themselves had become malfunctioning aspects of reality.

“Wait a minute, so they,” Lily pointed back at the Slytherin table, “Are all growling at me and attempting to threaten me for shaming their house and dishonoring their culture, because I might lose them a cup?”

No one had a response for that one. Only in her head did Wizard Lenin respond, “Well they also believe in more abstract concepts such as pride and honor, which you have managed to strip them of in a matter of hours, but as for physical extrinsic rewards then yes it’s just a cup. Such qualities though are more important than you give them credit for; nations have been born and destroyed for honor and pride.”

And with those ominous words she left the house points where they were in her head and simply finished her breakfast.

Upon entering the room in Potions no one on the Slytherin side of the room spoke to her, they just looked, as they had looked the day before with dark eyes filled with anger and betrayal. As if even she, who was clearly ousted from the first day, should have stayed by them in breakfast and that her failure to do so was unforgivable.

Lily took her seat in the back of the room without a word, she was slowly but surely realizing that something was going to have to be done.

She wasn’t used to her two different lives, Ellie Potter and Lily Riddle mixing together, but there was the small fact that people took Lily Riddle far more seriously. No one took Ellie Potter seriously, well they said they did, but they saw her more as a symbol rather than something that could kill and eat them with her bare hands. Messiah figures did not cause you to think twice about calling them names and making their lives difficult, drug lords did, and Lily was beginning to miss that sort of a reputation.

Snape’s entrance was no less dramatic than it was the first time, he swooped in like a shadow, black cloak billowing behind him like the wings of a mangy crow, and at the sound of his footsteps the class fell silent. It was only on turning around and observing his students that he spotted Rabbit still sitting on Lily’s head.

“Miss Potter, what is that ridiculous thing on your head?” He asked in a tone that had all the Gryffindors in the room at the back of their seats in fear.
She was getting very tired of answering that question. Slowly but surely questions about Rabbit were working their way up to being as obnoxious as “that’s nice dear” or other equivalent expressions. Mostly she was tired of saying the same words and having them disregarded completely, she was beginning to understand why people lied, even if it did muddy up communication at least it was a little less boring.

“A being of unspeakable horror?” Lily said in a remarkably flat tone that spoke to her increasing frustration with the situation, “The trouble is that I don’t really know either, I only know that it has chosen to take the form of a rabbit.”

Slowly but surely everyone’s head in the room turned towards her, each of them looking at her in anticipation, as if expecting death by velociraptor to descend upon her for daring to answer Professor Snape’s non rhetorical question. And it did seem as if he was surprised by the answer and angered by it, which if he didn’t want an answer he shouldn’t have asked in the first place.

He gritted his teeth, and through them said, “Five points from Slytherin for your cheek, Miss Potter. Now get rid of it.”

Bouts of temper were usually Wizard Lenin’s prerogative when he was especially upset with reality or otherwise discouraged, however Lily found herself taking a deep breath and telling herself that there was some reason she had gone to Hogwarts that she just hadn’t thought of yet and that just giving up and letting Rabbit eat Scotland wasn’t an option.

“It would eat out your heart and wipe you from existence. Are you sure you want me to leave it alone unsupervised?” She asked with a strained smile, one that didn’t reach her eyes in the slightest, it was Wednesday and as Tuesday had shown she was slowly but surely running out of patience.

It was odd, the Dursleys had her do more ridiculous and tedious tasks but they generally asked less of her. When Rabbit had first appeared no questions had been asked, nor had they insisted she feed it or otherwise take care of it, instead they had simply attempted to punish her for it and been reminded by the gong of death that it was terrible to punish Lily for anything. Generally when she told them that something could eat them or otherwise destroy them they took her seriously, most often resulting in a lecture about freaky business and threats to hand her over to the orphanage, but they did take her seriously. At Hogwarts they seemed more concerned about her wellbeing, giving her food three times a day, giving her a bed that wasn’t in a cupboard, but in return they seemed to see her less as a person and more as the idea of a little girl, one who should follow an unknown list of little girl rules.

“Ten points from Slytherin.” Snape replied swiftly, his voice growing in volume, and with each point loss the glares from her classmates increased and whatever good feeling had remained from Transfiguration disappeared entirely.

At least, from the Slytherin side, the Gryffindor side looked torn between horror and pure joy as she had fulfilled their wildest dreams but that their dreams were a little more terrifying than they had expected.

“The sad thing is you probably have.” Wizard Lenin commented drily. “On a side note I don’t think I would be upset, or the universe thrown into chaos, if Severus Snape disappeared from existence.”

And there it was Wizard Lenin’s final argument on why she should attend a school in the middle of Scotland when she could be in downtown London selling narcotics instead. Between Rabbit, classes, friendships, and everything else she just hadn’t had the time to truly devote herself to the destruction of Snape’s psyche. It wasn’t as if she had forgotten, it had always been there, it had just seemed less important as she situated herself in rooms filled with children who oscillated between pure hatred and adoration. Revolutions were all well and good, as well as the random good moments that Hogwarts
seemed to spurt out every once in a while, and it was certainly more interesting than normal school but Snape now there was her true purpose in attending Hogwarts.

It seemed though, even without focusing on it, that somehow by even being in the same room as him and just talking she was making him very unhappy. It was the sort of unhappiness she caused the Dursleys, that by simply reminding them of her existence she caused them pain.

“*I wonder,*” She commented softly to Wizard Lenin, “*How much discomfort and pain could I cause him if I actually tried?*”

“I’m afraid I can’t do that, Mr. Snape.” She finally said as if stating a simple irrefutable fact of the universe.

“Sir, Miss Potter, you will refer to me as sir in this class and elsewhere, am I clear? Another ten points for your disrespect.” There was a cry of outrage from Slytherin, many of them turning back to glare at her, and some even grabbing at their wands as if to strike her right then and there.

“Put those away before you hurt yourselves.” Lily said looking at them, Nott who didn’t seem to have learned his lesson, mini pimp and his two robotic goons who seemed programmed to take action whenever Malfoy so much as twitched.

“Potter, five more points for threatening your peers!”

She balked at that looking up at him with raised eyebrows, “Please Mr. Snape, when I threaten someone it’s clear to everyone involved.”

At that point he simply looked at her, his face filled with unspeakable rage, and then he began roll call in a flat monotone that barely hid the anger never once taking his eyes from her. She took the brief pause in their interaction to observe the class, judging by the face of her Slytherin comrades her standings had plummeted even further than before; instead of looking at her as if she was dirt under their boots that needed to be scraped off they looked at her as if she was an abomination before God. However, glancing at the Gryffindor side of the room it seemed like a different story entirely.

Neville was still looking as alarmed but slightly friendly as always but the rest of the house had changed their outlook on her completely. Ron, who routinely confused her with a slime coated snake, was grinning wildly at her as if she had just blown up the Death Star, and many others seemed to be sharing a slightly less enthusiastic version of this expression. Only Hermione Granger was looking put out and horrified, as if Lily had just devoured an infant in front of her, but as far as Lily could tell she was the only one with that expression.

“I believe, Lily, that you’ve just managed to earn yourself a following.”

And Wizard Lenin was done watching soap operas for the moment, the gears were turning, the metaphorical chess board was set, and the game of revolution had begun once again.

“You see, Lily, Magical Britain has been on the brink of civil war for decades. My own revolution, which you noted was mostly comprised of urban guerilla tactics was not the true war they have been itching for. Even in this classroom you can so easily see the divide, and the system only makes it grow stronger, all they need is a little push.” And in this vision Snape was merely a part of the damaged system that made distinctions like Slytherin and Gryffindor so very important. It was like a more complicated game of chess, one that Wizard Lenin had been playing for a very long time.

“I thought you recruited from Slytherin.” She noted, as far as she could tell from the various details she was currently recruiting from the opposite side of his revolution. Of course, his following seemed
more of a thing of convenience than something he believed in. Judging from his impressions of his devoted comrades his opinions of them were not too high, certainly Severus Snape had never been held in too much esteem even during the revolution.

“Typically yes, however earn one side of the population and you can quell the other half through fear. Teach them early enough and they’ll remember that you don’t stand against Ellie Potter if you wish to live. No, in the end you simply need the mindless devotion of one group, not necessarily all.” He said and it was left unmentioned that it was supposed to be Wizard Lenin’s revolution and not hers. She wasn’t sure how she figured into his plan, whether as a pawn or an avatar of himself while he was elsewhere, either way there was a dark unmentioned undercurrent that Wizard Lenin could not perform this on his own.

Ten years after his defeat and he was still in Elba.

That fact had left an impression in both of their minds and sometimes, when the days were calm, they wondered if they would ever find him a body. It was perhaps his greatest fear and so they didn’t speak of it.

In the meantime Snape had finished with roll call and was writing another set of instructions on the board, “Today we will see if you dunderheads have managed to learn anything from your previous mistakes, however I do not hold out much hope, you have the remaining period to complete the potion. Try not to make complete fools of yourselves.”

On Monday the Slytherin side of the room would have snickered, now there was only silence, already the unspoken rules were changing. The situation had grown tenser; Snape was deducting points from his own house, something unheard of in years before if Lily’s information was correct. In the eyes of the first year students it was only now that the war between themselves, Gryffindor, and Lily became truly serious.

The potion they made was less volatile than the one from Monday, perhaps Snape had realized that exploding things weren’t a sign of progress, and there were no cauldrons melting or otherwise exploding. Neville, Ron, and the Robot Minions did manage to create poisonous gas that had Snape running to destroy whatever they had managed to create in their cauldrons but that was all. She hadn’t wasted much time reading the potions text but she’d done enough, and cheated enough with Lenin’s help, to make a potion that had Snape seething at her when she turned it in.

Snape, she noted to herself, did not like it when she succeeded.

She made up her mind right then that she was going to be the best damn Potions student he’d ever seen in his sorry existence.

She also decided that she was going to have to make a list of things that Snape thoroughly disliked so that she could more accurately go forward her plots to make him suffer.

“Try not to kill him within the first year or else drive him to suicide.” Wizard Lenin interjected as they were leaving, “This is my main source of entertainment.”

Neville caught up to her as she was walking through the hallway, “Hey, Ellie, that was… How do you stand up to him like that?” He smiled at her warmly before continuing, “The other day when he called on me I couldn’t do anything…”

“Hm, Snape?” She asked to which Neville nodded vigorously, “Well, I already told you he’s not as terrifying as he likes to believe he is. Besides, I think I’ve had… well not an epiphany but I’ve reevaluated my situation.”
“Huh?” Neville asked looking more than a little confused flushing slightly as if it was a fault that he didn’t catch on right away.

“For the past couple days I’ve been so busy with classes, and people in classes, that I hadn’t really had time to get my priorities straight.” Lily said, “But now that I’ve had time to think everything should be in order.”

“Oh… That’s good, I know I have to focus on classes more and it’s only been three days. You should see Hermione Granger, I mean you only see her in Defense and Potions, but she’s been really good at everything.” He looked somewhat disappointed as he said this, not necessarily because he wished Hermione could be worse but that he could be better, she noticed a running theme with Neville’s talks with her.

For some reason he seemed to think that he was phenomenally worse than any other pseudo glitch manipulator, he was most likely worse than her and Lenin as well as a few choice other but for the most part they all seemed on the same level. One instant ramen wasn’t necessarily that much better than another brand of instant ramen.

However it seemed as if the wizards themselves viewed their magic quite differently than she did and she doubted Neville would understand if she tried to explain it.

With that Neville turned off to go to Herbology leaving Lily to go to Charms with the rest of the Slytherins where they would be paired up with the Hufflepuffs.

Charms just led her to the conclusion that only crazy people were hired as faculty at Hogwarts and that her previous evaluation of McGonagall’s sanity must have been flawed because as soon as Flitwick called her name during roll call he fainted. He had been enthusiastic and perhaps a bit bubbly before that point but it hadn’t gotten really weird until the fainting spell.

“So, I’m guessing this kind of thing is a normal occurrence here.” Lily observed to the class but again it wasn’t appreciated by anyone.

Before anyone could respond though he was back in action though explaining the wonders of Charms and all they could do with it. The rest wasn’t really worth mentioning, them attempting a few spells, Lily just summoning the glitch and creating light in the palm of her hand earning twenty points to Slytherin as well as much praise from the half goblin.

Apparently glitches, what he called wandless magic, was nearly impossible for someone her age and for her to use it so easily was almost unheard of.

“The potential, Miss Potter, the sheer potential you have!” He exclaimed as he looked at her, the Slytherins and Hufflepuffs were also staring at her. It was as if she had reminded them of her abilities, which they had seen the day before in History of Magic, but they were only now starting to believe that Lily didn’t need a wand. They looked as if they weren’t quite sure how to take that realization.

So far she supposed that Flitwick was the nicest of her professors, being the only one thus far to be polite about the Rabbit issue, saying that he would have to stay in the dormitory but if she absolutely felt she had to bring him to class he could stay so long as he was not obstructive to the learning environment. As the only Hogwarts professor that was concerned by the state of the school and the surroundings, namely what would happen if Rabbit ate them, Lily mentally gave him a gold star like the ones she used to receive in the early days of normal school.

No, where things really got interesting were the flying lessons.
Outside with a broomstick in front of her outside in the sunshine and cool fall weather with Rabbit perched on her head Wizard Lenin gave his first observation, “I hate flying.”

She recalled suddenly their first visit to the train station and uncle Death together, where she had climbed Mrs. Figg’s tree to break her neck, she’d thought it’d been the idea of dying at the time (which he was never pleased with it) but there did seem to be something about heights that he intrinsically disliked.

“Height is a surmountable problem in and of itself; my issue is when there is nothing between you and the ground hundreds of feet below but a wooden stick.” He said shortly before adding, “It’s a rather pathetic and anticlimactic way to die.”

“Well it’s a good thing you were burned alive then.” Lily pointed out.

“Oh shut up.”

“Hey, Ellie!” Neville shouted from his position on the Gryffindor side of the field next to him a more enthusiastic looking Ron waving at her as well with an absurd looking grin on his face.

“Oh, hey Neville.” Lily waved slightly and then remembering the course he had said he was going to, “How were plants?”

“Herbology was great!”

Before he could go on with the awesomeness of plants though Malfoy sneered and interrupted them, “Potter, if you could not associate with your pathetic boyfriend in my vicinity it’d be greatly appreciated.”

Neville on the other side of the field spluttered a bit while the Slytherins snickered Lily just looked blankly at him not quite sure how she was supposed to respond to that. As a statement it wasn’t so much insulting as it was incorrect, but looking at the reactions of both the Gryffindors and Slytherins there was some insult implied in there that she simply hadn’t understood. Normally she’d let things like that go, there was no point in understanding others most of the time, but looking at Neville’s discomfort she couldn’t help but wonder how it could possibly have been a verbal victory for the mini pimp.

Fairly soon though the instructor came out and gave the preamble of the dangers of flying when not taken seriously that they so far had gotten in every class. It seemed that handing small children instruments by which to distort reality was more than a little dangerous, like running with giant scissors instead of just the regular kind, and they felt that students had to be continually reminded for fear that they might kill themselves by accident.

“Now, I want you to place your hand over your broomstick and say up.” They all placed their hands of their broomsticks and shouted the word, Lily’s flew up immediately, summoning objects was hardly something she needed to practice but many others flopped around on the ground like demented goldfish. Hermione’s and Nevilles were perhaps the most goldfish of them all, eventually they gave up and just picked up the brooms looking sheepishly around to see if anyone had noticed.

“After you have your brooms I want you to place it between your legs like so,” She demonstrated, “And push gently off the ground.”

She’d been missing her quota of violence for the day when nothing had exploded in Potions, Neville’s small push was more than he realized, and he shot up off the ground only to fall back down again on his arm.
At the sight of Neville on the ground wounded to the point of tears many of the Slytherins began snickering again. It was strange though, she usually never cared when someone else was hurt, but seeing Neville in only a very little amount of pain and the others disregard of it she felt something, something cold.

Neville was quietly escorted to the hospital wing, Madam Hooch saying that they were all to remain on the ground and if anyone started flying before she got back they would be expelled. And so she left the remaining Gryffindors and Slytherins alone on the pitch.

Malfoy at this point picked something up, a glass ball with smoke inside, “Hey, that’s Neville’s!” A girl from Gryffindor shouted to which Malfoy sneered.

“A remembrall? He would need it.” Malfoy sneered grabbing one of the brooms from the ground and then flying into the air with the ball.

“You give that back you dirty snake!” Ron shouted to which Lily quietly replied, “I like the tone but unfortunately he’s not a snake either.”

Malfoy just tossed it here and there in his hands grinning as if thoroughly entertained, the rest of Slytherin cheering him on like a mindless mob, and Gryffindor growing angrier by the minute. Lily watched it all with a cold and calculating expression.

She decided she liked Neville Longbottom, more than she liked most people, and Wizard Lenin had said that he was important. There was something in this moment, with his smoke filled ball in the air, and the jeering children all around that brought to mind her torn shoes from the day before and the coldness that had come with it. She was done entertaining these people just as she had once been done with the cupboard and it was time to stop entertaining their whims.

“Mini pimp, you have ten seconds to get your ass down here before I send you to the hospital wing.” She said clearly, and all the noise stopped, both groups stared at her the red and the green until it seemed as if it was only her and Malfoy in the field.

“Mini… What are you going to do about it, Potty?” He asked with a forced sneer, putting on a good show even by stealing Pansy’s nickname, and she just smiled back. She’d been hoping he’d say that, demonstrations were necessary after all.

“Ten.” She started, his look of superiority faltered somewhat and he looked down at his peers for reassurance.

“Nine.” His look hardened as his gaze met those of the other Slytherins perhaps realizing that their hopes for the day were counting on him and this moment. This was the show down, it was here that Slytherin would put her in her proper place; that is what their expressions screamed up at him.

“Eight, seven, six.” He drew back his arm aiming the ball towards the forest as if to throw it in there where Lily would have to face many forbidden things to get it again. With that she made a mental note to check out the Forbidden Forest when she had more time, it sounded like an excellent means of meeting Uncle Death if the stories about the centaurs, giants, and giant man eating spiders were correct.

“Five, four, three.” He smiled down at her, a sly superior smile, before looking to the forest again as his arm moved forward.

“Two.” The ball was beginning to leave his fingertips.

“One.”
Lily’s smile became a grin. She summoned the ball to her hand and with a twitch of her fingers broke the broomstick in half causing Malfoy to plummet to the ground below.

“You were right,” Lily commented to Wizard Lenin inside her head, “That did look unpleasant.”

She walked over to Malfoy, unlike Neville he looked as if he had managed to avoid broken limbs and instead was merely severely bruised, he stared up at her with wide eyes as she blocked the sun from his view, “You shouldn’t take people’s things, it isn’t nice.”

With that she walked away and back to her ostracized position on the Slytherin side of the field leaving Malfoy lying where he was and the rest of the Slytherins staring at her in fear. With a twitch of her hand she mended the broomstick so that by the time the instructor came back the evidence was gone and only the fear remained.

After the class Ron walked up to her with that huge grin, “That was amazing, Ellie!” He exclaimed clasping her hands before sheepishly saying, “Look, I’m sorry about all the Slytherin stuff earlier… I mean you know how they are but… With Snape and then Malfoy, you’re wicked!”

“Um… good?” Lily said awkwardly wondering when violence had suddenly become more popular although that would explain how Dudley managed to be so popular in their old school.

“You can sit at the Gryffindor table any time, as far as I’m concerned you’re an honorary member, who needs Slytherin anyway!”

Violence, as it turned out, was the answer to the question she had just forgotten that for a little while. So it was thinking on Gryffindors and Slytherins, friends and enemies, house points and shiny cups, as well as all the things that needed to be done that she entered her second detention with professor Snape that night.

And there they were at the end of her speech, simply staring at one another, the words he had demanded be written on the board staring at them with accusing white letters, “I can make your life a living Hell, Mr. Snape, do try to keep that in mind.”

And with that she grabbed Rabbit from the desk and walked out of the classroom and back towards the common room. Snape did not mention that her detention was not over and that she had not physically written the words on the board. He only stared after her, a silent shadow of a crow, and said nothing.
The Chaos, Just Think of the Chaos!

In which Lily and Wizard Lenin play a complex game of strategy that involves provoking a civil war in the Potions classroom, the Weasley twins make a better recruitment pitch than Malfoy, and Lily is finally summoned to the headmaster’s office.

Thursday was hardly worth mentioning in retrospect, a few interesting classes had occurred, but in the end it was Friday that marked the definitive end to the week.

It had been building up to it because strange as it seemed the battlefield, the trenches on the Western front where the earth was scarred and barren and the scent of poisonous gas filled the air, was not the hallways or even the quidditch pitch but was instead Potions class. It was in that room, under the watchful eye of Severus Snape, that the bitterness festered and the battles for house points were waged.

Thursday, featuring Charms for the second time in a week, Astronomy at midnight which had enough gumption to call itself a class, and Herbology which was surprisingly more dangerous than it sounded was altogether quite boring in comparison to Friday.

And perhaps it was simply because Friday, unlike Thursday, had been anticipated. Lily had been waiting for Friday; she just hadn’t realized it until Thursday night.

That night in the dream world with Lenin they began to set up the battle plans; they were in a small undecorated room with a single light over the plain wooden table, on the table a large piece of paper had been laid out, on it was the complete list of first year students in Gryffindor and Slytherin, the attributes of each, and where they tended to sit in Potions. Everything was dissected and cut into pieces until all contributing factors were listed. This, of course, was mostly Wizard Lenin’s design.

Lily was all for causing chaos for Snape, a mess of a proportion he’d never be able to clean up, but she was surprised at how involved Wizard Lenin seemed to be. It was that intenntness she only saw every now and then, an inhuman focus where his blue eyes seemed like the edges of knives, and where there was no light heartedness and only the goal. She had thought at first that he was merely bored, and that was true enough, but there was more to it than that. There was something personal in making Severus Snape suffer, more personal than Lily’s uncle Vernon or any other man, and for that Wizard Lenin allowed himself to put his revolutionary wit to the situation.

He began by looking across at her, with his most serious of expressions on his face, and outlined the goals of their current military ventures, “To be taken seriously, in the manner that I am taken seriously, or that Albus Dumbledore is taken seriously, or even that Lily Riddle is taken seriously it pays to be honest. I am not necessarily speaking of integrity or even honesty in general but rather I speak of bluffing. When you deliver a threat, a prophecy, or anything else you must live by your words no matter the cost because only then will they see that you mean it. This Wednesday you all but ensured Severus Snape that you would lose the house cup for Slythein, regardless of victories in quidditch or the achievement of any other student. Given your current rate of point loss this goal is not extreme however this will not last.”

He paused the blue in his eyes cutting through to hers, nothing in them but that raw determination that tore through nations, even simply looking at him she could believe that he had almost toppled a country with a handful of cultists.

After confirming her attention he continued, “Severus Snape, while obnoxious, is not stupid. In the
past few days he has realized that he is almost solely responsible for the house point debt and if he hasn’t then you were kind enough to inform him during Wednesday’s detention. If he wishes to maintain civility in his house, to give Slytherin some chance at winning the cup and possibly stop them from seeking revenge against you, he will have to change his methods of punishment from house point loss to detention. Even by losing points in other classes and for miscellaneous activities it would be nearly impossible to catch up to the current rate at which Snape is deducting points. Therefore we need to instead focus on disrupting the stability in Slytherin, to cause outbreaks of violence and discomfort in the regular population, rather than solely relying on your own means.”

“So just bringing Rabbit to class isn’t going to cut it?” Lily asked.

“It will certainly help, but no, at this point I wouldn’t be surprised if he simply assigns you detention. Of course, he can only do that so long, as eventually he will run out of days for which to give you detention and he cannot hope to suspend or expel you with Dumbledore as headmaster and your… political situation. He has to maintain some form of authority, for which he relies on his terrifying demeanor, house points, and detentions; all three of those will fail him at some point in regards to you. And that, as you put it, is when things will become very interesting.” He smiled at her, his lips parting to reveal teeth, and then a red pen was out and he began circling names.

Nott, Parkinson, Malfoy, and Weasley were all circled. “Now, these students as you may have noted, are the most prone to impulsive outbursts. These are your low hanging fruit, so to speak, you need not say anything insulting or pointed at all simply talk as you normally do and they will provide the rest.”

A different pen then appeared in his hand, this one green, and more names were circled. This time they included Davis, Bulstrode, Longbottom, Crabbe, and Goyle, “These are the students who will come in after the commotion has already occurred. In the case of Davis and Bulstrode they will back up Parkinson as she’s their assumed leader in the fight against you, Longbottom will come to your aid when he sees the tides turning against you, and Crabbe and Goyle will back up Malfoy because it’s what they’ve been told to do for their entire lives.”

At this point Lily interrupted, “Who are Crabbe and Goyle?”

Wizard Lenin sighed, losing a little of his revolutionary zeal, and said in a dull tone, “Malfoy’s cronies… Robot Minions One and Two… Perhaps respectively, I’m not entirely certain you can actually tell the difference.”

Lily nodded but also wondered why he didn’t just call them Robot Minions One and Two, it was much easier to remember than the model names Malfoy had given them so that they could infiltrate the student body.

“Regardless,” He continued, “We now have the neutral rest of the class, the key Lily, is not to involve the ones who would involve themselves already. But to involve all of them, by yourself you might lose eighty house points, if each child in the room loses ten…”

“That’s a lot of house points.” Lily finished for him before reexamining the chart, “But wait, how are we going to prevent Gryffindor from losing house points.”

“We’re not, collateral damage I’m afraid.”

Lily frowned a bit thinking of Ron and his reactions towards her, somehow she doubted he’d be thrilled when she lost his house as many house points if not more than Slytherin, “They’re not going to like that.”
“They’ll have no choice but to blame Severus Snape for it.” Wizard Lenin shrugged before adding, “Besides, the plan is not that simple. If it’s an even split then yes Snape will force Gryffindor to shoulder the blame. No, Lily, in order for this to be effective it needs to be a massacre.”

By the end of the night Lily had to admit that Wizard Lenin was a phenomenal schemer and it was a small wonder he had almost taken over Britain. It was really too bad he hadn’t taken green death laser malfunction into account.

And so Friday had begun, at breakfast they had entered the prelude, and Lily prepared herself for war on a scale not seen since the great battles between her and Dudders. She also decided, that morning as she was getting ready under the glares of her roommates, that she’d best give Neville some warning as well.

She liked Neville and while his actions had been taken into account Snape also terrified him beyond measure for some fathomable reason. It seemed that everything made Neville slightly wary or insecure but Severus Snape seemed to destroy him whenever he walked into a room. The very sight of that greasy shadow would have Neville begin to sweat and his mind leave his body for safe shelter elsewhere. Throwing him into battle with the man without warning would be cruel, at least, that was how it seemed.

With her continuing point loss as well as her actions at the Wednesday Quidditch pitch it seemed she’d earned herself a permanent seat at the Gryffindor table. Not only one next to Neville who was always more or less happy to see her if a bit nervous, but also Ron Weasley, and several other Gryffindors she had never even heard of. So it was to a relatively crowded portion of the table that Lily and Rabbit found themselves that morning.

“Hey, Ellie!” Ron said waving cheerfully, “Do you have any new Malfoy clobbering stories today?”

It was almost insulting, the way he assumed she beat up the miniature pimp on a daily basis, as if Malfoy was really that interesting or suicidal as to challenge her daily. Since his broom adventure he had been avoiding her actually, only once saying to her face that his father would make her pay, to which she’d replied that his father hardly had any business with children’s feuds. Lucius Malfoy, bigger pimp, seemed a bit busy running the newspaper and the government behind various puppets to get himself involved with Draco getting his ass handed to him at Hogwarts. Since then whenever she’d walked into a room he’d gone unnaturally quiet stepping back behind the much bulkier Robot Minions One and Two so that they might serve as meat shields.

“Nope,” She said before sitting down causing disappointment to bloom on his features as well as some other members in her audience, “Thursday was actually pretty boring, well plants are surprisingly violent, but mostly boring.”

Then after placing Rabbit down on the table, letting him hop or else shuffle to where he pleased for the moment, she turned to Neville, “Potions will be unpleasant today.”

Neville groaned looking miserable, “I know, it’s double Potions… I think I might die.”

“No, Neville, Potions is going to be unpleasant.” Lily said before adding for clarification, “When you strike you must strike hard and fast, or else the war goes cold and lasts for fifty years or more, I don’t have time to squabble with eleven year olds for fifty years and I’d rather just get it over with.”

Neville looked slightly alarmed at that, his eyes drifting to Rabbit and back to Lily, before saying in a wary tone, “Ellie… Are you… going to do something?”

“I’m always doing something, that’s what verbs are for.” She said before adding getting the general
gist of his question from years of Wizard Lenin clarifying these types of things for her, “But if you mean am I going to instigate a bout of point loss such as the world has never seen before then yes, I’m going to do that as well.”

Across the table Ron cheered looking far too enthusiastic at the prospect of Potions and Lily’s various attempts to undermine Snape’s authority, “Yes, yes, I am all for it!”

“Amazing, that only two days ago you were an evil snake.” Wizard Lenin commented drily inside her head to which she couldn’t help but agree.

“That’s good.” Lily said to Ron before turning back to Neville, “Battles are often messy things. So I thought it best to let you know before things go to hell.”

He looked at her as if he vaguely appreciated the warning but was more alarmed by the prospect that the warning was needed. He still smiled awkwardly though and appeared to accept that there was nothing he could personally do to stop either Lily or Potions from occurring, which was true in both cases so it was good to see him accepting his role in life.

It was still very odd, someone her age talking to her, smiling back at her and she wasn’t quite sure how she felt about it. She thought it was nice, even as it was odd, it was also a little nice.

Thus it was on that first Friday morning of the year, Gyrffindors and Slytherins packed into their various positions on the room with Hermione Granger in the front, Lily in the back, and the rest of them in between that Lily began.

Step number one was to remove Rabbit from her head and throw. Now, she normally didn’t like experimenting with Rabbit but he usually only caused massive amounts of destruction when not observed. When observed it appeared as if he was forced into either one form or another, or he chose not to change back into his original form, but it amounted to the same thing in the end. So long as she or someone in the room kept track of Rabbit (which was very likely given the plan) he shouldn’t be inclined or else able to change forms and devour Scotland. However as it was Wizard Lenin’s plan, and even he wasn’t entirely convinced that Rabbit could eat a country from existence, he stated that the possible disappearance of Snape or a first year Slytherin or Gryffindor student was no great loss to humanity.

“Collateral damage,” He’d said the night before when she’d brought up her misgivings, “Just collateral damage.”

So as soon as the potion was announced, a relatively complicated one that day due to the double potions and students started the brewing process Lily aimed in hand and threw him Rabbit forcefully into Pansy Parkinson’s cauldron.

There had been a few choices on how to best stir up trouble in the beginning of class. One had been to insult Draco Malfoy’s father and thus get into a petty round of “your daddy” insults but that had seemed insulting and demeaning to both Lily and Wizard Lenin so had been quickly crossed off the list. Also it would most likely only involve her, Mini Pimp, Ron Weasley when he got overexcited at the prospect of humiliating Draco Malfoy, and Robot Minions One and Two.

Wizard Lenin hadn’t necessarily been a fan of the plan they had chosen, preferring to be a little more subtle, but in the end he’d decided that at the very least it would be more entertaining than Potions class usually was which for him was one of the main points of the venture. Lily made sitting through first year classes for a second time vaguely tolerable.

Whether Rabbit appreciated being thrown into Pansy Parkinson’s simmering cauldron was unclear
but judging by the fact that as soon as he was submerged beneath the surface it lit on fire she guessed he was not pleased or he was extremely flammable.

She made a note of that for the next time she needed something on fire.

In the meantime Pansy Parkinson was screaming and backing away from the pillar of fire that was her swiftly melting cauldron even as Snape was rushing to put it out. Lily having completed stage one of the battle plan, just continued her potion and watched.

“Potter!” Snape shouted once the Potion had been eviscerated and only the blinking, untouched, fluffy white Rabbit remained. He picked up Rabbit gingerly, almost as if afraid to touch him, and when holding him by the scruff of its neck pointed to him while looking at Lily. For a moment he didn’t say anything, looking both confounded, angry, and somewhat fearful as he stared at her. The class waited with baited breath, stuck on every word that wasn’t spoken, just aching for the climax to the week.

Finally Snape said in a low and dangerous voice, “Do you think this is funny, Potter?” It appeared to be a rhetorical question because he then continued with a sneer, “One hundred points from Slytherin.”

And that had not been in the battle plan. Wizard Lenin and she had assumed that Snape would act first with detention before resorting back to house points but it seemed as if Snape already was perfectly aware of the corner he had painted himself into. He had skipped over that middle step that made him look like an idiot and instead went for what he believed was the kill.

“He knows that it will come down to a duel or perhaps even an ambush between you and the rest of Slytherin. By continuing to decrease the house points at an extreme rate he is forcing that confrontation to be sooner rather than later.” Wizard Lenin commented in a quiet voice reanalyzing the situation and rewriting the plans, “However, we are all aware that this was coming. He’s hoping this will end with that confrontation, that you cannot possibly defeat the house of Slytherin on your own. And perhaps if it was any other student this would not be a gamble, but he’s taking a rather large gamble with you.”

There was an unnatural hush over the classroom, both sides having gone deathly quiet, and there was only Lily and Snape staring at each other as each thought over what this meant in the elaborate game of strategy known as Hogwarts.

She hadn’t realized how fun these things were when the other side was competent, the Dudder wars had gotten old before they had even begun.

Lily grinned.

“My sincerest apologies, professor Snape, but you see extra dimensional beings are very slippery.” She showed her hands as if for proof to which Pansy Parkinson, having gotten over the majority of her fear at almost having been burned alive shouted, “No you’re not, you’ve been waiting to do that all week, blood traitor!”

“Miss Parkinson, language.” Snape commented whipping his head down to stare at her in warning but Parkinson was beyond upset and was taking out her wand.

“That is true,” Lily commented to the class unconcerned by Pansy Parkinson’s wand pointed directly at her head, “I can’t say I’m not satisfied at the moment.”

“Potter! Five points from Slytherin for provoking your peers!” Snape said in an attempt to mediate
the situation, forgetting that the house points were the reason they were in this whole mess in the first place, and was swiftly ignored as Lily stared down Dog Face Parkinson with cool steel in her eyes.

“Well, I’ve been practicing Princess Potty! I’ll show you what a real pureblood which is capable of!”

“Again with the potty, really, it’s not clever.” Wizard Lenin commented and as he did so Pansy struck, it was a spell, the one Nott had tried the other day that hadn’t been covered in Quirrel the squirrel’s class so probably was supposed to be impressive.

This time though Lily let her get out the whole gibberish word.

“Locomotor mortis!” Pansy screamed and a red bolt of light headed towards Lily only to meet the shield that Lily now routinely set up every time she walked into Potions in case someone tried to drop something into her own cauldron.

The red bolt ricocheted right back into Pansy causing her to knock back into the table and her empty cauldron which then wobbled at the edge of the table and knocked into the potions brewer in front which happened to be Draco Malfoy. Pansy always sat behind mini pimp in Potions as well as every other class, Wizard Lenin presumed that Pansy was hoping to one day marry into the Malfoy family which was a ridiculously lofty goal to have, Lily just thought she wanted to have Malfoy for her pimp; in the end they decided that these were two fairly similar ideas.

And thus the second part of the plan was in place.

Malfoy’s potion sloshed out of his cauldron and onto the floor where it quickly began eating through the stone only to be eviscerated by a very distracted looking Snape who wasn’t sure if he should be tending to Pansy Parkinson, helping Draco Malfoy, or smiting Lily and was still clutching at Rabbit by the scruff of his neck.

“Goddammit Potter!” Malfoy said turning with his own wand to face her, Robot Minions One and Two mimicking the action so that three wands were pointed at her head, “I swear to you, this is the end, if my father heard…”

“Your father would be very unhappy with Pansy Parkinson, I am aware.” Lily finished for him at which the boy turned very red and raised his wand a little higher shaking as he did so.

“Mr. Malfoy, put your wand down now!” Snape shouted from where he was bringing Pansy back from the land of unconsciousness. “And Potter, another ten points from Slytherin!”

“But you haven’t docked me ten points yet, just one hundred and then five.” Lily pointed out at which point Ron, who had decided to become extremely reckless and brave, qualities that Wizard Lenin assured her were at the core of Gryffindor shouted, “Yeah, Snape, learn to do math!”

“Ten points from Gryffindor, Mr. Weasley for disrespecting your professors.” Snape said with speed that was almost reflexive apparently believing belittling Gryffindor to be a priority above taking care of the now blinking and rather disoriented looking Pansy.

However Malfoy hadn’t put down his wand yet and appeared to be thinking deeply because he had seen Lily in action multiple times. He knew that to get to her he’d have to get past the shield and even then Lily had wandless abilities that were far beyond their own. However, while Malfoy wasn’t as stupid as Pansy he also had a lot of pride.

Wizard Lenin had explained it the night before, “Draco Malfoy is the sole heir to what can now be stated to be the most powerful family in magical Britain with the Blacks all in Azkaban or else dead. At the age of eleven this will be very clear in his consciousness, he will expect himself to be superior
to his peers and in front of his peers. What will get him is his pride and his need to preserve his family’s honor. When he acts impulsively he cannot back down publicly and he knows it. Once that wand is pointed at you he has to strike even if he knows that he is doomed to failure.”

And so Draco stood, his wand extended, the class’s eyes on him and he knew that even though he was about to be humiliated he had to keep going. It was in his gray eyes as he stared at her, the realization that he was going to lose and there was nothing he could do to stop it.

“Well, Malfoy? Ready for round two?” She asked even as she tended to her own potion, stirring it casually with her wand and adding another ingredient. In the corner of her eye Malfoy stiffened but whether with rage or fear was unclear, it had been an awfully long fall after all.

Tracey Davis and Millicent Bulstrode found their courage and joined Malfoy, “We’ve got your back, Draco!” Tracey said as if she was one of the super powered teens in Dudley’s cartoons that were about to fight the villain, “If we work together, all do it at once, we can bring the shield down.”

Judging by Malfoy’s expression he was well aware that the shield wasn’t the point and that he was still going to lose pathetically in front of all his friends.

Lily continued to stir her potion at the correct intervals acting as if none of it was happening.

Apparently Slytherin first years had been practicing, because as Wizard Lenin was noting silently inside her head, it was very unlikely that even all these purebloods would know these spells and hexes at this age. Probably after she had gone to sleep or sometime during the day before they had been practicing spells and learning from older students for this very confrontation.

It didn’t help.

Five spells hit the shield and then once again the five students were down and knocked into their cauldrons and then into five other students causing five more potions to be ruined.

Lily added another ingredient.

Snape just stood there, staring at the dismayed children as well as the unconscious children, still standing next to Pansy and holding Rabbit by his neck. He seemed to be in shock, as if even he could not have predicted this occurring when he docked the original hundred points.

Before he could act or else gather his thoughts across the room Neville’s potion exploded from lack of attention.

And the third part of the plan was in effect.

The Gryffindors, having been so caught up in the drama, had for the most part forgotten about their own potions and the effects were now showing as they had stopped in a rather finicky stage that needed close monitoring. Ron’s potion shortly followed after Neville’s, not exploding, but exuding what appeared to be poisonous gas that was quickly disposed of by Snape without even a word edgewise and then followed by various other Gryffindor and Slytherin potions.

Within two minutes at least half of the class’s potions had vanished under Snape’s hand and it seemed as if only Hermione Granger who was frantically tending to her potion in the front and pretending Lily didn’t exist and Lily who was leisurely going through the instructions in the back would be turning in O worthy potions.

After they seemed to hit a lull in the chaos, unconscious children still on the floor or else slumped on the table, dangerous potions vanished or else dealt with, Snape stood silently in the center of the
room the rage seeming to pour into him until he was the personification of rage itself. In his hand Rabbit twitched slightly.

“Potter.” He said his voice strangely calm for the expression on his face.

“Yes, Professor Snape?”

“Detention, tomorrow night, in the forbidden forest with Hagrid.” He said without inflection before dropping Rabbit on the floor with a sense of finality that one only saw in cinema.

Lily thought about that for a moment, the silence of the classroom almost weighted in the aftermath of the battle, and then concluded, “Oh, so it is uncertain death this time.”

He appeared to have nothing to say to that and only moved silently to wake up the other students who had been knocked out either by the fumes of their potions or else by trying to attack Lily.

At the end of the class only Lily and Hermione turned in potions that were above expectations, the rest as predicted, were abysmal failures. He took each and every one of them without expression, only looking at the finished result with cold black eyes.

Just before Lily was about to leave the classroom he added, loud enough so that everyone could hear, “Potter, you will be meeting the Headmaster tonight to discuss your behavioral issues. Seven o’clock, do not be late.”

At lunch, sitting at the Gryffindor table, where Neville was shakily eating salad looking as if he was about to vomit at any moment from sheer terror and Ron was gibbering excitedly about how awesome Potions had been Lily observed the hour glass. There was indeed an almost astronomical amount of black sand inside, considering the small amounts of colored sand that the other hourglasses had, and with it Lily reflected on the main event of the day.

It hadn’t gone exactly as planned, Neville had stayed purely neutral as had most of the class, but they had gained about as much house point debt as expected which she supposed was a plus. All that remained now was the aftermath.

“At this rate how soon until they confront me outside of class?” Lily asked as Wizard Lenin seemed to be the expert on the exact psychological nature of human beings. Lily knew they would be coming but Wizard Lenin probably had it marked down to the very minute it would occur.

“After this I wouldn’t doubt it they tried something this weekend. There are only so many quidditch games a year after all and the prospects of winning the cup are looking bleak if this is only the first week.” Wizard Lenin said before adding, “If they want any chance of winning they will have to deal with you now before the point loss becomes too high. I would expect older students as well as younger.”

Older students were still only students and given what she’d seen thus far of wizards she was more than certain she could handle them. Wizard Lenin was fairly confident in her abilities as well, of the few wizards he imagined her having trouble with children at Hogwarts were not on the list.

If anything it would simply give her more opportunities to increase the point loss.

One of Wizard Lenin’s death migraines began causing her to frown, she thought about the past statement, it had seemed as if Wizard Lenin was all for the destruction of Slytherin house if it would gain Lily a cult like following in Gryffindor so she wasn’t sure where it was coming from.

“That isn’t me.” He said stiffly before thinking deeply, “It’s something else.”
Her eyes drifted from the hour glass and she looked over to the staff table where several professors were looking back at her. Snape was glaring at her with passionate hatred in his eyes which was nothing new, Dumbledore was looking at her rather speculatively perhaps thinking over their future meeting that night, and oddly enough Quirrel the squirrel was twitching at her with an oddly focused expression as well and for a moment when their eyes met her headache only increased.

She was interrupted before she could think further on it by two voices behind her, “Well if it isn’t the little Slytherin hell raiser.”

“All worship the lord of chaos, Ellie, devourer of Snape and other ickle Slytherins!”

She turned to find Ron’s brothers doppelgangers one and two wearing identical grins and expressions leering down at her with an expression in their eyes that she couldn’t quite place.

“Hey! Ellie’s my friend!” Ron shouted from across the table growing very red very quickly raising a fist at his brothers. Neville just sat awkwardly in between this as he always did looking as if he wasn’t entirely sure what was going on.

Lily wasn’t sure she was going to go so far as to call Ron a friend, especially considering that until Wednesday he’d been under the illusion that she was secretly a snake but she supposed she tolerated his presence.

“Oh don’t worry Ronniekins,” said one of the doppelgangers still with that grin, “We only want to borrow her every once in a while.”

“For the good of society you have to understand.” Responded the other doppelganger as soon as the other had finished.

Then in perfect tandem that was really impressive considering they were two different people, “We only have a little business proposition for her, after all.”

“Business proposition?” Lily asked suddenly very interested, every time anyone brought up the word business she had profited greatly.

“I think I’m in love, Fred.” One of the doppelgangers said but before she could respond they both held out to her business cards with the names Fred and George Weasley on the front.

“We’re highly impressed with your work thus far.” The other said as she took the card.

“Highly impressed.” The original doppelganger echoed.

“And we’d been thinking to recruit you into our business of mischief making…”

“…hell raising…”

“…and pure marauding in spite of your first year and Slytherin status.”

Then together they stated, “Meetings are on Tuesdays unless you have detention in which case they’re on Thursdays.”

Ron interrupted for her, “No! No she is not doing anything with you two!”

They looked vaguely disappointed at that, one of them stated dramatically leaning over the table, “But why not Ronnie, it will be so much fun!”

“Think of the chaos, Ron, think of the chaos!” The other added in leaning next to his twin so that
Ron was confronted with both of them.

“Well,” Lily said musingly, “I am interested.”

Given their enthusiasm it seemed like they’d be excellent pawns or allies in the fight against the Slytherin hour glass.

“Excellent!” They both stuck their hands out for her to shake before looking at Ron, “See Ron, no harm no foul, you can have Ellie Potter back until Tuesday.”

And with that they walked back to their own older portion of the table. Across the table Ron was fuming and looking once again like she had just stabbed a knife into his back, “Why did you agree?”

She really didn’t understand him at all, it seemed as if the littlest things caused him to change his mind completely regarding her whether it was Slytherin or his brothers.

“Because it does seem interesting.” She said in response at which point Ron sulkily started stabbing his food and stuffing it into his face.

“… You know, Ellie… The Weasley twins… Well…” Neville trailed off as if realizing there was no point to his finishing that sentence. “You know, Potions wasn’t as bad as you said it was going to be.”

Lily blinked at that, she had assumed it was fairly terrifying for the average student but apparently not, “Your potion exploded again.”

She pointed out to which he shrugged and then sighed looking very disappointed and altogether miserable, “I guess my potions always explode… or melt.”

“That boy is the most pitiable thing I’ve ever seen…” Wizard Lenin trailed off not sounding quite disgusted but rather thoroughly confused as if he expected so much more out of him.

“He is only eleven.” Lily remarked in Neville’s defense as, compared to the other eleven year olds, she thought Neville was doing splendidly. Sure he always looked as if he was being beaten up or emotionally traumatized but that was nothing compared to Pansy just talking.

Wizard Lenin said nothing but in the back of her mind he was discomforted and she got the feeling that he had expected her and him to be different somehow. As if she should have been Neville and Neville should have been her and the fact that they weren’t… Although she didn’t even understand why he would make such a comparison, there was no reason for Lily to be Neville or else Neville to be Lily.

It was a very odd thought to have on his part.

As for the rest of the day it seemed almost fitting that it would end with her meeting Dumbledore. Dumbledore was something that caused Wizard Lenin both anxiety as well as anticipation and in her head as they waited outside she could almost hear him pacing. He wasn’t sure what Dumbledore made of Lily, of everything, what he was planning because apparently Dumbledore always had a plan.

“This is the man behind everything, Lily. If there ever was a big brother then it would be him, I’m sure he’s been observing your upbringing intervening when necessary as was the case with your therapist Doctor Mitchell. This is the real man behind the curtain, keep that in mind.” He said as they sat down at the bottom of the staircase just before seven the password Blood Pops written on a sheet that had been handed to her by Snape.
From what she knew blood pops were fairly nasty, Frank detested them, and the only one who seemed to actually eat them was Stefan but even he admitted they tasted like shit and that he had gotten himself addicted to them back before working for Lily Riddle. Lily had even tried one herself and she wasn’t sure if it was because she wasn’t a blood sucking demon but it had caused her to gag pretty harshly and over all just tasted metallic.

She wasn’t sure if it was a subtle message on Dumbledore’s part or if there was no inherent meaning in the password at all. Either way she was sitting outside the office staring at gargoyles and waiting to ascend.

Finally when it was close enough to seven she stood, shifting Rabbit back onto her head from where he had been hopping on the floor, and loudly said, “Blood pops.”

A stair case revealed itself and Lily began to climb up.

The office itself reminded her a little of Riddle Incorporated, it was filled with odd flashy knickknacks that distracted and confounded the eye. Silver instruments that ticked, whirred, and popped so much so that the phoenix sleeping in the corner was almost passed over. She had always liked things like this, the cupboard had always been terribly quiet, especially in the days before Wizard Lenin. Being surrounded by noise and color and light, well, it was always a bit refreshing and made her a bit lighter.

“Don’t let him distract you with his shiny toys!” And then she had a migraine.

Sitting behind a crowded desk was the man himself, this time in purple robes with dancing cats on them, looking at her with twinkling eyes and a rather benign expression as if he had stolen it straight off of a Christmas decoration.

“Lemon Drop, Miss Potter?” The man said offering her a bowl filled with brightly colored yellow balls.

Lily reached for one hesitantly, never one to turn down free food, but then Wizard Lenin was shouting, “Don’t eat anything he offers you it could be drugged!”

She thought he might be overreacting and more than a little paranoid, Dumbledore had no reason to drug her after only a week, but she declined with a smile, “No, thanks, I’m fine without the lemony goodness.”

“Such a pity, no one ever does seem to want one.” With that Dumbledore popped one into his mouth and began to suck on it. They sat in silence for a few weighted moments as Dumbledore ate the lemon drop and Lily stared at him, in her head Wizard Lenin’s hatred and paranoia warred with each other each making him more unreasonable than the last, she had almost forgotten in all the excitement how much he hated Dumbledore.

There were so many emotions associated with Dumbledore, many of them Wizard Lenin attempted to store away for later or else use to his advantage, but always they were there causing him to burn inside her and just add to her headache.

“Is he just going to sit there and stare at you all night?!” He said after reaching his limit of silence.

“I don’t know, maybe? It’s not like I have anything better to do either.”

“There is always something better to do!”

Dumbledore had finished his lemon drop though by then and smiled over at her, folding his hands on
the desk he gave her a more serious look, but even the seriousness was seemingly comical as his eyes twinkled over at her, “Now, my dear girl, professor Snape says you’ve been trying to incite a revolution in Potions.”

Snape was more perceptive than she’d thought, she froze for a moment wondering if he truly had said that and more importantly if Dumbledore believed it, but then even if they did believe it did it truly matter? Wizard Lenin’s revolution would always remain whether they believed in it or not and she would continue even if they were aware of her actions so it really meant nothing.

“So he figured it out after all,” Lily commented before sighing, “You know he’s smarter than I thought, most of the time I think he doesn’t try, he just gets by on being menacing and terrifying small children.”

“It is a problem.” Dumbledore agreed with a frown before adding, “But Potions is hardly the place to go about such business.”

“Oh?” Lily asked, “Where would you recommend then?”

“I always found Defense Against the Dark Arts to set the mood correctly.” Dumbledore said before smiling, “However revolutions are a rather messy business for an eleven year old girl to participate in. Perhaps you should wait until you’re older?”

All in all she was finding Dumbledore to be perfectly reasonable, really the most reasonable wizard she had met thus far, sometimes including Wizard Lenin.

“This is not a reasonable conversation!” Wizard Lenin interjected feeling more than a little insulted that Dumbledore had just been proclaimed to be more reasonable and practical than him when he was wearing purple cat robes. He also was just confused by the conversation in general, not sure what to make of it at all, having expected something much more Lenin-esq from both of them.

“They are a bit messy, but really headmaster, what else am I going to do with my time?” Lily asked.

“Fair point.” Dumbledore said before pausing and saying, “You could join the quidditch team.”

Lily thought about it, she distinctly remembered there being some stupid rule about quidditch and brooms and being a first year, but she was pretty unconcerned with rules as it was. There was a small problem with that plan though, “Isn’t Snape ultimately in charge of the Slytherin team?”

“Yes, but I believe Default is in need of a few players.”

And in the back of her head Wizard Lenin preemptively responded, “You will not respect or otherwise admire this man!”

“You’re right.” She said, and there was a smile on her face, because even Doctor Mitchell had never been this helpful. It was as if, for the first time, someone besides Death and Wizard Lenin understood. Sure, Neville tried but it had only been a few days and it was more than clear that he didn’t quite understand. Here was someone, who within only a few minutes, seemed to grasp what she was trying to say.

Wizard Lenin was not pleased by these thoughts.

“In the meantime,” Dumbledore said as her smile grew, “Do try to keep the devastation in Potions to a minimum, Miss Potter.” He winked at her and she saluted him across the table, “Yes, your excellency!”
“We are going to talk about this later.” Wizard Lenin said dangerously in her head even as it pounded, her scar aching and sending pinpricks of death into her brain, but even so she felt the meeting had gone well.

Perhaps, if there was a man and a room like this in Hogwarts, she could manage to get along there if only for a little while.
The dream was stark that night.

The dreams always had atmosphere whether good or bad, sometimes they were ominous, sometimes nostalgic, sometimes bright, and sometimes intimidating but they always had a feel to them. It was in the lighting, the scenery, and the edges of their surroundings so that they were not only in places but they were also in different worlds.

The one that night was barren, not dark, not dangerous, but expanding forever with nothing inside it; a white room without walls where shadows did not even cast themselves on the floor.

In the center of the room Wizard Lenin waited for her staring ahead at that blank horizon and yet his eyes held so much inside them all at once so that they seemed to have so many more colors than his usual pale blue.

“Albus Dumbledore is not a man to be trifled with.” He started, not even waiting for her to approach, not even looking at her.

Lily did walk up to him though so that she was looking at him from the side, catching his profile, that flat expression as he stared straight ahead, “Who said I was trifling?”

He frowned slightly and then did turn to look at her but there was still no expression on his face, not the expression of spinning gears of thought but instead that irrationality that seemed to appear only with Dumbledore, “Perhaps trifle is the wrong word regardless you are not taking him as seriously as you should. He wears many masks and has his hands in many pies, headmaster is only one of his titles, and it would be foolish to accept any of his charades at face value.”

And yet even if it was a mask it was the first time she’d found someone who understood immediately. Wizard Lenin had improved over the years and Death was fairly competent but it was Dumbledore who had responded without pause to her conversation and surely that meant something even if it was a charade. It might not mean friendship, trust, or anything like that but certainly it warranted a small amount of respect.

“Perhaps,” Lily said staring back at Wizard Lenin, “But then, if it is a mask I do appreciate the effort he took to craft it.”

And there it was, a flicker of fire in the back of his eyes, of pure rage that had to be stifled down and silenced before it turned into an inferno, “You are being played like a fiddle, Lily!”

Abruptly their scenery changed and they were no longer in a white abyss but rather a small gray room. A single wardrobe stood, scratched with old wood, and a cot was shoved into the corner. In the room there were two people besides herself and Wizard Lenin, or rather images and memories of people, one was a very small boy with dark hair and hard pale blue eyes the other was a younger red haired Albus Dumbledore in a canary yellow suit.

“This man is not your friend and will never be your friend. He will do what he believes is necessary and justify himself after the fact through his own fickle sense of morality and he will not hesitate to
strike you down when you give him half the chance.” Wizard Lenin said pacing and then stopped himself abruptly before the wall, his posture stiff and the emotion seeming to pour off him.

Finally in a somewhat bleak and emotionless tone he said, “And should you respect him, even if you believe you do not trust him, you will give him the chance he needs.”

Lily wandered the room for a moment, taking in his words, and finally seated herself on the bed next to the young boy. He had a look of distrust on his face, fear too, and something else perhaps something that could be labeled as hope but that was almost absent in his eyes.

She poked him slightly, he didn’t move, he felt more like a statue than a person so very cold and immobile.

“Please refrain from touching him, Lily.” She turned to find Wizard Lenin’s narrow eyes on both her and the boy with some expression she couldn’t quite put her finger on.

“Well he’s not really a person, is he?” Lily asked although she was guessing the answer was no, after the Rabbit incident she had refrained from creating or summoning things from nothing, so creating people from scratch in her head seemed like a rather dangerous thing to do even for someone as daring as Wizard Lenin, “Where are we, is this your memory?”

“Yes, from a very long time ago. This was when I first met Dumbledore.” He said quietly and she reevaluated the boy next to her, and yes he did look at lot like Wizard Lenin, only young and not so dangerous yet.

It wasn’t quite that he seemed human, because even this boy seemed a bit too intense for normal humanity, but he was softer than the Lenin he would later become. Still, it was odd to see him this way, looking close to her age and so terribly small.

“Come here, there’s something you need to see.” Reluctantly Lily pulled herself from the bed, whose quality was even worse than her own subpar mattress at the Dursleys’, and stood next to Wizard Lenin as he offered explanation.

“As it stands Dumbledore and I are not the only ones in this room.”

She looked at him with raised eyebrows, looking around the room for a moment which really appeared to contain only them, the boy, and the younger Albus Dumbledore.

“Well, yes, we’re here too.”

He made some dissatisfied noise, glancing at her slightly as if disapproving, before clarifying, “No, we don’t count. Remember I told you I once had a friend.”

That conversation had been some time ago but it had always lingered in her memory, Wizard Lenin rarely dispensed details on his past, and then it was only on dry facts that usually meant little to him. The fact that he had once had a friend, someone outside of his role as Lenin, had a far different taste to it. She didn’t think on it often, sometimes not at all, but every once in a while she would try to picture young Wizard Lenin’s friend with red hair. She never could manage it and Wizard Lenin never appreciated the gesture.

“Oh yeah, the one who became boring and married a near sighted guy with bad hair.” Lily said paraphrasing Wizard Lenin’s words from years ago.

His face twisted into an expression of displeasure at the memory of it but he nodded tightly, “Yes, although this was long before that occurred. Regardless right now she is hiding in the wardrobe.”
There was a moment where both of their eyes drifted to the silent and seemingly empty wardrobe at once.

“Um, why?”

He sighed and then in exasperation said, “You know, even I’m not sure, but it’s important to keep in mind.”

And with that he pulled her to the side of the room with him, so that they were clearly portrayed as members of the audience rather than the stage, and the scene started.

“Who are you?” The boy asked, his voice very sharp for a child’s, his eyes flickered momentarily to the wardrobe and then back to the man’s, “Are you some sort of psychologist?”

Younger Dumbledore blinked momentarily and his face was different from the face that had greeted Lily. It was less benign, less of that cheery holiday rip off, and instead it was a somber expression as if even while in this room he was thinking on greater things than a pale child. At the question he looked a bit confused but he understood the tone.

“I’m afraid I’m not entirely certain what that means.” Dumbledore finally said before adding, “So I’ll have to say that no, I am nothing like that. I am a wizard just as you yourself are and it is my great honor to invite you to Hogwarts Academy of Witchcraft and Wizardry this coming September.”

Here Dumbledore reached into his jacket and withdrew an envelope, holding it out to the boy with a smile that tried to be benign, it was a little tight to be real though.

Something in the boy seemed to relax for a moment as if he recognized these terms and he reevaluated the man, he seemed almost to be searching for something on or in the man and couldn’t find it, finally those pale blue eyes met Dumbledore’s again with something sharper inside of them, “You don’t look like a wizard; color blind yes, wizard no. Mrs. Cole would send someone up to screw with my head, she’s always wanted to you know, thinks I’m not right upstairs.”

Here the young Wizard Lenin gave Dumbledore a bitter smile and tapped at his head, indicating just where upstairs really was. A slight chuckle escaped him but before Lily could really process it the smile was gone, “You know it’s not a half stupid idea, get some man up here in a ridiculous looking suit, have him say that he was special too. That he could make things happen sometimes, just by thinking it, just by wanting it enough, that he could talk to snakes and they could talk back! Because then all of Tommy’s secrets come pouring out, don’t they? Did she tell you about the rabbit or was it Dennis and Amy?”

By the end of it the boy was shouting, pressed against the wall, he finally took a deep breath though closing his eyes for an instant as if to calm himself, “It doesn’t matter though, even if you try to hold me in some asylum, with the junkies and the schizophrenics you can’t keep me there. You people can’t touch me, can’t even get close, and that’s really the best part of all. No, the best part is when they realize they can’t get close that I can hurt them, that I like to make them hurt, but they can’t ever hurt me. That’s really the best part…”

The smile was long gone from Dumbledore’s face, and the hand that had been holding the letter out to the young boy dropped to his side, “Would it make any difference if I told you again that I am no psychogrophist?”

“Psychologist.” The boy replied calmly, his eyes reopening to stare at Dumbledore, “Anyone can say words though, correctly or incorrectly, you’ve offered me little in the form of proof.”

And for a moment they merely looked at each other, in the way that Clint Eastwood and his
opponent would stare at each other in an abandoned desert town, and then there was a wand in Dumbledore’s hand and he pointed it not at Tom but at that dark wardrobe against the wall. From there the memory seemed to slow, to become almost distorted, the shadows elongated and Dumbledore and the boy seemed stretched thin.

In the young Wizard Lenin’s eyes it seemed as if he already knew what was about to happen because they had widened and the only expression in them was horror. With pitifully slow movements he began to move towards the wardrobe but how fast is running when all Albus Dumbledore had to do was say a few words.

The wardrobe burst into flames and the boy was screaming.

“Holy shit.” Lily summarized, the scene stopped there the boy with his hands raised against the heat of the flames but looking at it in desperate horror and disbelief, Albus Dumbledore standing at a distance with a grim expression and his wand pointed at the offending piece of furniture, and the wardrobe lost within the pillar of fire that had seemingly sprung from nothingness.

“It was the illusion of fire.” Wizard Lenin, the normal Wizard Lenin, said softly as he walked into the center of the room once again his footsteps echoing in the silence, “Only a few seconds later she was rolling out of the wardrobe perfectly unscathed and all my other possessions untouched. Nevertheless it remains that in this moment, in this one single moment, I lost everything at the whims of that man.”

Lenin’s head turned back and the smile he gave her was more than bitter it was poisonous, “Should you have asked him that day, today, or any other day, he will and would have told you that it was all for the greater good, well if he could remember it that is.”

The memory faded from view and even as Lily could feel herself leaving the dream Wizard Lenin offered her some parting words, “This is what he is at the heart of things; very different from the genial and eccentric old man isn’t he?”

When she woke, bleary eyed and somewhat dazed, he made no mention of that memory or of Dumbledore. Instead he was silent, almost withdrawn, as if he was hardly in her head at all but was instead lost somewhere in his.

She was left a sense of disquieted wonderment as she tried to puzzle out what could possibly have prompted Wizard Lenin to show her that.

It seemed far too personal, far too human, for it to be anything he would show her of his own free will and she found it unnerving. Almost more unnerving than the sight of a wardrobe on fire and the shadows it painted across the room.

At breakfast she decided to dig up more information since Wizard Lenin seemed unwilling to discuss it further. Sitting down next to Neville and across from Ron who was stuffing his face with a speed that was almost uncanny she started the round of questions, “So what do you know about Dumbledore?”

“Well, a lot of people say he’s the greatest wizard of our age. He’s really famous for defeating Grindlewald during the first war… I can’t say I really know that much though…” Neville trailed off
sheepishly as he ran out of information.

“Hermione?” Lily asked, Hermione was in her usual position which was vaguely close but still very separated from the herd. She was sitting with her nose in a book attempting to look as if she wasn’t paying attention but given that it was *Hogwarts: A History* which Lily was pretty sure Hermione had memorized Lily thought it was a weak attempt.

Hermione twitched at her name being called, her fingers clenching around the book, Lily tried for a second time, “Hermione?”

“Don’t do that!” She finally said snapping the book closed and looking at Lily with a hurt expression of indignation, “Don’t treat me like some wizarding encyclopedia!”

Lily blinked at her once or twice in sync with Rabbit who was blinking on the table also looking at Hermione, “So, you don’t know then?”

“No, of course I know… That’s not the point and you know it! Why don’t you just go back to your own table, Ellie Potter!” With that Hermione gathered her books, as well as the wealth of mostly useless information stored in her brain, and quickly strode out of the Great Hall not even bothering to look behind.

“Blimey,” Ron said in between mouthfuls of food, “She’s even weirder than I thought.”

It was rather alarming that her go to resource for wizarding information had left in such an emotionally frazzled state for seemingly no reason but Lily didn’t think that was enough of a reason to chase after her.

“Okie dokie then, you know anything Ron?” Lily said turning to her next source of information, she personally would rather have heard from Hermione who had so far shown less short circuiting than Ron (from her there had been no mentions of slimy snakes) but she would work with what she had.

“Dumbledore is the greatest wizard ever!” Ron said grinning after swallowing the latest mouthful of food.

“Really?” Lily said looking over at Dumbledore, he was pretty cool and reasonable for a wizard, but she thought Wizard Lenin would take more than a little offense at the idea of Dumbledore being the greatest wizard ever.

“You’re bloody right he is!” Ron reemphasized still with that absurd smile, kind of like the one he gave her every once in a while when she was seen putting Slytherins in their place, “Even You Know Who is scared of him!”

“Oh, that is such bullshit.” Apparently Wizard Lenin’s moment of introspection and silence had ended. She had to say she agreed with Wizard Lenin, hatred yes, to an absurd degree he despised Albus Dumbledore. He hated his clothes, his demeanor, his charades, pretty much everything about him burned in Wizard Lenin’s memory but afraid wasn’t quite the right word. He was wary of approaching him head on, in the same way that he was wary of Lily Riddle, but that was not fear.

It was not mind crippling; and that said more than enough.

“While I appreciate your attempts to garner information clearly your sources of intelligence are abysmal.” Wizard Lenin said and with it the scathing thought that the only thing Ron Weasley could ever ben an authority on was quidditch which just went to prove how useless he really was.

“Albus Dumbledore is far more political than many of these fools realize; he is above all a master of
Wizard Lenin started in a short tone and as he went on images flickered through her mind so rapidly that she could not catch them. She saw Hindenburgists, a phoenix, that tavern scene again, as well as many other things she could not quite fit into her mind. “He is not only headmaster of Hogwarts at this time, a position that allows him to monitor and influence wizarding Britain’s next generation as he chooses but also is Supreme Mugwump and Chief Warlock. At the end of the first war he defeated Grindelwald, as Neville Longbottom so kindly pointed out, and from there his political power grew exponentially. He also stood against me and my movement through a resistance movement known as the Order of the Phoenix. Even now, humming up there and pretending to belong in a madhouse he is scheming.”

Just what those schemes were weren’t stated but rather left to Lily’s imagination, accompanied only by Albus Dumbledore humming to himself at the head table a sight so normal that no one even bothered to comment on it anymore. Lily decided that information gathering would have to wait until her encyclopedia, otherwise known as Hermione Granger, returned, “Well, thanks anyway.”

And so it was, later that night, lost and alone in the Forbidden Forest with Rabbit hopping around at her feet and surrounded by nothing but trees that Lily decided that Dumbledore probably merited some watching. Lighting a wardrobe on fire had not only been badass but also rather terrifying there also was his reputation to consider which bordered on cult like if Ron Weasley was anyone to judge by and there was the fact that Wizard Lenin was wary of outright challenging him even in his revolutionary days; and that spoke volumes for the man’s destructive capabilities.

Wizard Lenin was right, Dumbledore wasn’t someone to trifle with, and so she decided to keep it in mind.

Naturally it’d fall behind other priorities such as her war with Snape, the destruction of the house of Slytherin, the bolstering of the house of Default, the formation of the Default quidditch team, finding a more permanent solution for Rabbit, getting Wizard Lenin a body, following up with Riddle Incorporated on A.L.F., checking out the third floor corridor, visiting uncle Death on Sunday, and most important of all getting the hell out of the woods.

Preferably before the man eating spiders or xenophobic centaurs showed up.

“While I admire your ability to prioritize tasks that doesn’t exactly help the situation.” Wizard Lenin commented in her head but considering his comment was just as useless as hers she didn’t pay it any attention.

It had all started well enough, she had met with Hagrid at the appointed time, Rabbit on her head and both of them prepared for danger and adventure of all kinds. As it was it turned out to be much less exciting than that, or it was intended to be.

“It can’t say why Severus wants you out here with me, need to collect some plants for his potions but other than that…” Hagrid had said shrugging as he held a lantern. It seemed that Snape had wanted to intimidate her, and if Ron’s reaction of terror to werewolves that roamed the woods was anything to go by it probably would have worked on a normal student, as it was it just seemed kind of petty like Snape didn’t want her in his classroom again after hours.

She may have been a little too forceful that last detention on Wednesday.

So she and Hagrid had started out in search of plants, Hagrid taking the time to talk to her about her parents. It’d be fairly interesting if he was at all informative; instead he got too emotional and tended to say the same details over and over again. She learned that she looked just like her mother, a statement that Wizard Lenin had affirmed, and she also learned that her parents had been the top students in their class (a statement Wizard Lenin found more debatable) and that they had been really
good people (a statement that Wizard Lenin found even more debatable).

Other than that it seemed that Hagrid either didn’t know any details or was incapable of expressing them. The conversation then turned into how proud they would be of Lily (which she wasn’t quite sure she believed given how many house points she had lost in a week) and how they had been too young and too good to die (which seemed rather rude to uncle Death as if he would discriminate against only the old and morally decrepit).

It probably would have gone on like that for some time if Rabbit hadn’t decided to take initiative. Rabbit normally was a rather passive observer of reality, choosing to hop here and there every once in a while, but mostly just watching out of those dark eyes. Only out of sight of observers did he strike as evidenced by the disappearance of the Hogwarts ghosts; however Rabbit seemed to have changed. Perhaps it had been something in the potion he had been thrown into or the fact that he had been thrown into a potion but either way he jumped from Lily’s head without warning and began to swiftly hop into the underbrush.

“Oh shit!” Lily said and without warning to Hagrid had bounded after the fading patch of white that was Rabbit. Hogwarts, as filled with Dumbledores, Snapes, and boring conversations with Hagrid as it was did not deserve to be eaten along with Scotland by Rabbit.

“And down the rabbit hole we go…” Was Wizard Lenin’s distant comment; almost too quiet to make out.

She caught up to Rabbit in an empty clearing, the stars glittering overhead, and Rabbit staring back at her as if nothing had happened at all. It was then that Lily realized that she was hopelessly lost.

“You have any idea where we are?” Lily asked Wizard Lenin once Dumbledores and other tasks had all been settled in her brain.

“A general idea, yes, but it’s been a while since I’ve been in the Forbidden Forest and you weren’t exactly paying attention to where you were going.” Wizard Lenin grumbled out, which Lily took to mean that he had no idea where they were either. After a moment, he added, “That thing is a menace, we can’t leave matters as they stand.”

“Hey, I told you Rabbit was already on the list.” Lily said, before Dumbledore even, dealing with Rabbit was a top priority.

“Indeed, before Dumbledore…” There was the feeling of Wizard Lenin grimacing in her head but he added nothing to that.

She doubted Dumbledore was going to eat Scotland anytime soon so she felt her opinion was justified. With a sigh she brushed off Rabbit and deposited him back on her head, “Sorry about the potion and Pansy, if that’s what this was all about. I didn’t realize you were flammable… It was great though.”

Rabbit on her head twitched, she didn’t know if that meant she was forgiven or not. Looking back towards the direction she came she started walking hoping she might be able to retrace her steps successfully.

As she did so she felt the headache, the one that had existed since the night before and never truly
had gone away, mounting once again in her head, “Only you, Lily, could manage to get yourself lost in the Forbidden Forest on your first week of school.”

“What was I supposed to do, let Rabbit eat something else? He already ate the dead people what if it was something important this time?” Lily said as she stepped over various roots which seemed a lot higher than they had been when she had been running through initially.

It wasn’t really about Rabbit though, they both knew that, in the end it had always and would always be about Dumbledore. That moment she had looked at him and seen something worthy, if only for a moment, and for that Wizard Lenin burned. She had not realized at the time, and even really until that moment, how seriously Wizard Lenin took her and her opinions of the world.

He didn’t always listen, and certainly didn’t agree, but ten years in her head had made her more important to him than he had previously lead her to believe. Lily wasn’t just a place he resided until she found him a body, and while he feared that his lodgings in her head would be permanent and did everything within his power to get himself out he still manipulated himself around her. Lily was more than Dudley Dursley or even Ron Weasley and she hadn’t truly realized that.

In viewing Dumbledore, in discussing Slytherin’s situation with him so bluntly, something between them had grown strained. Not broken, he was still in her head and she in his, but strained.

She wasn’t quite sure what to say to that because it was all so complicated, she could only see the tips of the thoughts as she trudged forward, as if they were threads winding back into a tapestry whose pattern was obscured.

So she walked on in silence, arbitrarily turning left or right according to what she remembered, passing this tree or that tree but on the whole getting nowhere. The night was only growing darker, the moon rising overhead so that it was staring down upon her like a silver eye, and in that eye she felt as if she was no more than a single photon.

“You are far outside of your territory little wizard.”

Well, it seemed she had run into the xenophobic centaurs after all. A dark centaur stood before her, looking for the most part what she imagined, a very muscular man with the lower body of a very muscular horse. He regarded her coolly, with mild interest but also a little chastising as if she should have known better.

She wanted to point out that really it was Snape’s, then Hagrid’s, then Rabbit’s fault she had wandered off the beaten trail but he didn’t seem like the type to take excuses like that. Although she wouldn’t be in this situation if she hadn’t had detention in the forest anyway; that had to say something about her situation.

“Well, I am very lost.” Lily said stepping fully into the clearing where the centaur stood brushing dirt and twigs off of her robes. “I’m beginning to wonder if I shouldn’t have just turned left the whole time.”

“One is never truly lost merely misdirected for a time.” The centaur replied seeming to take no offense by her approaching him.

Wizard Lenin was slightly more on edge than she was, despite being a bit put out with her at the moment he seemed as if he still would prefer not to have an arrow lodged in his brain.

“Well then I am thoroughly misdirected.” Lily said peering about in search of the lights of Hogwarts that she had been searching for for the past hour, “Any idea how I might get un-misdirected?”
The centaur pointed with a hand to Lily’s right, probably leading back to the castle, “Ah, that’s very helpful.”

For a moment they simply stared at one another, his hand still raised and pointed to the castle, and her just staring out at it wondering why she hadn’t started yet. She was uncertain, she realized, she and Wizard Lenin had never been on this shaky of terms before.

When they had first met each other they had been hesitant but this was different and she wasn’t sure how to proceed with it. She could make it back to the castle, make it back to the Slytherin dormitories, but then where would she go or be? It was like being lost while being lost, making herself not lost in one capacity did not solve all her issues.

“It appears I’m more lost than I thought.” Lily said and with a great sigh sat herself on the ground much to the centaur’s blinking astonishment, “I need to think for a bit.”

“I, Firenze, am more tolerant of wizard kind than most but it would be unwise to loiter here for too long.”

Lily snorted slightly, “Sometimes I think I’m tolerating wizard kind too; that’s half the problem.”

“Are you yourself not a wizard?”

She stuck out her hand, “It’s Lily, well Ellie Potter, but you know… names they’re such ephemeral things.”

He shook it gingerly, his hands very calloused, as if unsure what to make of the human gesture. And as he heard her name his eyes widened a bit and he seemed to reassess her.

“I have heard your name even in these hallowed woods, it echoes greatly amongst the stars.”

“Ellie Potter or Lily?”

Here he did smile at her, “Both.”

And what did one make of that, she wondered to herself, she looked up at the stars above them. Twinkling brightly in the distance and she wondered if her name or names were truly spelled out among them in particles of light. She couldn’t see it.

How many thousands of years of light would it take her for her name to reach the outer edges of the universe so that it could reflect back in the eyes of centaurs? What did the moon see when it looked down at her and Wizard Lenin in her head?

“I’m not really a wizard, everyone says I’m one, insists really but… Insisting does not reality make, you understand, and so I never have been a wizard even when they insist I’m one.”

“I am not quite certain I understand.” The centaur stated after a moment of silence, taking her words in gravely, “The heavens are always clear on one’s state in the universe, everything is written, it merely remains to be read.”

She supposed that made about as much sense as normal divination methods did, certainly more than relying on bad trips caused by LSD, and if one could read the death of stars in light as well as the expansion of the universe there were probably other things up there as well.

“Does it say how I make Lenin happy and understand that acknowledging Dumbledore for ten minutes in no way endears me to him and that I will always back the proletariat and the glorious
revolution no matter what form it might take?”

“… No.”

Well that would have been useful, “What does it say then?”

“They say you will accomplish great and terrible things.”

“Ollivander kind of beat you to that one.” Lily noted drawing her wand momentarily out of her pocket before stuffing it back in, “Anything else?”

He offered her a slight smile, a hesitant one, before continuing, “They say you will write and rewrite yourself until light itself is overwritten.”

“Sounds exhausting.”

“They say that Mars walks in your shadow like a great red eye but that war is not your true purpose.”

“Still sounds exhausting.”

“They also agree and say that you are no wizard.” He concluded in a curiously solemn tone, one that attempted to be affectionate but also had an undercurrent of sorrow for her, as if even as pitiable as being a wizard was it was better than being nothing. She wondered if she should feel insulted by that, but then from her usual glimpses of pseudo glitch manipulating culture she didn’t really feel like she wanted to be a wizard. She’d much prefer just being Lily.

“I told you, no instant ramen glitch manipulating for me thank you very much; only the very real deal for me.”

“I do not understand this instant ramen.” He said with a quizzical lift of the eyebrows.

“It’s sort of like eating very salty cardboard but for a very low price.” Lily clarified which judging by his expression clarified nothing; sort of like the conversation she was having at that very moment.

Glancing at Rabbit she looked over at him, “Do the stars say what Rabbit really is?”

“The stars do not speak of such abominations.” He said sparing Rabbit a withering glance beneath which Rabbit’s ears twitched in warning.

They stared in silence for a moment at the illusion of a rabbit but after a while the centaur once again broke the silence, “You said you are having personal troubles with this wizard named Lenin, correct?”

Lily nodded, that seemed like a fairly accurate portrayal of her current situation.

“When young foals are fighting it is often best to discuss troubles rather than allow them to ferment and fester.”

“So, just talk to him about it?”

“It often helps.”

She considered that, well, it certainly was better than the seething silence that had been in her head. Picking up Rabbit and placing him on top of her head she gave the centaur one last smile, “This is the most vaguely interesting conversation I’ve had all day, and that includes Hagrid talking about my dead parents.”
“It was my pleasure Lily-Ellie but it would be best if you return to the castle now. It is not wise for little almost wizards to linger in the woods after dark.”

And with that the centaur walked off in the opposite direction of Lily until he disappeared back into the forest as if he never existed in the first place. Not quite as xenophobic as she was lead to expect nor as cryptic but still more interesting than most of the day had been.

“It meant nothing, that conversation with Dumbledore, it was only a moment.” Lily finally said to Wizard Lenin as they made their way back.

“I know.”

And strange enough, as they approached the glittering lights of the castle, it seemed as if he truly did.

(Snape, McGonagall, and Hagrid seemed less enthused by the prospect of her journey of personal discovery and she was docked one hundred more house points for abandoning Hagrid and getting herself lost in the Forbidden Forest during detention.

So it was that even on a Saturday without classes she pulled Slytherin further into house point debt.)
A Week in Review

"In which certain death, and other certain things, are not quite as certain as they were advertised to be, Slytherin tries and fails to do something about Lily, and Death asks for Lily to keep a secret."

It seemed as if they were always headed to that third floor corridor.

Even years before, when it had only been her and Wizard Lenin and Diagon Alley filled with possibility and dead ends in equal measure, they had always been guided to that wooden door that marked the road to certain death.

On Sunday morning, there was no thought on the week that had already passed, on Wizard Lenin, Dumbledore, Neville, Slytherin, or anything else there was only the thought that it was a Sunday and that a door had been promised them.

And it seemed so very heavy with destiny.

There was something odd about that third floor corridor, namely that it seemed so simple, almost as if it was an invitation. On the door was only the slightest of spells, one that Wizard said even a competent eleven year old could break, and inside there was only silence. There were no warning signs, no wards, nothing to indicate death or danger or even something worth protecting.

Simply a wooden door, a very breakable lock, and the overwhelming silence.

Foreboding was not a feeling she had often, as she had told Wizard Lenin when she was five the idea of death as a terrifying force of nature to be reckoned with or otherwise avoided was alien to her, before she had fallen and met with Death in Purgatory she hadn’t liked the idea of dying but mostly because she didn’t know what it would entail. She doubted that it would be either the fiery sauna of doom described in church but beyond that she had no real ideas. Sometimes she had wondered if it wouldn’t be some sort of abyss, like sleeping, with nothingness crashing over your head and just slipping away from reality as if you never existed in the first place.

There was still a sense of unease, whenever something unplanned arose that could harm her person, but it was never truly terror.

It didn’t creep into her, carve itself a home in the marrow of her bones, it didn’t burn cold inside her heart. It did for Wizard Lenin, ever since she had known him, and possibly long before he had always looked over his shoulder for the shadow of death. In his mind she wasn’t clearly associated with death, there were a few strings here and there but they were mostly labeled as Death’s theories, to him death was a shadow and did not have a face or thoughts to go with it.

There was always a moment of pause from him, terrifying blankness, whenever they were about to visit uncle Death. Where there was only the drop, the rope, or whatever method they would use and the terrible plunge into darkness and the unknown. He always seemed a bit relieved that it was a train station that awaited him, instead of something else.

The door was ominous and foreboding spread through her with the pulse of each heartbeat.

“You’re right, this first step is far too easy.”

She felt the reassurance then running through both of their minds that nothing had managed to kill her yet and that it was Sunday so death was somewhat expected. Still, all the same, that image of the
scheming Dumbledore and a wardrobe on fire was not easily dispelled from their shared consciousness.

She shook off any lingering doubts and readjusted Rabbit on her head, standing around looking at doors labeled “DESTINY HERE” in invisible pen was all very well and good but it accomplished nothing, she often found that destiny at least required walking if not falling out of trees.

“Right! Onward to certain doom, destruction, and decimation!” And with that she twisted the door knob and used a small glitch at the same time to open the door.

Perhaps she had simply expected to walk into the train station between worlds, into her own mind where Wizard Lenin lingered, or perhaps some other world she had never been in before but even stepping into the room she felt nothing change. The stale air still tasted of Hogwarts and her foot met with a solid wooden floor that might be found in any other room of the castle.

And so she opened her eyes and peered into the darkness.

She’d never been to Hell before, she’d heard about it vaguely in church when she was very young, and then from various other sources. Vampires had various beefs with the Christain faith, mostly culminating in ridiculous and embarrassing deaths such as death by holy wafers, death by holy water, and death by large pointy crosses. As a result most everyone who worked at Riddle Inc. had some opinion on Hell and demons or just religion in general. Nevertheless she’d expected Cerberus to be a bit larger and the road to the gates of Hell to be a bit longer and not in Scotland.

“A cereberus not the Cerberus” Clarification aside they both agreed that they were confronted by a very large, three headed dog, that was bearing its teeth and growling at them preparing to tear them limb from limb. Wizard Lenin was not taking it well.

“How painful would you say digestion is as a form of death?” Lily asked as the dog moved closer, its chain rattling on the floor, and Lily couldn’t help but watch the large amounts of saliva pooling underneath it forming a rather deadly looking lake of spittle.

“You can always hope that it kills you on the first bite.” And as hard as Wizard Lenin was trying to contain himself she could practically feel the unease and desire to be elsewhere oozing from him like ooze from the giant space snakes that Ron was always talking about.

“The terrible part of that is that you don’t consider that simile an insult.”

Still it all seemed a bit weird, certain death by dog was by no means certain, intimidating certainly but not necessarily lethal. As it was merely by entering the room Lily could still leave it and therefore escape her doom, and according to Dumbledore that shouldn’t have been possible. In fact that dog couldn’t even seem to reach her, stretching its chain to the full length it was still a few feet from her, snapping and barking and growling but nowhere close to eating her alive.

It was like the door had been, a little flashier but never the less the same principle, the dog wasn’t that much of a challenge.

She felt suddenly rather disappointed, when she had first heard of the third floor corridor, she had known immediately that she and Wizard Lenin would investigate it thoroughly because as Death of the universe she had an obligation to meet certain death in a hallway now and then. Even Wizard Lenin had later agreed and said there had to be something important, something life altering, hidden in that corridor if Dumbledore was going through such a ridiculous play for it.

“Even Dumbledore,” He had said that first night, “Is not that eccentric.”
And perhaps, they had thought, this would contain Wizard Lenin’s answer. The philosopher’s stone, an android, or something that would allow him to exit Lily’s brain and resume the grand revolution where it had deteriorated and begun to fester.

A world without Wizard Lenin in her head, without his commentary, was almost unfathomable. It was like staring into a dark horizon waiting for the sunrise, uncertain if it would ever appear, and meanwhile the air was growing still and cold. Never the less it was something that was needed, a role to be played, and she accepted that reminding herself that gone was not gone and that changed was not lost.

He belonged to the world, not solely to her, and she would not keep him from it.

And so they had come to the third floor corridor in which there was nothing but a three headed dog and the vague sense of disappointment.

“So Dumbledore is keeping a dog locked in the attic?” A dog could be useful in its own right but it certainly wasn’t worth all that build up during that first welcoming speech.

“I doubt it, cereberuses are usually used as guard dogs. Look under him, you see that trap door?” And indeed in the giant dog shadow there was a trap door, a small square with a single iron handle.

“Ah, the first level.” And once again, as she was every once in a while at Hogwarts, she was reminded of Dudley and his various hobbies. This time his video games came to mind, pixelated figures on a screen moving this way and that, having to face dire obstacles only to proceed to the next level. The door had been the first step, the dog the first level, there would most likely be many more still to go.

Digging her feet into the wooden floor, facing the beast and expelling any thought of pain or death, she breathed out and prepared to sprint under the dog and through the small wooden door beneath.

She was a still pond, a perfect reflection of the sky and trees above her, and from a branch above there landed a single drop and then there was only the ripple.

With one she slid and rolled past the dog and offered it one glance as she opened the trap door it had abandoned in pursuit of her. And then she fell.

The door slammed over her, drowning out the sound of rabid barking, and beneath her there was only darkness and the sound of rustling. With a thought she summoned light into her hand and then the rustling increased to a dramatic amount along with something that sounded vaguely like screaming until it was just Lily floating downward into the center of the room staring into the cracks of the walls where thin black vines were desperately attempting to hide themselves.

“Plants?” Lily had only had Herbology once thus far and while it had been more dangerous and interesting than she had expected she hadn’t necessarily expected certain death to involve plants. Even Wizard Lenin seemed vaguely dumbfounded although he knew what the plants were called.

“I think it’s time we moved onto the next room.”

The next room however, was completely empty, as was the next, and then the room after that. These series of rooms ended in a large empty chamber, one with pillars and all the dramatic setting, but nothing inside.

After a few fruitless attempts at searching the chambers and searching for wards and other signs of disillusionment Lily gave up. Sitting in the floor with Rabbit hopping at her feet she pretended that she was Dumbledore and what a three headed dog, plus plants, plus a few empty rooms, amounted
It did seem a bit like him, or at least, like how he presented himself to act without purpose promising certain death and delivering only plants and dogs and empty rooms. However Wizard Lenin was insistent that Dumbledore’s personality was one that was forged, and that he truly never did anything without purpose, particularly something as drastic as all this.

That being said even he was dumbfounded by the fact that they had found nothing at all.

“Maybe it’s a metaphor?” She asked in her head but it was quickly shut down.

She knew he was trying to hide it, to stamp it out before it could start, but despair was beginning to well within him again because after so many years of searching he had thought that this might lead him somewhere. Perhaps onto another path, but never the less this was an end that did not appear dead, and he had put more stock into that than he should have. Now where there had been small amounts of hope there was bitterness, disappointment, anger, and that feeling of hopelessness he always attempted to avoid.

These periods never lasted too long, Wizard Lenin was the very definition of persistence, but never the less she never liked them. He always seemed far too listless, drifting from the material world, with her only left watching as he seemed further and further away from both her and reality.

There was nothing she could say though, because however she painted it the room was empty, and they were alone once again.

“Come on, let’s go visit uncle Death. It’s Sunday after all.”

He said nothing to that; seemed unable to even muster his usual reluctance and irritability at the mention of Death. Instead he felt heavy, as if he was sinking into himself where his deepest thoughts were obscured from her view. Grabbing a quill from her pocket, an action she had taken to doing since having transfigurable materials was always handy, she turned it into a blade and in one quick stroke drew it across her neck.

She would have to remove the stains from her clothing on the return, she thought as she distantly heard the blade clatter to the ground already half turned back into its original quill form, but Dumbledore had failed to deliver what he had promised and it seemed easier than all the other possibilities encountered thus far.

On entering the train station Wizard Lenin only stared flatly ahead, beyond the image of King’s Cross station, and without a word to her or to Death he began walking without a glance behind him.

It was Death’s words that broke the silence, “Ah, I was wondering how your first week would go.”

Only a little while later they were at their familiar table with a kettle of tea and two cups between them, and the familiarity was nice, more pleasant than she’d thought it would be because even though it had only been a week it had also been exhausting. Hogwarts was loud, messy, vibrant, and emotionally draining. It twisted her this way and that, throwing children, Slytherins, house points, and Dumbledores into her face and asking her to juggle them all at once. Death she did not need to juggle.

“It’s not that it’s terrible or even really good, it’s just… Busy. I like busy, it’s far better than not-busy, but at the same time…” She trailed off and shook her head unable to describe all of it. He smiled at her, that kind smile she so rarely saw. She hadn’t realized it before Hogwarts, where she had human interaction on an unprecedented amount, but it was the kind of smile one expected to see on a father
or a grandfather.

“I can’t say I felt the same way, my life up until Hogwarts was not quite as exciting as yours so the school was the brightest and best thing I had ever seen… Nevertheless I will agree, Hogwarts is a world unto itself with wonderful and terrible moments hidden within in equal measure.” He stared off into the distance for a moment, where Wizard Lenin had wandered out of sight, and his eyes made their way back to hers, “I haven’t seen him this depressed since you first took him to Diagon Alley.”

“Well, stuff happened, or didn’t happen I guess. First there was this whole Dumbledore thing, I mean I had one conversation with him and while it was pretty cool did you also know he apparently lights wardrobes on fire?”

“Strangely enough I did know that one.” Death muttered with an odd expression as if not quite sure what even he made of that detail.

“Anyway, so there was this whole Dumbledore thing which we kind of got sorted out but then today when we were looking into the third corridor that leads to certain death we find that one, it doesn’t lead to certain death and two, there’s nothing in it. And we had thought… Well… we had thought about it more than we should have.”

She didn’t know what she had said but Death suddenly looked rather alarmed, his face paled more than its usual bone-white complexion and he had the expression of someone who had forgotten something important or else misplaced it for a while, his gaze sharpened and it seemed as if he was thinking on something very hard. Finally he said, “Lily, you entered the third floor corridor already?”

“Well, yeah, he said it had certain death. I mean, how could I turn down an invitation like that?” Her eyebrows had raised, that dubious expression she had picked up from Wizard Lenin years before, but Death didn’t even seem to notice.

“And there was nothing in it?” He asked, curiously insistent for Death.

“Well a dog and some plants…”

“Oh that will change very quickly, and I imagine the defenses will as well.”

Death then, in reluctant tones, as if he was uncertain how much he should impart to her and how much truly applied to her own different universe related a story of a single red stone in the possession of one Nicholas Flamel and how it managed to find its way to Hogwarts in the protection of Albus Dumbledore.

“So then in that ridiculously dramatic room…”

“Yes, the philosopher’s stone was waiting… But Lily, that stone has no right to exist, it will only attract violence and death as it is doing at this very moment. It must be destroyed.”

“No right? I have to tell Lenin, this is what he’s been looking for…” She made to walk off in the direction where he had gone and tell him the good news, that somewhere in Hogwarts was the philosopher’s stone, and that if they played their cards right it would wait in the third floor corridor.

Death’s hand shot out to hers though, unusually tight, in a way that it had never been before and his eyes seemed to burn as he looked at her, “I will not lie and say that I know this man, your Lenin, as I knew the Voldemort that existed in my world. I do not know what wonders or horrors he is capable of but nevertheless I fear the power a philosopher’s stone might bring him.”
Staring back into those eyes, filled with so many emotions she didn’t know how to name and had never felt herself, she saw the consequences of her decision etched inside them. Death had once hinted that should Wizard Lenin break ties with her then worlds would burn for it and she had wondered then how much she believed that just as she wondered now.

There was a faint possibility, one she had not allowed herself to consider, where Wizard Lenin didn’t leave. Because Lily had always existed with Wizard Lenin and once he left there was no guarantee that she wouldn’t somehow be transformed into Ellie again; Ellie alone in the cupboard for hours on end with only her thoughts running in circles.

There had seemed no question though that Wizard Lenin would leave and that she would do everything she could to help him to do it, that he would return to his revolution as well as the world and she would be elsewhere, perhaps at his side and perhaps somewhere else entirely. They would be two separate entities, Lily and Lenin, no longer held together in her own head.

“You cannot give it to him, Lily.”

And she could only allow for her hands to be clasped in his, to stare at him with wide eyes that asked how he could ask this of her, and in her mind she weighed Wizard Lenin and Death upon a scale and was almost afraid to see which weighed heavier to her.

The rest of the time they spent talking, lighter words, about Malfoy and Ron and everyone else she had met. For someone so removed from time and space Death had many opinions on Hogwarts and the people in, from Hermione Granger, to Malfoy, and even a few vague and cryptic comments on Dumbledore. It seemed as if it had been such a long time since she’d seen him, and she’d forgotten how nice Sundays truly were, and how even though it had always been Wizard Lenin and Lily she had met Death in a station even before meeting Wizard Lenin.

Eventually Wizard Lenin returned from the horizon, a figure in black, his pale skin seeming slightly off color in the dark clothing and shadows cast beneath his pale and tired eyes. He looked worn, stretched, but more present than he had felt in her head.

“You ready to go?” She asked.

With a grimace he gave a short, “Yes.”

And that was enough.

She woke to the smell of dried blood staining her Hogwarts uniform, staring up at the vaulted ceiling in that final chamber, and without a word to Wizard Lenin plucked her quill from the floor and removed the stains from her.

What a strange day, she thought to herself as she exited the corridor and made her way back to the Slytherin dormitory, she had expected it to be a little more exciting and involve a little less thinking. Instead it seemed the weekend had only been filled with reflection, with thoughts of her and Wizard Lenin all tangled and gnarled together until she failed to make anything out of it at all.

It’d been an oddly paced week, too busy and then too slow, and now here they were at the end of it with all the year stretching before them and longer.

It seemed exhausting all of the sudden, so much to do and so much time to do it in, a never ending list just growing and growing and growing inside her head.

As if to add to that the common room was not empty as she had expected it to be but rather filled with a hoard of angry children.
If only they had come for her on Saturday she would have given them more of a show or perhaps even Friday but as it was the first year Slytherins and a few upperclassmen had waited until Sunday to confront her as soon as she walked into the common room.

They were staring at her with eyes far too bitter for the minimal damage she had done to their persons, even those she had not talked to like Daphne Greengrass, Romilda Vane were looking at her with both contempt and distaste. Their knuckles were white around their wands and as soon as Lily had entered the room there was instant silence, the weighted silence that comes before a battle, and at the forefront like a hideous parody of seniority were Malfoy, Parkinson, and Nott each vying for the lead spot of opposition against Lily.

“Potter,” Malfoy started when she only continued to stand in the doorway, her hands dangling at her sides, and her eyes narrowing. “I think you know why we’re all here today.”

That comment was probably supposed to stand on its own, the sneer, the charade of confidence made it all seem like mini pimp was reading off some sort of script in his head but as usual Pansy Parkinson made an ass of herself and ruined the timing, “Yeah, Princess Potty, today’s the day we end you!”

There were a few glances at Pansy, winces, but the tense atmosphere did not change.

Any other day of the week and she would have played along, as it was she needed to sit down and think, think about stones and Death and wizards and a world without Wizard Lenin; she needed to think about things that were far more important than even the war with Slytherein.

“I don’t have time for this today, go do whatever it is you all do on Sundays.”

No one moved an inch, “Oh you’re going to make time, Potter.”

It was funny, even at a glance, she could tell which ones knew it was going to work and which knew it wasn’t. Malfoy, standing at the front played at confidence but she could tell by the look in his eyes that he knew it was going to end in disaster. Most likely when Pansy Parkinson had begged him and Nott had scoffed at him he had felt he had no choice but to lead the movement, that was what Malfoys did after all, stood at the head of things and hoped the ship beneath them didn’t crash into an iceberg.

Zabini also looked somewhat hesitant as did Greengrass but the rest seemed more or less confident, as if a few recruited third and second years and a few hours of practice could allow them to stand victorious against her. Funny, the underdog story didn’t usually involve the underdogs provoking the enemy first.

Wizard Lenin’s standard advice in these scenarios rang in her ears even without him having to voice them, make them bleed, make it hurt, not necessarily humiliating but painful to contemplate, so that when they think to strike at you their hands will always be shaking.

So with a single casual hand gesture she watched as they all dropped to the floor unconscious, their wands rolling out of their clenched hands and one by one she picked the wooden sticks up off the floor and stored them into her extra dimensional pockets.

“What you’re contemplating doing is bordering on sacrilege.” Wizard Lenin commented in her head, the thought like a gong across her consciousness, nevertheless she didn’t stop inspecting each wand with care and then slipping it into her pocket. She had always found it odd how hideously crippled wizards were by their reliance on sticks, take away the stick and most were the same as normal non-glitch manipulating humans. They spent years going to a school to master the art of the
stick, the words of the stick, and never once thinking that the stick was somehow more of a wizard than they were.

After all, without the stick they weren’t wizards but without the human the stick was still a stick.

“They’ll get them back.” Besides she didn’t have time to cause them physical pain and her latest plan involved many more point losses than this, some other day she would have her epic battle with Slytherin, but today was not that day.

She was tired, too tired to be violent and creative, and so she would do what she would always do and let them deal with the aftermath. She would cause large amounts of point loss for Slytherin, inexplicably become popular in Gryffindor, search for stones, and think about Dumbledore but she would not pander to the whims of children.

“They will not appreciate the gesture.” But that seemed to be all Wizard Lenin had to say about that because he fell silent then and back into that contemplative state he had been in before. Trying to think where to go from here, what to plan or try next, how to not succumb to his position as Lily’s invisible friend. It seemed he was too tired to humor them as well, he had not thought Hogwarts would be so exhausting.

So with that Lily walked into her empty dorm room, placing Rabbit onto the night stand and falling onto the bed with a sigh, and there was one final thought to Wizard Lenin before she closed her eyes, “Death says that it’s a philosopher’s stone.”

It wasn’t Death’s world, he had no right to it or its future, and he should have remembered that.

(The next morning, and thus the next week, started on a more certain note than the first had. She stepped up onto the Slytherin table, in front of her wandless and agitated looking peers, and amidst the chaos of the hall had shouted the one word she knew would cause instant silence and rapt attention.

“Voldemort!”

Then, when everyone’s eyes drifted to her form, in disbelief, terror, outrage, and all other emotions she reached into her pockets and removed a single wand.

“One wand, Ollivander’s, a seven on the flame scale of power and having belonged last night to Malfoy. Do I hear one galleon, two, five?”

And as Wizard Lenin had predicted the night before, no one seemed to appreciate her auctioning, but she had never before lost so many points in one go.

And so week two started off far more proactively than the first.

There was shit to be done.)
A Rabbit by Any Other Name

In which Lily fixes the Rabbit problem, a new Albanian transfer student arrives a week late to Hogwarts, and Lily has a second meeting with Dumbledore.

By the middle of her second week in Hogwarts Lily was once again in the Headmaster’s office. Considering that they’d thus far spent the first five minutes simply looking into each other’s eyes in complete and utter silence, waiting for the other’s moves, feeling out the other’s thoughts, she wasn’t quite sure what to think of the whole thing.

It’d started that Sunday night, after having visited Death, and after she had gone against his wishes and told Wizard Lenin of a red rock named immortality that might one day find its place in Hogwarts’ overly dramatic basement.

The dream was filled with great gears of a giant machine, hidden somewhere far beyond them, each of them spinning against each other, she and Wizard Lenin were on a rather large one spinning in circles like a demented merry go round and even with all that motion Wizard Lenin felt it necessary to pace. His eyes were like blue fire, too intent to hold anything other than persistence and obsession in them, and in them she could only see that red stone reflected.

“I knew it, I knew there was something down there, something worth this elaborate set up.”

She wasn’t sure if he was speaking to her or not, he was smiling, but he wasn’t looking at her rather he was staring straight ahead as he paced back and forth on that spinning metal disk. Lily spared him a glance before staring out past them, into the rest of their shared consciousness, wondering just what the great machine truly was.

It could be a clock, she supposed, ever ticking forward but she also liked to think she could hear a piston somewhere and that it was the engine of the train she had always seen but never taken. That even in here, even after being forced to choose, she was not abandoned by Death.

“Theatrics, they’re his true greatest weakness. The girl who lived, the prophecy, that whole debacle of attempting to hide the Potters, it was all theatrics in the end and they only worked because it was you. But now he doesn’t have Deus Ex Machina to hide behind anymore, he has to play with his own pawns, and that won’t be so easy.”
He stopped pacing and looked at her, his eyes burning far too pale and brightly, “We need to search his office, possibly his person, within the week. I have no doubt our little excursion was noted, whether he knows it was you is left up to debate, but with the stone not under his planned defenses and rather in transition it should be at its most vulnerable.”

Lily paused at the idea of strip searching Dumbledore, not quite sure she was willing to do that even for the sake of Wizard Lenin’s body, but she nodded slowly, “Okie dokie, I needed a password to get up there last time though.”

He gave her a flat look as if unimpressed with her answer, “Lily, if I’ve learned anything from living in your head for the past ten years it’s that where you’re concerned reality is jelly that can be molded into whatever shape you want it to be.”

That probably was true, all the things she truly wanted worked themselves out more or less, but never the less she hesitated because as easy as life was it wasn’t always easy. “True but…”

“But?” Wizard Lenin asked with raised eyebrows his voice filled with doubt of her doubt.

“Glitches are a bit like using a sledgehammer instead of a key.” Lily finished searching for the words and images she wanted, “It works, it gets you through, but the results aren’t always… clean. Sometimes it’s easier, for now and for later, to just use the key.”

Wizard Lenin blinked at her for a moment, stunned, and then said, “That was perhaps one of the most profound observations you’ve ever had.”

“Thank you.” Lily said wondering if Wizard Lenin had ever given her a compliment so directly before. He really wasn’t the type, compliments and positive feeling was usually more Death’s thing, while Wizard Lenin was stiff and cold.

She knew that he liked her more than he liked most people but toleration was about as high on the scale of affection as he ever got. As it was she’d never really heard him compliment anyone without there being some sort of backhanded insult involved.

“However, I don’t care if you blow up Dumbledore’s office or cause it to sink into an abyss in another dimension so I’d rather have the sledgehammer.”
“But what if the rock is inside the office that sinks into another dimension and gets eaten by space snakes?” Lily pointed out, the gears stopped spinning momentarily, as if she had just thrown a wrench into their midst and clogged some integral piece of equipment.

He stared at her, blinking, and said nothing clearly having not thought of that problem before. Normally he was the one to hesitate on using glitches to solve problems, whether to rewrite memories, fix various things back to their natural states, or anything at all and it’d be Lily all for using it. Now that it mattered though, that they had to get it right without room for error, they had switched and Wizard Lenin was the one burning with impatience and Lily hesitating.

Glitches worked, far better than their pseudo glitch cousins, but they weren’t always precise. That was the nature of a glitch after all, a fundamental error in reality, it could be directed and manipulated but not controlled to the very letter at least not when she was guessing. She had the feeling that Dumbledore’s office was a lot more complicated than locked doors so her pulling it apart and putting it back together could have unforeseen consequences. And unforeseen consequences were the last thing Wizard Lenin needed in this situation.

“I got called in for a meeting the first week, I can do it again.” Lily said and in response the gear she was sitting on slowly and jerkily began creaking into motion once again.

“It might not be so easy a second time.” Wizard Lenin noted his expression slightly less flat but still looking as if he’d infinitely prefer the easy way out, “In a week you’ve managed to push Severus Snape to his wits end, as far as he’s concerned you’ve already had your meeting with the headmaster and it has failed. If it didn’t work the first time why on earth would it work the second?”

Wizard Lenin was later proved right after auctioning off her schoolmate’s wands in front of the entire school did not earn her a meeting with the headmaster but instead an unheard of amount of points lost even greater than her previous amounts of points lost. However Dumbledore merely looked at her then, considered her, with a far more sober expression than he had given her thus far and made no move to seek her out or summon her to him.

Things continued in this trend when in Potions she didn’t lose any house points even after pulling out the dreaded ‘your daddy’ insults to Draco Malfoy. Snape instead had only stared at her flatly, contemplating, and proceeded to ignore all of it.

Point loss, he seemed to realize, was completely useless when he couldn’t rely on the members of Slytherin House to defeat her in combat and thus humiliate her in front of everyone. Snape was changing up his strategies and those didn’t rely on house points or meetings with Dumbledore.
She despaird to her audience of Gryffindors that night on the topic. “You’d think I’d have to burn down the school just to see him. Why does this place make easy things so difficult?”

Her audience had expanded from Ron and Neville to include their other two roommates Seamus and Dean (who still acted more like replacement Ellie than real people) and Ron’s brothers; doppelgangers one and two.

“Um, so is that why you tried to sell Malfoy’s wand this morning, because you want to meet with Dumbledore?” Neville asked perhaps trying to appear confident but mostly looking confused and somewhat wary as if not quite sure what to think of her.

There’d been a brief period of debate in Gryffindor during lunch and the school day on whether she had gone too far this time even for Gryffindor. The day had been filled with quiet chatter in her wake that would halt immediately when she entered a room and they would each look at her from Slytherin and Gryffindor and in their eyes was disbelief, confusion, and perhaps a trace of fear. It had been Wizard Lenin, as usual, who had managed to explain it best, “In selling their wands you’ve gone much further than humiliation, there was actual danger in that, because to a wizard a wand is everything. You can buy a new one, yes, but that’s not the point. In that moment you disarmed them all so easily you took away everything they were and showed them just how mortal they truly are. They are beginning to recognize that you are a thing to be feared.”

She didn’t know what she had been to them before, a slight amusement, a pest, but something in the taking of their wands had slammed home the lesson far more than any other action could. In that one morning, more than anything else, she had managed to convince the majority of them that she was very serious.

And they weren’t quite sure what to make of that.

By dinner Gryffindor seemed to have decided that she was still an honorary member of the house and that any action against Slytherin was a good action to take. There was some hesitation, in Neville’s eyes, but Ron was back to his overenthusiastic short-circuiting self and there were no loud objections to her presence at the table.

Neville’s expression had cut deeper than she had expected and she had wondered why it was so unpleasant to see that kind of opinion curdling in his eyes. However, he had yet to say anything directly to her, and when he saw her he still smiled so she supposed that things could remain that simple if she wanted them to.
"No she tried to sell Malfoy’s wand because he’s a git, right Ellie?" Ron asked between bites of chicken trying to ignore Rabbit as he slowly crept across the table his beady eyes never leaving Ron’s face.

"In part, it also wasn’t just Malfoy’s wand, his just happened to be the first in the pile.” Lily said with a shrug taking a piece of chicken for herself, “I wish they would have let me get a little further along and keep the profits but that was too much to hope for.”

There was silence for a moment, where each of them appeared to take in her words and reaffirm what they had seen this morning, that Lily had tried to sell all the first year Slytherin wands and more. When you had that kind of reaction of stunned disbelief even after many hours how was it that she still hadn’t been summoned to the Headmaster’s office?

She hated to think it but she might have to go with Wizard Lenin’s suggestion of her usual tactics and just break down the door.

In the meantime Rabbit had inched closer so that he was sitting on Ron’s plate and staring him in the eye. Ron, leaned away from it, guarding his piece of chicken closer to his body and interrupted the thoughtful silence, “Ellie, look, you gotta do something about your rabbit. He’s kind of creeping me out.”

“You dare insult Hogwarts’ god of calamity’s pet bunny of chaos?” Doppelganger one asked cuffing Ron across the head.

“I’m shocked Ronniekins, shocked and insulted at your behavior.” Doppelganger two added shaking his head in dismay.

Ron flushed crimson, “Who asked you guys?! What are you doing here anyway? Don’t you have your own friends?” He stopped and looked at Rabbit who seemed impossibly closer than before, “And it’s really creepy, I’m not making this up.”

“But our friends aren’t nearly as exciting as yours.” One of the doppelgangers noted with a musing expression.

“Besides we realized that if we waited until Tuesday we’d have missed a week’s worth of Ellie adventures.” The other doppelganger noted with an equally musing expression.
And with a timing that amongst normal people would have to be rehearsed they said, “And that just isn’t in any way acceptable.”

Wizard Lenin drily noted in her head that she was starting to appear something like a heroine in a romance novel in which many different suitors fought over her hand at once and she just sat quietly sitting in the middle feeling very flattered by all the attention. Certainly there was some unspoken tug of war going on between the brothers with Ron staking claim to her first and the others coming in later to take away the territory of friendship gained.

Rabbit seemed to be ignoring all of it though, fixated on Ron with an almost worrying amount of attention. Ron was right, something did have to be done about Rabbit, she’d acknowledged as much already and perhaps while meeting Dumbledore over stones and immortality was stalling she could look into her other projects instead.

“Well, he is a being from another dimension that devours things from the very fabric of reality; I mean what did you expect?” Lily asked looking across at Ron.

“Yeah… Right…” Ron said not sounding at all convinced that Rabbit wasn’t a rabbit but not willing to bring up his usual arguments while locked in the staring competition with the creature.

It was somewhere around there, of Ron considering Rabbit, and Neville considering both her and Rabbit and how he felt about either of them that Lily had an idea. She stood from the table an expression of divine inspiration on her face ignoring the way that they table’s occupants were staring at her even those she hadn’t even been near.

“Uh, Ellie, are you okay?” Neville asked a bit of that concern that had been in his eyes leaking into his voice but it was hidden behind the vision dancing in her head.

“I’ve just had a brilliant idea.” Lily responded and mechanically picked up Rabbit from the table and began to walk towards the dormitory without a word behind her.

“See, Ron, if we had waited until Tuesday we would have missed that.”

In the dorm room, empty as all the other students will still at dinner, she paced back and forth in the style of Wizard Lenin in deep obsessive thought and considered Rabbit whom she had placed on the bed. He stared back at her, unblinkingly, observing her with just the same intensity that she observed him.
“This is a terrible idea.”

Wizard Lenin, of course, was entirely against all of it.

“It’s a wonderful idea. I kill two pigeons with one rock.”

She took care of the Rabbit problem and there was no possible way this would not merit at least some meeting with the headmaster. It also had that taste of an idea that would lose her house points by the dozens which was not an opportunity to be passed up.

Wizard Lenin didn’t say anything, as it embarrassed him to admit it, but he didn’t like the idea of experimenting with Rabbit. He didn’t even like the idea of Rabbit’s existence and was always hesitant to confront it. It was like Death but more so, if there was such a thing as going beyond his discomfort with Death then Rabbit was it, Death he could at least contemplate the consequences of Rabbit’s existence he didn’t even like to picture.

“Besides, weren’t you the one who was all for sledgehammering your way through the office door and having the whole place possibly disappear from reality?” Lily asked and it didn’t matter that he hesitated to respond because the answer was a definite yes.

“That wasn’t exactly what I said and those were very different circumstances. A door is not… whatever that thing is. Besides this shouldn’t even be possible, remotely possible, the very idea that it could be possible is beyond alarming.”

On the trail end of that, not exactly directly stated, was the thought that Lily just did what she wanted regardless of it being against the fundamental laws of reality or not. It was amazing how he kept forgetting that glitches were at the end of all things glitches, representative of the failings of those fundamental laws, and thus anything really was fair game. It was as if he didn’t really want to know and preferred his neater and cleaner version of reality where physics meant something.

It was just better not to get into that kind of a discussion though.

“It’ll get us into that office without possibly blowing it up, which is all we really want, right?”
He certainly had nothing to say to that.

In retrospect Wizard Lenin may have had a point but at the time things had been a bit too strained between them for her to really see it. His need to get to the stone, to find it, to begin working was oppressive to both of them. Along with the tension over Dumbledore the week before as well as the fact that they hadn’t found it in the third corridor Lily had felt limited in her choices. There was probably a safer and cleaner means to reach Dumbledore’s office, but it would have taken time, and as Wizard Lenin had clearly conveyed time was against them from the start.

The first thing she noted was that it had actually worked in that it had stuck. She had managed to turn Rabbit into quills, staplers, ties, and other inanimate objects but as soon as her attention drifted slightly he’d be back in Rabbit form. Here, even when she looked away for only a moment and back the form stayed.

The next thing she noted was that she had forgotten to give him clothes which while wasn’t a real problem as she could just transfigure them but was more of an interesting situation than she had originally envisioned.

Wizard Lenin in her head was dumbstruck apparently losing all capability of thought as they both stared at the newly transformed Rabbit who was sitting slightly stunned on the bed. Finally, blankly, he said, “Why do I keep doubting you can do things only for them to occur so anticlimactically it makes me feel like an idiot?”

“You know, that’s a really good question.”

Lily pulled a dark green blanket that had been sitting on her bed over Rabbit and then stepped back to continue staring.

He was the most symmetrical looking human being she had ever seen.

It wasn’t just the symmetry though, his skin had no marks on it, looking more like marble than true flesh, his eyelashes were long and black, his eyes large and despite being very dark seemed almost to be filled with light, his limbs thin and slender, all features that didn’t really fit the eleven or so year old body he seemed to be in. He looked out of time, parts of him adult, but others very childish.

That of course wasn’t even getting to the fact that his eyes were still very dark, so that it looked as if they were only pupils, and that his hair was still that rabbit shade of white it had been previously
curling about his face.

He plucked at the blanket around him with an expression that might have been curiosity but could have just been the same no-expression he’d had when he first transformed. He drew it in closer around himself, over his shoulders but not really covering anything important, and continued to stare across at her.

“Do I still call him Rabbit even if he’s not a rabbit anymore?”

Wizard Lenin was too caught up in the fact that Rabbit was no longer a rabbit to make any comment on that.

Lily decided to address him, “So, Rabbit, or Not-Rabbit… You’re a person now.”

Rabbit blinked a few times at her but otherwise did nothing.

“Being a person is nice, I think you’ll like it, well I’ve never been a rabbit so I wouldn’t know the difference but it’s an experience worth having I think.”

“Lily, are you sure it understands English?” Wizard Lenin seemed dubious, he really wasn’t sure what to think, but judging by Rabbit’s complete lack of expression comprehension probably wasn’t happening.

“Well, then I’ll just have to teach him.” Lily said realizing even as she thought it that there were many other things she’d have to teach Rabbit as well because thus far he was acing his vegetable impression but his Hogwarts student impression was abysmal.

It was at that point that the other girls started wandering in and the reaction had been pretty much as expected. Dog Face, Boulder, and Completely Normal and Boring Looking all walked in to find a very naked young boy with very features that were almost too pretty lounging on Lily’s bed and staring at her with an unusual intensity.

There wasn’t really a response at that point, more like wordless frothing at the mouth, but Lily felt that when they did regain powers of speech Pansy Parkinson said it best, “What the hell, Potty?!”
Lily motioned to Rabbit, who had turned his head to glance at the new intruders staring at them for a moment with the same expression he had looked at her with, “Everyone, this is…”

She looked back at Rabbit wondering if Rabbit really was in anyway applicable anymore, it hadn’t really been applicable when he was in rabbit form but it fit even less now. Glancing at the open mouthed group of girls who were blushing furiously at the sight of him she also had the feeling they wouldn’t believe her even if she tried to tell them.

“I am not helping you name your abyss creature.” Wizard Lenin cut in, not that she wanted his help anyway, he had referred to himself as the airplane of death and was clearly in no position to help her decide on anything reasonable.

Looking at him and then them she came to her decision, it was the first time she could remember lying.

“Lepur Rabbitson… From Albania.” Lily finished.

After that there was much screaming at Lily, flushing and apologizing to Rabbit, then screaming at Lily and finally things began to roll into motion when Tracey went to go get Professor Snape.

Snape could ignore her blowing things up in Potions, he could ignore her words of disrespect, he could even ignore her entire existence but he could not ignore the appearance of an Albanian transfer student appearing naked on her bed without any explanation. Backgrounds would have to be checked, suspicions be cast, and above all headmasters would have to be met with and a few points lost along the way for inappropriate conduct probably wouldn’t hurt.

And it seemed that way when she and a blanket-toga wearing Rabbit were summoned into his office and both stared across at him from his desk.

Snape was not the most incompetent of players, he was aware that there was a game being played at the very least, he may have started late but he had realized his mistakes soon enough. Regardless he was still going to lose pitifully and he may have begun to have realize that as well. The meeting did not start with point loss, with glares of hatred, or anything else but rather a few minutes of complete silence where even the room didn’t dare to breathe.

“What exactly is it, Miss Potter, that you’re aiming to do here?” He finally asked.
Straight to the chase, she hadn’t expected that, Wizard Lenin hadn’t really either. They had both expected a battle of verbal fencing, cutting at the matter from the sides but never head on, always having a conversation within a conversation that ended up not being a conversation at all. It seemed though that Snape didn’t want to play that game today.

“I want a meeting with the Headmaster.” She said placing her folded hands on the table, “Some points lost also wouldn’t hurt; you forgot to dock me in Potions today.”

Snape grimaced and pointed to Rabbit, “This, is simply because I did not dock you points or send you to the headmaster.”

“Essentially yes.” There were other reasons but she doubted Snape would be interested in those.

He looked as if he wanted to dock those points, was itching to do it, his hands clawed at the desk and his eyes grew very dark. He said nothing though, let out a clenched breath, and looked across at her straight into her eyes.

“And who exactly is he, Potter?”

“You could ask him that, he isn’t deaf.” Lily said motioning to Rabbit whose expression had not changed throughout the entire conversation. Instead only his eyes had moved, flicking from Lily to Snape and back again as if watching a ping-pong match.

Snape reluctantly turned to Rabbit and asked, “Who are you and how did she sneak you past the wards?”

Rabbit’s neutral expression changed somewhat, his lips quirking downwards, as he took in the fact that Snape was clearly addressing him. He made no move to respond though.

“He doesn’t speak English.” Lily clarified.

“Then why…” Again Snape seemed to reign in his mounting frustration and desire to dock points and asked, “Who is he, Potter?”
“This is Lepur Rabbitson, an Albanian refugee, you know because of the vampire revolution.” Lily said motioning to Rabbit in all his green-toga-blanked glory.

“What vampire revolution?!” Snape asked, and it was interesting how he grew paler when he got angry. Uncle Vernon had always gone purple, Ron went red, but Professor Snape went pale and it was his eyes that became bloodshot.

“A.L.F., you know the Albanian Liberation Front.” Lily said, raising her eyebrows at Snape’s lack of understanding before clarifying further, “Remember that embarrassing episode where a bunch of Albanian vampires lost to Quirrell the stuttering squirrel this summer. Well it was so embarrassing, and so revealing of their desperate situation, that it sparked a revolt amongst the Albanian vampires.”

She then motioned to Rabbit again, “They pillaged his village, it was sad.”

Snape didn’t seem to know what to make of that, he simply sat and stared at both of them for a few minutes, and then asked, “And how did you get him past the wards?”

“Oh, that was easy, you remember Rabbit?” Lily said.

“…You mean the rabbit.” Snape asked for clarification before adding, “You mean to tell me that this boy is an animagus, at this age?”

“Yes. Lepur Rabbitson is very talented; just you know kind of traumatized… and foreign.” She smiled as if to accentuate her point but that just seemed to put Snape off further.

He said nothing, not asking for clarification on how exactly Lepur Rabbitson had managed to make his way from Albania to England or why he had come to her, not asking how and why Lily had decided to sneak him into Hogwarts for a magical education instead he simply stared across at her and seemed to reach some decision.

“You will not be receiving your meeting with the headmaster, Potter. The boy… Rabbitson will go, but you will stay here.”

He looked determined, the turn passed and him confident of his actions, and she felt her expression grow colder. He did not intend to make this easy then, and had it merely been the house points, had it been less integral that would have been all for the best as the year was long, cold, and boring without
these little games. But it was about the stone and time was of the essence.

“Are you quite sure you want to do that?”

For a moment he hesitated, fear entering his expression and perhaps a bit of recognition, but soon enough his eyes were cold and black again, “Quite, Miss Potter.”

She stood mechanically, her features feeling stiff and cold. Rabbit made to stand as well but she placed a hand on his shoulder shaking his head, wondering if he even understood such gestures.

She then turned and made her way to the door and back to the dormitory but before she could leave Snape’s voice resounded with a sneer inherent in his very words, “Oh, and before you go, twenty points to Slytherin.”

“Well, then.” Lily said, not turning to face them, and opened the door stepping back into the Hogwarts night.

That night they tried to imagine just what occurred during Rabbit’s meeting with Dumbledore. She and Wizard Lenin spent the night discussing stones and Rabbits and what they meant to each other if they meant anything at all. It was hard to picture even the scene in her head let alone imagine what had taken place during it but it had happened and the next morning when she saw Rabbit wandering towards her with that too empty expression she still couldn’t imagine what they possibly could have said to each other.

The twinkle in Dumbledore’s eye didn’t answer her question, merely sparked and danced even as he stared out at her, she lifted a goblet to Dumbledore and he lifted one back as wordless understanding passed between them. It seemed that they both recognized that they were in between moves in a vast and complicated game in which neither party had been given all the rules and expectations. If only it could have led her to his office at a faster rate, but the week was far from over, and she still had cards to play if she had to.

As Rabbit approached she inspected his tie, a green and silver one to match her own, “Slytherin, huh?”

Wizard Lenin was not pleased he didn’t say as much but he felt it was a gross insult to his personal honor to place Rabbit of all things into Slytherin. As if this was even more detrimental to Slytherin’s reputation than having Pansy Parkinson as a house member.
Lily hadn’t pictured Rabbit in Slytherin either, or in any house really, she suspected Default probably came out as the hat’s decision but apparently the staff was still pretending the glorious house of Default didn’t exist; which was beyond ironic as Dumbledore had suggested she start up its quidditch team.

Lily shrugged, she supposed Rabbit fit the baby eating definition Ron had given when they first met, so he would fit in well enough, “Well, it’s not the best house but it’s… a house.”

Rabbit blinked back most likely not understanding what the word Slytherin even meant which was just as well because Lily found that people tried to make it mean so many things that it meant nothing at all.

With that she turned back to her Gryffindor audience who was gawking at her but mostly at Rabbit. Ron spluttered out his food at the sight of him, “Who’s this bloke?”

The others looked somewhat confused, also a little disoriented by the fact that Rabbit was apparently a Slytherin. Lily had discovered that her being Slytherin was one thing, a tolerated quirk at worst and at best an infiltration into enemy lines, but that the rest of Slytherin house was wholly irredeemable.

Lying to Snape was one thing, even if it was very convenient, but she also realized it was the perfect time to accentuate her point that Rabbit was never really a rabbit. I

“Everyone, this is Lepur Rabbitson, from Albania. Also known as Rabbit, the creature from the outer abyss who when unsupervised will most likely eat Scotland; he’s just wearing a person suit at the moment.” Lily explained and then looked over to Rabbit who was still standing behind him and motioned for him to sit. When that didn’t work she stood and sat down and when that didn’t work she physically sat him down on the bench.

All of this was met with various looks of disbelief from Ron, Neville, their roommates, and even the Weasley doppelgangers.

“…I really think we’re out of our league, George.” One of the doppelgangers said without any expression.

“And yet, I somehow love it, Fred.”
“Wait, so Rabbit, as in the rabbit is… this guy?” Ron said attempting to put two and two together with a strained expression.

“Yes, but Rabbit was never a rabbit, as is plainly clear in this moment.” Lily said, “He only chose to take the form of a rabbit as he now chooses to take the form of an Albanian refugee.”

“… But he’s a rabbit?” Ron asked swallowing his food and then looking slightly horrified asking, “Wait, so the rabbit was a bloke the whole time?”

“No, he’s not a person either he just happens to be a person at the moment.” Lily said throwing her hands in the air in frustration.

“You mean like an animagus?” Neville asked before eyeing Rabbit with wariness as if the idea of Rabbit being a person was even more terrifying than the idea of him not being a rabbit, “Because I heard that was really difficult to do.”

“No.” Lily said shortly, “Lepur Rabbitson, is Rabbit but in human form, I really doubt he was a person to begin with either. Rabbit is just… well whatever Rabbit is or ever was.”

The fact that she was met with blank expressions all around, each trying desperately and failing to process Rabbit’s true ineffable nature, was a bad sign.

As if to accentuate that Ron started talking again, “So… where’s your actual rabbit then?”

And that was the point in which Lily’s tolerance crumbled. She stood from the table, regarding her peers, and then stated in a dull tone, “I clearly need to rethink tactics.”

“Um, bye Ellie? See you at lunch?” Neville called out after her but it was too late, she and Rabbit were already exiting the hall and on their way to History of Magic where she would attempt to get things back on track again.

“I may have no choice but to burn Hogwarts down at this rate.” Lily admitted to Wizard Lenin as they tugged Rabbit through the hallways towards class.
“You know, Hogwarts was never this bizarre when I was a student, certainly not within the first two weeks either.” Wizard Lenin said in a rather accusatory tone as if this was somehow all her fault. She disagreed, if Snape didn’t insist on winning and being difficult, in giving house points instead of taking them and sending her to the headmaster’s office when things were clearly spiraling out of control then she couldn’t be held responsible. She was only doing what had to be done.

“I turned Rabbit into a person, if that doesn’t earn me a meeting with the headmaster I don’t know what will.” Lily said looking over at Rabbit as she did so, it was easier than she thought maneuvering him around, he seemed more or less as willing to follow her as he had when he was a rabbit. For the most part though he was silent and dazed looking as if Hogwarts was rushing too far past him so that it just slipped past his fingertips.

“You could always just break down the door, as you do every door except this one.” His frustration here was sharper than normal, anger burning cold beneath it, so much so that her scar began to burn slightly but she ignored it.

“That comes after the arson.”

They silently contemplated the issue until they reached the classroom, already filled with Hufflepuffs and Slytherins, and slid into the back row towing Rabbit along with, “The trouble is you are relying too much on Severus Snape. The punishments you seek out, the point loss, the meetings with Dumbledore have all come from him. If you wish to meet Dumbledore this time, to lose house points, you’re going to need to antagonize a new professor.”

She thought about that for a few moments but then was dragged out of it when she realized just how horrifically quiet the room was.

It was a heavy weighted silence that grew and ate at itself as every student turned to look back at her. It was the first time they had gotten a chance to confront her as a group since the wand incident and without any authority present as History of Magic was just as professorless as ever.

There were no words spoken, not even by Pansy Parkinson, instead there were only eyes filled with disbelief, rage, humiliation, and fear as they stared and stared.

Lily thought they were overreacting just a bit, it had been humiliating yes, but they weren’t dead. It was true she could have easily killed them at that point but she could have easily killed them all along, she didn’t and they should have kept that in mind.
The Hufflepuffs weren’t looking at her with quite the same expressions, they hadn’t witnessed her actions but rather heard through the rumor mill, but nevertheless there was expectation there.

Judging by everyone’s faces there was some showdown expected here and now when no one was looking.

Lily placed her feet up onto the table and leaned back in her chair listening to the ticking of the clock marking time as it marched past. After five minutes had ended she announced, “So, I don’t think anyone’s coming, again. Do I have to be here if we never actually do anything in this class?”

“Who told you that you could talk, Potter?” Nott spat out but it was with more emotion than there had been in the previous week; where before it had really only been condescending and perhaps even angry now something sad and bitter was in there as well, as if those words were far more than any question.

“Well, no one said I couldn’t.” Lily observed tilting her chair forward to survey the rest of the course, “You know, you’re the ones that ambushed me in the middle of the common room, I think my actions were only fair.”

“Fair?! You call that fair?!” A Slytherin shouted a bark of desperate laughter in their voice.

“Yes.” Lily responded shortly, “If it had been a true war, instead of children pretending they have things like pride and power, then it wouldn’t even have gone that well. But that’s all beside the point, it’s a new week, it’s time to move on.”

“That was yesterday!” Malfoy spat out looking outraged and pushed past his limit of credulity, it was funny she had actually expected him to stay silent but it seemed that even he couldn’t take it.

Lily shrugged, “Yes, well, I don’t know about you but I’d get pretty tired if I had a fight about honor on a daily basis.” Lily then motioned to Rabbit, “Oh, I forget, have you guys all met our newest housemate Lepur Rabbitson from Albania? He’s sad and traumatized because vampires sacked his village and ate the intestines of all his family members, he also doesn’t speak English.”

Rabbit blinked perhaps trying to convey his sadness but mostly conveying the nothing he usually did. That seemed to kill the conversation before it even started, everyone looking blankly at Rabbit, and then back to her as if not even sure what to make of that.
“Yeah, so if we aren’t doing this class thing I’m gonna go and do something better.”

No one interrupted, demanded she return to the class, rather they each watched her as she stood and then walked out tugging Rabbit along with her.

It seemed there was only one option left aside from lighting the school on fire and Lily had not started off the week or turned Rabbit into a barely functioning person to do half-measures. She was going to see Dumbledore, whether he liked it or not, and then she was going to search his office and lose house points by the hundreds and thousands, whether Snape liked it or not, and she was going to do it even if it gave her the migraine to rule all other migraines.

In the middle of his lecture to older students, stuttering his way through (according to Wizard Lenin) one of the most poorly written text books he had ever seen, Lily kicked open the door to the Defense classroom and dragged a very stunned looking Rabbit in after her.

“I see you had no problem with that door.” Wizard Lenin grumbled in her head but without too much conviction perhaps seeing that it was far too late to turn back to easier, glitchier, methods now.

The students were staring at her in blank confusion, she noted that it was a Gryffindor and Slytherin class like her own, featuring the Weasley doppelgangers who had woken up from what appeared to be a very deep sleep at her entrance and entered frazzled alertness. Quirrell for his own part looked just as shocked as his students and his very garlicky presence once again just piled on the headaches as if there was no tomorrow.

“Mi…Mi…Miss…Miss….Po…Pott….” He started too shocked even to get through the first couple of syllables.

“Professor Squirrel, if you don’t stop talking right now I can’t be held responsible for what I’ll do to you.” Lily said eyeing him before turning to address the class, “I don’t know what Squirrel’s been attempting to stutter out here this morning but I’m about to tell you something infinitely more important. I’m about to tell you about the vampires.”

She moved to the center of the lecture hall, so that she could be seen by all viewers even as they whispered to each other in confusion, while the doppelgangers just looked very excited.

“Va…vam…vam…” Quirrell started but Lily immediately cut him off.
“That’s right, the vampires.” Folding her hands behind her back she began her story, “Now, as you all may have heard this summer Quirrell was almost eaten by vampires in Albania but was miraculously spared by either making the story completely up to hide his garlic fetish or else the vampires were even more dead than undead.”

She noted her headache increasing, possibly by the increasing smell of garlic as Quirrell jerked his way towards her with a very odd expression on his face, half fearful but also half jeering and somewhat crazy looking.

“Naturally when the Albanian vampires heard about this they were horrifically embarrassed that they couldn’t even eat one stuttering wizard. This then lead to an outpouring of rage and violence that swept through the Albanian countryside annihilating many villages along the way. My comrade, Lepur Rabbitson here is a victim of such terrible violence on the part of the A.L.F. and it has made him very sad. And to think, all this violence, and terror, and dead people is all because Quirrell made up a stupid story about vampires because he wears a turban and looks like an idiot.”

She looked back over at Quirrell but he had gone still, had stopped moving completely, and when he looked at her there was a coldness in his dark eyes that hadn’t existed before. He looked at her carefully, as if dissecting her, and asked, “What is it you want?”

She blinked, that hadn’t been the response she had really been expecting, in fact Quirrell seemed to be a very different kind of squirrel than he had even been when she had walked in. Almost like he wasn’t a squirrel at all, “A trip to the headmaster’s office and one hundred points deducted from Slytherin.”

Continuing to stare at her coolly, even as sweat broke out on his brow, he responded in a cold and very clear voice, “One hundred points from Slytherin, Miss Potter, for disrupting my class with malicious rumors and a trip to the Headmaster’s office to discuss your behavioral issues. Now, get out.”

“Yes, sir.” Lily said with a grin grabbing onto Rabbit and making her way out of the class.

“All hail Ellie Potter, lord of chaos!” Came a call out from behind her as she left presumably from one of the doppelgangers, “Hail to the bringer of calamity!”

“And the rest of you, open to page thirty five and read!”
And that was how Lily ended up in Dumbledore’s office wondering if this was really a situation that had gotten out of hand or something that just happened. Certainly with Rabbit sitting next to her, albeit in a very different form, it seemed as if nothing had changed and yet things had. Because there was very little twinkle in Dumbledore’s eyes right then, and when he looked at her he truly looked in a way that he hadn’t bothered to the last time they had met.

This, she thought to herself, was the man that lit wardrobes on fire.
Looking at Dumbledore, in his brightly colored robes, across from a variety of ticking shining objects whose purpose was a mystery, she thought that the evaluating look in his eye as he stared across at her did not clash with his persona.

Wizard Lenin, when he spoke of Dumbledore, brought the image of masks but even behind masks his eyes would be the same. No, the edge had always been there, as the edge was always in Lily; they were always all their components and it was simply that no one bothered to look for all their facets in one moment.

The geniality wasn’t gone, it still lingered in the lemon drops and the bright vivid colors, but the steel was more prominent than it had been before.

At least, that was what Lily found herself thinking as she looked at him.

Still all this analyzing of people was getting her nowhere interesting fast.

He seemed to think so as well, as he leaned forward with a far graver expression than he had worn in her presence before, “Miss Potter, I believe it is past time that you and I had a little talk.”

Lily’s eyebrows raised, this was undoubtedly true, however it wasn’t her who had been delaying. It reminded her of a line in a film, one used for intimidation and effect, rather than any logical statement in and of itself. A “No Mr. Bond, I expect you to die.” And his eyes, his sober expression, did help to give gravity to it but all the same it felt too meaningless to have any real effect.

Inside her head Wizard Lenin was paying rapt attention, analyzing possible motives, thoughts, as well as thinking of where in the office Dumbledore might feel it was safest to hide the stone before setting it up in the third floor corridor.
Dumbledore appeared to give up on waiting for her to respond and instead sighed, “Do you know why you’re here Miss Potter?”

Again, another statement with more implied than was actually there, she was there because she wanted to be there and had put in quite a lot of effort to be there. Had Snape been more accommodating she would have been there sooner but something was telling her that this wasn’t the answer Dumbledore was really looking for.

“Was it Rabbit…I mean Rabbitson?” She said motioning her head towards Rabbit who looking as if someone had shot out his brains and he was just on the verge of glassy-eyed death, “Because, you know, he is very sad and traumatized and Albanian so you have to cut him a little bit of slack.”

“In part.” Here he gave her a grim smile, “I’m afraid, Miss Potter, that we may have misunderstood each other in our last meeting. A little chaos here and there, pranks, humor, the kind your friends the Weasley twins partake in, is all well and good. However, there are limits to all good things.”

And when he looked at her then it was almost as if she could hear his very thoughts, that he was very much hoping she thought it all was a joke, a joke taken too far for anyone’s wellbeing because the other answer was not as enjoyable.

Inside her head Wizard Lenin was urging her to ignore him, to agree blindly, to look away from his eyes and search the goddamn room for wards but she didn’t. Something stopped her, the same thing that always stopped her from just giving the Dursleys what they wanted. And so she leaned forward and said in a flat voice, “Then hire less easily played pieces.”

He did not blink but his eyes lost what little twinkle they had left replaced only with something that could be recognition and a trace of concern. “I’m sorry?”

“Severus Snape is a fiddle just begging to be played, you don’t even have to wind his strings, just mention a name or give him a look and off he goes.” Her hands flew up as if to demonstrate Severus Snape’s chaotic and erratic march towards his own destruction, “Of course, that’s probably why he’s here in the first place, because he has such easy to reach puppet strings.”

“This is not a conversation we should be having with Albus Dumbledore.” Wizard Lenin said quietly in her head.

“Wasn’t it you though, Lenin, who said we needed to see how they twitch?”
And twitch he did, not visibly, Snape was far less subtle whenever confronted baring his anger in the
grit of his teeth or else his fear in the darkening of his eyes. Dumbledore’s discomfort was in the
silence, too long and too weighted, in the way he looked at her with sharper blue eyes as if
superimposing some image onto her.

“Rumor has it he used to be a cultist, back when the Hindenburg movement was still a happy
zeppelin in the sky and not combusted. He also enjoys tormenting small children, which really,
unless he’s using their blood sweat and tears in some evil potion is just kind of petty. So, if he’s
terrible at teaching children and he has a dark and mysterious past, you have to wonder why he’s
here at all. But then, the answer really isn’t all that difficult when you think about it. What is a fiddle,
your excellency, if it isn’t played?"

He looked at her for a long time then and in a quiet voice said, “And are we all instruments then,
Miss Potter?”

“Of course.”

His eyes grew darker, “And I expect you are the player of instruments.”

“No one is ever truly the player of instruments, your excellency, as I’m sure you well know.” Here
she came to the point bringing her hands together, “You’ve been playing me for a long time now, not
very well, and not very in tune, but playing out some semblance of a melody all the same. Chosen
one, it’s a well-known ballad, isn’t it?”

In her head Wizard Lenin had stopped everything, he had not realized the direction she was heading,
that she meant to confront him here and now. Wizard Lenin preferred subtlety, intuition, watching
the play from a safe distance where every action and nuance was noted. Again, from him, was an
almost panicked repeat of the thought he had earlier, that this was not a conversation he wished to
have with Dumbledore.

To Dumbledore’s credit he did not attempt to deny it, merely smiled at her grimly, and said, “It must
be very lonely, to see life that way, but I doubt anything I could say would change your mind.” With
a sigh he rubbed a hand over his face and then looked at her, “You are a very extraordinary girl,
Eleanor Potter, perhaps more than you even realize and I think because of that you have difficulty
understanding things that are far more ordinary. Hogwarts has strong foundations, it has lasted
through battles and wars, but push it too far and it will break and it would be such a sad thing to see
it falter now. Is there anything so terrible, Miss Potter, about playing the part of a child?”
They stared at each other for a moment, and it was strange because his eyes weren’t cold, there was steel in them yes but also pain, regret, pity, and all those other emotions that Wizard Lenin considered unnecessary when playing the game. When he looked at her he did not see an opponent or a pawn, not completely, somewhere in there the image of Ellie Potter was reflected back.

But it was Lily who answered as it always was, “Interesting deflection, gold star for feeling, but unfortunately I’ve been playing the role of Ellie Potter for years now. It’s nothing new.”

And she tugged on the strings of the universe pulling herself and Rabbit out of time and taking Dumbledore’s most recent memories with her.

“What the hell was that?” Wizard Lenin said, the migraine coming with him, as the room fell too motionless for anyone’s comfort.

“You were the one who said to take him seriously, and I did, very seriously and he gave me a very serious answer.” Lily said with a stretch as she began to eye the room wondering where that stone could have gotten to, “Besides all I really wanted was to get in his office, I didn’t really need to talk with him about anything.”

She got the feeling, from his perspective, she had missed something vital about all of this but it hardly mattered since Dumbledore wasn’t going to remember it anyway. He had lived in her head long enough to argue with her results so he said nothing on that only stiffly saying, “Well then we’d best find the stone… Did you just stop time?”

“Well, the room.” Lily said as she began sifting through the phoenix’s ashes, the bird caught between flames and more of an orange blur than a bird. Rabbit kept his eyes on her looking only vaguely more alert than he had been in the meeting.

“That’s not…” He trailed off for a moment as if to reign himself in but it seemed he couldn’t contain it, “No, this is really not possible, no one has this sort of power. You would have to be a god.”

There was a blank moment where those words soaked in, where Lily stopped searching momentarily, and then responded, “Well, I am Death you know.”

He fell silent after that, he’d heard the words before, had even considered them then but she had the feeling that he had never taken them very seriously. The image of her in his head was unclear, some mix of Eleanor Potter, Lily, and now Death in the train station and yet he still tried to piece it
Lily in the meantime continued the search, flipping through books, behind furniture, inside all the various ticking machines, and everything in between. One by one machines were dismantled and thrown onto the floor and with each discarded object on the floor she felt her frustration mount.

“Seriously, it’s like he’s trying to make my life difficult.” Lily announced with a sigh as she sat back in her seat for a momentary break observing the casual destruction of the headmaster’s office. What little order had been in the place before was completely gone, not only was furniture thrown about but some of it torn apart completely, looking more like the remains of a great massacre of inanimate objects than an office.

“A fair theory, given his meddling in your abusive childhood.” Wizard Lenin grumbled, almost as frustrated as her, but still too determined to give into the irritation. He was also still a little distracted by the state of the room and the latest conversation with Dumbledore which he still wasn’t entirely comfortable with.

She looked over at Dumbledore, caught with that strange expression she had left him with, his mouth slightly open as if to respond to her last statement. She called over to him, “I don’t suppose you’d just tell me if I asked.”

Predictably he gave no response.

“Well, that would just be too easy, wouldn’t it?” Neither Wizard Lenin nor anyone else had a response to that.

Rabbit was wandering the room, a slow meandering movement that was reminiscent of his former shuffling when he was actually a rabbit, carefully stepping over the broken silver instruments he made his way behind Dumbledore inspecting him with a careful silent eye before reaching for something behind him.

Lily watched as he took up the sorting hat with gentle pale fingers and Lily groaned at the sight of it, “What do you want with that useless thing, Rabbit?”

Rabbit paid her no mind though, merely tilted it so he could peer inside with those empty black eyes as if it truly was fascinating instead of a broken hat that couldn’t even do its job properly.
Lily sighed and made her way over to him and the hat taking care not to break more than she already had. Eventually though she reached it too and took the hat from him peering inside, where she expected cloth she found instead a black abyss, as if the hat really was a bottomless hole.

“Well, I guess that is kind of interesting. More interesting than the rest of this office at any rate.”

“There are some books that were interesting and the pensive has interesting things inside it I’m sure…” Wizard Lenin mused but even he had to agree that these weren’t nearly as interesting as a philosopher’s stone.

“Like I said, boring.” Pseudo-glitch manipulating books were never useful as had been proven time and again in Defense class and by Hermione Granger’s existence.

She continued to peer inside, looking for the bottom, but none appeared. The last time she had pulled something out of a hat it had produced Rabbit, that could be why he was so interested in it, but at the same time it was about the only place she hadn’t bothered looking. With trepidation she reached inside with a single hand. She and Rabbit watched as she pulled out a very large gleaming silver sword with a single red stone staring at her like an eye.

“Oh, neat, I always wanted a giant broad sword.” Lily said once it was out of the hat, it was lighter than it looked but still fairly heavy, requiring two hands for her to keep it off the floor.

“Is that the sword of Gryffindor?!” Lily looked at it, the way it glinted in the light, looking very suitable for questing and dragon slaying.

“I think it’s the sword of Default.” Gryffindor wasn’t cool enough for a giant sword.

“No, Gryffindor as in the man, the founder. Legend has it he had a sword made of goblin steel but that it went missing over the centuries and well apparently it was in the sorting hat for at least part of the time. Besides, if you’ll remember correctly Default didn’t even exist until a few weeks ago.”

Whatever it was it was way more interesting than everything else they’d seen thus far.

She held it up spreading her legs apart, and swung it over her head in various directions; it was bit large for her but never the less she liked the image of it. Like Dudley with a stick but ten times more intimidating and while she’d never thought of herself as needing a giant sword she liked having the
Holding it to the light she proclaimed to Rabbit as well as the room in general, “I dub the Default, slayer of Hans Grubers and other foul unworthy creatures! May your steel never be clean of blood and bone marrow!”

“Put that down before you poke your eye out!” Wizard Lenin cut in with a similar tone to the times he told her to get out of high places before she fell off and broke her neck.

“It’s my body you know; I think it’s up to me what I do with it. Besides stab myself blind accidentally I’ll just stab something else so I bleed to death and regenerate.” Rabbit certainly didn’t seem to have any objections to her wielding the giant blade of silver doom, not that objected to anything besides being thrown into Pansy’s potion, but she did appreciate his silent and glassy eyed support.

Unfortunately for Wizard Lenin he really didn’t have a good argument for that so with a migraine that rivalled one by Squirrel he snapped, “Enough with the sword! Keep looking for the stone it has to be in here somewhere.”

Lily set down the sword and sighed, “Maybe it is downstairs and we just missed it.”

“Doubtful, I agree with your uncle on this. Dumbledore is far too dramatic for it to be hidden among half-finished obstacles. No, he’s still setting up the stage, and so he’d want the stone very close to him in the meantime.”

Well that was all well and good but he’d hidden it very well then to the point where even Wizard Lenin was getting a bit frustrated with the whole thing. Not enough to give up though.

“Well, let’s see what else is in this useless hat.” Lily said with a sigh dropping the sword onto the floor and inside the hat once again.

Her fingers brushed something, the cool water of a tranquil river, and she heard herself saying, “Oh.”

She felt almost as if she knew what it was as soon as she had touched it, cloth that wasn’t cloth, whispering up through her fingertips until her mind seemed to drift from her. It felt familiar and yet so tenderly distant, bringing with it the thought of train stations and a wild river with a single bridge across it, it had such nostalgia to it. It looked old and worn, a dark purple cloth with other colors
hidden within, but power crackled off it and even looking at it she knew that it should have been with her from the beginning and never in a hat.

She threw it over her shoulders without a second thought, a bit large for her, like the sword but never the less she still felt that this belonged to her; something she never should have lost in the first place.

And, when she stuck her hand in a third time, she knew that this would be the time. And there it was in the palm of her hand, an oversized, jagged, red stone with a deep red center.

“Bingo.”

Wizard Lenin was having difficulty comprehending how easy it had been to find and the fact that the sorting hat made up for its inability to sort students by being the ultimate goody bag. Lily didn’t think it was that easy, after all it had taken a significant amount of effort on her own part, had involved turning Rabbit into a person even. At the very least though she was being rewarded for her efforts, which was more than what happened most of the time.

It was a bit anticlimactic looking, appearing just like any other red rock, but then Wizard Lenin didn’t really have a problem with how it looked so she supposed she shouldn’t either. Still, she’d expected it to be larger and glowing ominously, like the eye of some unknown creature staring back at her. The fact that it was a strangely colored rock and nothing else seemed a bit odd to make a fuss over. Still, there was something about it, not quite as much as the cloak, that seemed strangely familiar. As if she should be placing it somewhere in her memory but couldn’t quite manage it.

Rabbit touched it with a pale finger, tilting his head as if curious though his expression was blank, and for a moment stood there as if conversing with the thing. However whatever he learned he didn’t share even when his hand slowly dropped from the stone.

“You know, I realize you did the same exact stuff when you were a rabbit but it’s super weird when you do it as a person.” If Rabbit understood he gave no acknowledgement, merely shuffled away from her and began to poke at the wreckage on the floor.

“So mission accomplished then, and all before Friday too.” Lily said and began tying the strings of the universe back into their original positions, restoring all the ticking machines to their rightful places. New to the room were three replacement objects for the hat, a fake sword, a fake rock, and a fake cloak all of which were to be stuffed into the hat in case Dumbledore went looking for things that weren’t really his business having in the first place.
She then shrugged off the cloak and stuffed into her extradimensional pockets along with the sword and stone then sauntered over to her seat offering a grin at Dumbledore, “Good try, your excellency, but I’m afraid you just didn’t try hard enough.”

She waved over at Rabbit to join her but he unfortunately wasn’t getting the hint. Instead he was blinking at the floor where all the broken shiny objects used to be. So she stood back up, sat him down in his seat then moved to hers.

“Mission accomplished?! Is that really all you have to say at a time like this?!?” Wizard Lenin screamed in disbelief the migraine of death pounding away in her head.

“Yes.” There seemed nothing else to say about it.

“For ten years Lily, ten years, I have been searching for that stone and we finally find it. After half a week of effort you pull it out of the goddamn sorting hat and all you can say is, ‘Mission Accomplished’” If he had physical hair in that moment instead of the idea of hair she imagined he’d be pulling it out.

“Would you rather I say something else?” Lily asked and immediately she felt some sort of lurching humor from Wizard Lenin as if things had gone so far that they everything was bitter and funny all at once.

“Oh please, do say something Lily, I just can’t wait to hear what it is!” He didn’t sound too thrilled with the idea but given the insistence in his tone she thought of something proper.

“To be or not to be, that is the question. Whether ‘tis nobler…” She was almost immediately cut off by Wizard Lenin.

“And after eleven years you still don’t understand sarcasm!” She felt him take a large breath, calming himself and sorting his thoughts, and letting go of the anger and the rage and the senseless grief. “You know, I never pictured myself as Hamlet. I always felt that Hamlet was a Gryffindor but perhaps, well, that speech does fit more than I would like. To be or not to be, that really is the question.”

“You asked for something.” Lily said and then fished in her head for something else, “Do or do not, there is no try, isn’t that right?”
What little patience Wizard Lenin had was fraying at a rapid rate, “That wasn’t an invitation for another one. You know what, we’ll talk about this later, I don’t think I can handle this at the moment. Why don’t you... restart time... and get us out of here.”

“Rightio, comrade Lenin.” Lily responded back and with that the final thread tied into place and reality lurched back into motion with Dumbledore closing his mouth and confusedly looking at her while trying to remember his erased thoughts.

“So, you wanted to talk about school and behavior and life and stuff.” Lily said lounging in her chair. Dumbledore appeared to pull his thoughts together at that, blinking at her a few times, and distractedly nodded, “Ah, yes... Yes I did, tell me, Miss Potter do you know why you’re here?”

She wondered then if she could have the same conversation twice, she often felt like she did with the Dursleys, but now that she had the stone she really had no reason to stay and she could feel Wizard Lenin’s impatience burning within her. It was time to leave.

“Because Quirrell the Squirrel, while a nuttier professor than Snape, turns out to be a way more competent when it comes to dealing with revolt and anarchy. Which is just kind of sad for Snape, because I mean, who loses to Squirrel?” Lily said with a conspiratorial smile before standing and giving Dumbledore one last look.

“Well, it’s been fun, good talk learned lots of things about each other and life and the universe. But I’m afraid the rest will have to wait til next week. Come, Rabbit, adventure awaits!” She pulled Rabbit up from his seat, offered a final salute to his excellency Albus Wulfric Brian Dumbledore, and marched out of the office without a look behind her.

As soon as she was in the hallway she turned to look at the imposing gargoyles and hidden stairwell, it was a victory, one of her first true victories at Hogwarts, and with a grin she cried, “Suck it, Hogwarts!”

The gargoyles didn’t answer even as she strolled down the hallway, cheerfully waving at every student and professor she passed.

“Found the stone, found a sword, found my cloak all in a day’s work. Now all we need to do is get it working and we can get you a body.”

Wizard Lenin was strangely quiet though, distant, and there was something sad to his thoughtfulness.
A quiet sorrow she didn’t see in him often, different from the well of depression he sometimes fell into, and quietly almost so she couldn’t hear he said, “Yes, if only I had any idea how it worked.”

And her stroll stopped in the middle of the hallway a look of shock on her face, “What?”
Distractions and Why They Don't Work

In which Lily plays hooky, Snape confronts Lily again with little results to show for it, and Lily is a little more disillusioned than she’d like to be.

The Hog’s Head was one of those places that leaned on the edge of being disreputable. It was about as clean as the Leaky Cauldron but without the hustle and bustle that would explain the uncleanliness. In the corners were cobwebs, at the bar some drunken perhaps even dead wizard was slumped against the counter with a half-finished glass of fire whiskey by his hand, and in the background a dull wailing could be heard that was either someone trapped in the basement or a wizard’s pitiful attempt at elevator music.

For Hogsmede it was about the closest thing there was to a bad part of town which was why Lily had decided that it was the perfect place to meet Frank and discuss business.

Since discovering that Wizard Lenin was talking out of his hat when it came to the stone things had slowed down a little.

“What do you mean you have no idea how it works?” Lily had asked that night in her head. She thought the dream was more her doing than his; they were in bleak room for questioning seen in many a cop film. A single bright light shone in Wizard Lenin’s face and on the wall a one-way window could be seen reflecting both of them.

Blinking Wizard Lenin raised a hand to shield his face from the light and with a frown responded, “No one knows precisely how it works only that it does. Would you turn off that light?”

“Hey, this is my interrogation, you can’t have an interrogation without intimidating lights.” Lily responded harshly. He looked as if he wanted to say something to that for a moment but then sighed and continued with his explanation.

“There is only one philosopher’s stone. There have been many attempts to create it both before and after Flamel but none have succeeded and even Flamel has only ever made one. More than that Flamel has been extremely secretive on the details, nothing is known about it save that it works, and that is only known because of his inexplicable wealth and he and his wife’s longevity. The basics, the gold and the youth, are probably easy enough to figure out with experimentation, make some sort of elixir, but I am not interested in the basics.”
“Wait a minute,” Lily said leaning forward feeling something dark and angry simmering inside her, “You tell me for years that the only plausible solution is this stupid rock. That zombies, or robots, or dark rituals won’t work at all and that this rock is your best bet and you don’t even know if it’ll work.”

“It will work, if there is any true solution to be found it will be through that stone.” He leaned forward as well, his eyes filled with determination, and nothing in him seemed to hesitate as he looked at her.

“Because it’s red and shiny?”

“No, because it is clearly a source of extreme power in permanently transforming lead into gold in a stable manner and sustaining youth. Creating a body, a functioning human body, out of other materials will take a tremendous amount of effort hence the stone.”

Well, they were pretty enough words she supposed, and Wizard Lenin seemed to buy them but Lily herself wasn’t certain. It all seemed very convenient, like Wizard Lenin really wanted this to be the case, but life wasn’t always convenient at least not when glitches weren’t involved. It also did nothing to calm her indignation at being used as a tool in a really incompetent heist, it would have been one thing if it worked, but without guarantees she felt as if it had all been pointless.

The light dimmed slightly and Lily leaned back in her chair frowning, “So you have no idea where to start?”

Wizard Lenin let out a sigh as the tension in the room dissipated and answered in a more casual tone, “I never studied alchemy in depth… I’ll need time to research, to test, to theorize, but I do have some idea where to start.”

“Good.”

And that was all they had to say about that.

After that it was almost like he didn’t want to talk about the stone at all. Instead he retreated deep inside her head for hours at a time, always thinking on it. Occasionally he’d ask her to sneak into the restricted section and find some book on alchemy or arithmancy or even transfiguration and have her flip through it. This always was a waste of time as the books were filled with ridiculous pseudo glitch
manipulating theories that were never correct but Wizard Lenin never seemed to appreciate her thoughts or input. Otherwise though he mostly left her to her classes, to Neville, to monitoring Rabbit, and all those other things that being a Hogwarts student required.

Still there were no real hard feelings, after all had he been immediately successful he would have been out of her head altogether, but still the long hours gnawed at her. Hogwarts was flatter without him, or rather, she was too focused on its flatness without him to distract her from it.

So it was almost necessary that she turn her attention back to other matters, especially matters that would get her out of school, while she twiddled her thumbs and waited for progress.

“Hey, Frank, over here!” Lily called over to Frank as soon as he walked in. He paused on the threshold, blinking as his eyes adjusted to the bleak lighting, taking off his sunglasses and hat that were necessary for the vaguely sunny weather. On finding her table he gave a questioning glance to Rabbit as well as her surroundings and made his way over to them.

“Hello, boss, I see you’re Eleanor Potter today.” Frank said as he sat across from her he tapped his fingers against the table looking more like a dweeby accountant than he had any right to considering his inherent vampire sketchiness.

“Oh, right, the hair. It’s more of a hassle to get out of Hogwarts than I thought and since I’m not going all the way to London anyway it’s not that much of a problem.” Lily said inspecting a strand of red hair before further explaining.

“I mean really, they don’t just let you walk out the front gate, and if you go through the forbidden forest you have really weird conversations with centaurs where they basically tell you to get off their lawn. Not to mention Rabbit can’t be left alone unsupervised.” Lily said motioning to Rabbit.

Not that she was really complaining, sneaking around the castle and trying to leave had been better than going to Monday’s classes. Potions was tolerable in that she got to see Snape suffer and cause explosions but Defense had no such saving graces and on the whole it was really a waste of time to even show up. It wasn’t even mildly unenjoyable, it actually caused her physical pain with how terrible it was, she was certain that if she had gone even Wizard Lenin wouldn’t have been able to concentrate through the stuttered dangers of nightmare butterflies.

Not that he was thanking her, or anything.
“Ah, I see. So your friend then is…” Frank trailed off giving Rabbit a bizarre look. He was probably picking up a lot of weirdness on Rabbit with the heightened vampire senses or he was just uncomfortable with Rabbit’s blank stare.

In the few days Rabbit had been in human form he hadn’t progressed too much. His English, and Albanian for that matter, was still entirely non-existent and the most he’d do unprompted was blankly stare at his surroundings. Still, from a distance, or in a photograph he appeared very human if symmetrical looking; it was up close and in action that the whole thing just fell apart.

“You’ve met, well back when he was a rabbit, but no one took him seriously then and I kind of needed to get into the headmaster’s office so he’s a person now. Rabbit, Frank. Frank, Rabbit.” Lily said motioning to each as she introduced them but neither of them made any move to shake hands or give friendly acknowledgement of the other. Instead they just stared at each other in silence to the muffled wailing noises coming from somewhere inside the pub.

“…Wait, are you saying, this is your rabbit? The rabbit from the hat?” Frank asked slowly and then after evaluating Rabbit for a moment he added in shock, “You mean he was an animagus the whole time and at this age?”

“No, he’s not an animagus, he just happens to be a person at the moment like he happened to be a rabbit last time. It’s not that hard to comprehend, really.” It really shouldn’t have been but somehow it was, word had spread within a day of Rabbit’s sudden appearance that he was a prodigy animagus veela Albanian transfer student with a tragic past, which was all well and good if only the people she had actually told the truth to believed it. Every day at breakfast, tugging Rabbit along, trying to teach him how to sit down at tables, she had the same conversation with Ron Weasley explaining that Rabbit wasn’t a rabbit but he also wasn’t a person.

The prospect of having that same conversation could have played a large role in her contacting Frank Sunday night to discuss business in person and more importantly get out of Hogwarts for a few hours.

“…Alright.” Frank said eyeing Rabbit with a wary eye.

Lily blinked, she knew that Frank was reasonable, reasonable and accountant were practically his middle names but she hadn’t thought he’d be that much quicker on the draw than everyone else. Not that he looked like he really understood or believed it but the lack of argument was very refreshing.

“Alright?”
“Well, you are Lily Riddle.” Frank explained with an odd expression on his face, as if not quite sure that was enough of an explanation but couldn’t come up with anything more elaborate.

Strange, how she had said almost the same thing to Wizard Lenin only a few days before.

“Oh, yeah, cool. Anyway, so Rabbit left alone unsupervised is bad. He apparently eats the transparent souls of dead people from existence which isn’t really a problem because those sounded annoying anyway but he could start eating other things…” Lily said waving off the rest of her thoughts, “Anyway, not important, but what is important is A.L.F.”

“Alf? You mentioned something about it that letter a while back but I’m afraid I don’t follow…” Frank said placing his hands together on the table and narrowing his eyebrows as if preparing to solve some elaborate puzzle.

“The Albanian Liberation Front, A.L.F. You see, professor Quirrell the Squirrel was visiting Albania this summer during his sabbatical and naturally being useless at everything attracted the attention of around four or five vampires (he sort of stuttered his way through the story so I don’t remember the exact number but who cares). Anyway, since a stuttering wizard is a bit like being a blind cripple the vampires saw a very easy target and by all accounts should have devoured Quirrell whole with no one the wiser. But, Quirrell miraculously won and now wears a garlic turban to this day to stave off other attacks. Unfortunately this looks terrible for the Albanian vampires, who as you know are in a bit of a stint what with the Soviets and the Wizards and the bleak situation over there. Quirrell’s story is humiliating, not only humiliating, but very publically and internationally humiliating. This was the last straw as it was for the suffering blood suckers and they have now started revolting their way through the countryside, pillaging villages, raping their women, stealing their gold, and making their way to the capital to demand equal rights and stuff.” Lily ended with a grin to her overwhelmed audience waiting for the whole thing to soak in.

“I don’t understand.” Frank started giving her a very odd look, “I haven’t heard of any of this, at all.”

“That’s because they don’t know about it yet.” Lily said, “But they will.”

“They will?” Frank asked.

“You see, I think it’s time I got political.” Lily said and then glanced over at Rabbit, “Rabbit here, Lepur Rabbitson as it is, is going to be our poster boy. His usual non-expression is disconcerting and odd enough to be mistaken for horrific trauma and given the unusual attractiveness of his features
people are bound to pay attention.”

“We’re starting a vampire revolutionary movement, in Albania?” Frank asked in a dubious tone as if not quite sure he believed what he was saying but there was also an odd hopeful cast to his expression. Frank wasn’t always vocal about his political opinions but he had a strong dislike of wizards and Lily had always wondered if he wouldn’t like to see them overthrown by the darker creatures.

“Well, starting makes it sound like we’re going to cause it, nudging is a good term.” Lily said, “Revolutions are lucrative, you know that, look at the profit we made in the seventies and during the whole Grindlewald thing. You know, if the Ministry had actually accepted my offer we’d own Britain right now. I mean, more publically than we already do, which would be pretty cool.”

“Why Albania?” Frank asked, “Why not Britain, or France, or Hungary for that matter?”

Because Quirrell didn’t visit Britain, France, or Hungary over the summer Lily wanted to reply but she doubted Frank would be satisfied with that answer. “Revolutions are lucrative, but also a bit messy, best have one far away from us. Besides, I have it on good authority that lord Hidenburg is planning a sequel.”

She had the distinct feeling that when Wizard Lenin did return he wouldn’t want her anywhere close to stepping on his toes. It was probably best to leave Britain alone until the glorious revolution was settled again with Wizard Lenin at its head. He didn’t add any opinion or thought to that but there was a vague sense of agreement deep inside her head.

“Hindenburg… You mean Voldemort, Tom Riddle’s stage name?” Frank said and then paused, “Didn’t you burn him alive? I assumed he was dead.”

“Well there’s dead and then there’s really dead, he’s only dead, you know? Anyway so he’s probably going to make a comeback and even if he doesn’t from all the racist shit I hear in the common room it’s pretty clear that it’s going to get pretty nasty in a few years even without his help.” Not that Lily expected Malfoy and Pansy Parkinson to lead a great rebellion and slaughter all the muggle born but one should always be prepared.

Frank nodded slowly, not so much in understanding as acceptance, and then brought out a notebook and pen, “So how exactly are we going to incite this revolutionary movement in Albania?”
“I’m glad you asked that, Frank.” Lily said as she watched him prepare to scribble, “What we need is an inside man, some Albanian vampire, charismatic, grisly looking, terrifying to the people he’s going to kill but vaguely endearing to those on his side. We need him to be our leader, say everything is his idea, A.L.F., all the tactics, everything. He doesn’t even have to do anything, he just has to sit there, and terrify housewives.”

“Figurehead, alright, we’ll find someone.” Frank muttered writing down the details.

“We also send over one or two of our own people, not you, you’re staying in England. I’m thinking that German guy who was in Grindewald’s campaign, and maybe Stefan, who can be our go betweens over there and make sure the military campaigns actually work. Purely guerilla movement at first, keep to the forests, the villages, and not the major cities and wait until we actually get something of a following before going bigger. Meanwhile over here we drum up propaganda, make the situation look really bad, probably worse and more terrifying than it actually is. People panic everywhere, the details will come along as we get rolling, and if their Ministry of Magic is anywhere near as incompetent and terrible as ours they’ll collapse before we even reach the suburbs.” Lily said and then added, “We also could probably sell a lot of narcotics, while we’re there, because profits are good.”

Frank furiously wrote it all down and then looked at it, “That’s a very vague battle plan…”

“When you have details I’ll have details, find me a charismatic revolutionary leader first and then we’ll talk.” Lily responded nodding to herself and drumming her fingers on the dirty table searching for some other topic of conversation. The Albania thing was what had really been preying on her mind, now that the Rabbit situation was more or less solved and the stone was found, beyond that she seemed at a loss of what to do with Riddle Inc.

Inside her head Wizard Lenin was still tinkering, contemplating the possible transfiguration properties of the stone, and its use as a power source rather than a mystical object. He didn’t seem to care about the Albanian situation in any respects, he thought it was a bit ridiculous, but he had mostly tuned it out the way one tunes out a bad song on the radio.

“Flamel.” Lily said slowly as she pictured Wizard Lenin in her head, hunched over the stone, his eyes red from the long hours spent in her brain always thinking and testing.

“I’m sorry?” Frank said as he flipped through prior notes with a distant expression, probably trying to put together the actual details of their latest venture.

“Flamel lives in France.” Lily said slowly, “And he’s the only one who knows anything about the
philosopher’s stone.” It was more of a thought than anything, a flickering light bulb in her head, Wizard Lenin probably wouldn’t appreciate the help but if things got truly desperate they could pay the old man a visit in the summer. “I may need to see him when I’m out of Hogwarts… Do we have any connections with him?”

“Not that I’m aware of.” Frank said, “Flamel has a reputation of being a very private man and moreover one who cannot be bought.”

Which meant he was hardly interested in the drug business, not that wizards really were, Lily Riddle gave the whole thing a dark creature sort of cast when it really had nothing to do with vampires but that was a whole different story. What it meant that offering him gold, trying to set up a meeting through intimidation, these were all out. She supposed she could have him kidnapped but it seemed like such a hassle when she wasn’t even sure she wanted to do it yet. Who knew, perhaps he’d want to speak with Eleanor Potter instead.

“Well, I guess I’ll have to figure something out then, it’s not a priority.” Lily said with a shrug.

“Yes.”

It was a distracted yes, Frank wasn’t looking at her, but instead was staring at the bartender with narrowed eyes as the bartender stared back. The bartender’s original grim expression had faded somewhat and was replaced by a look of alarm, recognition, and sheer disbelief.

“Excuse me, Lily.” Frank rose from the table slowly, the sort of dramatic rising that one only sees in films, where there is no need for speed or hesitation only the slow deliberate movement. Then keeping his eye on the bartender he walked over to the bar and sat at the counter.

It was commendable on the bartender’s part that his reach for the wand was not too quick or shaky. Frank eyed the movement without expression and only when the man’s calloused fingers reached his wand on the counter did he say, “Are you certain you wish to destroy your own establishment?”

The man hesitated then and Frank continued, “You seem smart enough to have put two and two together so I’ll make this clear. You know our reputation, you know calling the aurors doesn’t work, you know that if you start shouting and pointing that you won’t fare well either. We haven’t broken any laws, we haven’t made any attempt to sell our wares, we’ve simply had a small meeting. We wouldn’t want things to get messy just because of that, would we?”
“No.” The bartender said in a gruff voice, coughing at the end, a flush on his cheeks out of embarrassment or else pride.

Frank smiled politely, “Good, and I hope you’re aware that it might not be the best idea to spread rumors. Not just for your own sake, but imagine the country, if they were to seriously consider Lily Riddle as the girl who lived. It’s a thought, at the very least.”

The man didn’t say anything but he probably felt he didn’t have to. Frank didn’t seem to think it was necessary as he turned back to Lily, “Well, then, if that’s all I’ll be headed back to London. If news does spread that Lily Riddle and Eleanor Potter are the same person then I’m sure people will be swarming for narcotics to deal with it.”

With that Frank pulled up his collar and walked back out into the autumn sunshine leaving the rest of them in his wake without so much as a glance back. Lily turned to eye the bartender, she had noticed him earlier, but he hadn’t seemed the type to care too much about what kind of meetings went on his bar. Given the state of the place and the fact that it was in that state and in Hogsmeade she didn’t think he was the type to care about anything. Still, they caught each other’s eye across the bar, and it didn’t seem like he was going to go back and ignore her any time soon.

She stood pulling Rabbit up with her and brought the two of them over to the counter where she sat down to better observe the man. He looked vaguely familiar, not like she had seen him before, but like she had seen someone like him or who looked like him which made it very hard to place the connection. Otherwise he matched his surroundings fairly well, looking poor, calloused, and altogether quite unhappy.

“One butterbeer, if you don’t mind.” Lily said sliding a few sickles across the counter. He took them and diligently began filling a glass, never taking his eyes off her.

“So, Ellie Potter…” He started after sliding the frothing glass over to her at the sight of her grateful smile he paused as if not sure where to go from there.

“The one and only.” As far as she knew at any rate. Perhaps there was some other truer Eleanor Potter out there somewhere but she had yet to show her face and so they were all stuck with Lily instead.

“Shouldn’t you be in school?”
It was an odd question to ask, considering he’d just listened in on a Riddle Inc. business meeting, but she supposed it brought him some sense of stability. He looked more grounded, a sterner expression on his face, and mistrust in his eye.

“Perhaps, but who can really say? You know, everyone keeps saying I need to go, but the more I go the less important I think it really is. Like this magic business, complete bullshit I tell you.” She offered him a conspiratorial grin which did nothing to ease his growing discomfort with the situation. He also looked a bit confused, probably with the magic point, since wizards lived breathed and died for magic.

“Seven years, or more if you want to get really good, seven years trying to master the universe when you’re really just mastering a stick. At first I thought it was a kind of gimmicky thing, the latin-gibberish and the wand, but it’s really important to these people. They don’t realize it, or they don’t want to think about it, but if you take away that stick or if you kill every wand maker in the world then they’d all be just the same as the non-magical people they hate so much. There’s more than a fair share of irony in there if you want to dig for it a little.” She took a sip of the drink, the trace amount of alcohol burning its way down her intestines, and wondering if real beer was that much less buttery than this.

“I guess that is true.” The man said with a very sober expression one she didn’t usually see on a wizard’s face. He looked old, old enough to have lived not just through Wizard Lenin’s revolution but also Grindlewald’s campaigns, he lacked that self-assured hubris that most wizards seemed to have.

“It’s more than true, it’s very true, almost a fact of the universe.” Lily said, “Which is why Hogwarts is a very silly place, at the end of things. Because they just don’t get it. I mean, Potions is the class I have most often, Potions. You’d think something more basic like Charms, or Transfiguration, or hell maybe even Defense would be more important but it’s Potions.”

It had been building up. It wasn’t really the bartender’s fault, and he probably hadn’t realized he’d even offered an invitation, but it was the first time in days that anyone had really listened to her opinions on anything. With Wizard Lenin MIA and Rabbit having all the expression of an eggplant she was running out of options and it was kind of refreshing to let it all out.

“…Potions involves a lot more time…” He started and Lily cut him off not wanting to hear any attempt at a reasonable explanation.

“Well, maybe, if it wasn’t just a class where things explode. I mean Snape is such an asshole that he actually endangers the lives of his students for his own vindictive pleasure. Actually, I don’t even know if he enjoys it, he always seems ridiculously unhappy so maybe there isn’t any intrinsic value in tormenting small children. Although, I suppose the majority of the explosions are my fault, but still
it’s his classroom.” Lily paused for a moment to contemplate Snape and Potions in general before adding to that opinion.

Before the bartender could get a word in she concluded, “The point is that the whole educational system is ridiculous, violent, and filled with people who have no idea what they’re doing.”

After a moment of quiet contemplation he changed the subject to something he was more comfortable with. Namely, getting her out of his bar, “They’re probably looking for you and your friend right about now.”

They probably weren’t, at least, not yet. It was still only morning and so far she would only be a part of the way through Defense. Snape was probably too busy being irritated to sound the alarm and Quirrell too busy being incompetent to even notice she was missing.

“Well that’s too bad for them, then, isn’t it?” She asked taking a longer drink of the butterbeer showing that she wasn’t going anywhere for a while. It wasn’t like there was some profound life changing reason she had to go back to Hogwarts right then, it was in her best interest actually to avoid Defense altogether, as the headache from Quirrell always brought on a headache from Wizard Lenin when he got too distracted by pain to think.

The man made some vague noise of agreement and stared at her for a moment and when it was clear she wasn’t going to leave proceeded to stare over her head like she wasn’t there at all. Lily rubbed at the dirt on the counter and was struck by a thought.

“Hey, I have a question. You’re a wizard right, so manipulating the universe is your whole shindig, why is this place so dirty if you can just clean it with a spell?”

He turned to look at her, slowly, and then in a voice that brooked no argument, “You and your friend, out, go back to school and learn something.”

He then walked over behind the counter, grabbed her and Rabbit by their collars, and hurled them out into the Hogsmede street and shut the door in their faces. She stared at the run down outside as she brushed herself off, frowning, “I can’t believe he threw out a paying customer, it doesn’t really look like he can afford it.”

Rabbit had no comment for that and instead stared vaguely at his surroundings with the same interest he showed Hogwarts or anywhere else.
She stood in the street staring ahead at the castle, it wasn’t as if she didn’t want to go back, that she had any other place that required her presence immediately. Despite the fact that her belongings were stored in her pockets, the Default sword, the stone, her coat, there were still things she had left inside the building that meant she couldn’t just leave. Those pesky immaterial things that couldn’t be stored in extra dimensional fabric, her ties to Neville, her obligation to lose the house cup, that vague promise to start a quidditch team, these weren’t things that were easily cast aside or else ignored.

Still, there was something about seeing it looming in the distance that was so distasteful. She couldn’t quite put her finger on it, it was in the small things, the Dumbledores, the Snapes, the squirrels masquerading as Quirrels, but it was there none the less.

Had it been any other week this would have been the point where Wizard Lenin would have testily interrupted and told her to get her ass moving and that Hogwarts was more entertaining than she thought it was.

There was only silence in her head.

With determination she began moving, dragging Rabbit behind her back to the school, and decided there was no use regretting decisions that didn’t merit regretting. She had to get the stone for Wizard Lenin, there had been no alternative, he wasn’t meant to live in her head and that was the bottom line truth of it. She’d just have to get used to it.

She decided to sneak back into Hogwarts the same way she had snuck out. It was true they didn’t let you walk through the metaphorical front gate, at least not easily, what with all the locks and heavy duty wards but that didn’t mean it was impossible. It just took a fair bit of concentration and time.

Still it’d managed to impress Wizard Lenin the first time around, so much so that he’d actually stopped concentrating on the stone for several minutes in order to rage about how she couldn’t just break the founders’ ward system because she wanted to destroy Albania.

The trick was pulling the right wires of wards at the same time, a bit like defusing a bomb, if you cut the wrong spell first then the whole thing collapsed on itself and exploded into alarm ringing terribleness.

It was only after finishing that she felt the sudden chill, like there was some shadow hanging over her, and looking up she saw the looming figure that was a furious Severus Snape. It seemed odd that he’d find her, but then she had been out there for a while, and if the bartender was right he’d been
looking for her too. Either way he was there and he did not look happy to see her.

“Oh, hello, are afternoon classes over then?” Lily asked not moving through the wards and simply staring across at him.

“Potter.” He took a deep breath as if attempting to calm himself without any sign of success, “Potter, your attendance to my class, and to all of your other classes, is not optional. The same applies for Rabbithson.”

This wasn’t strictly true no matter what Snape seemed to think about it. History of Magic was proof enough of that; even the professor hadn’t bothered to show up yet.

“Shouldn’t Dumbledore be out here meeting me or something?” Lily asked with raised eyebrows, not that she wanted to see him so soon after the last time, but he made for interesting conversation at the very least.

“The headmaster is a very busy man and does not have time for your foolishness!” Snape took another deep breath that did nothing to calm himself, “Two hundred points to Slytherin, for your disrespect, for wasting the time of your betters and your peers, for neglecting your education, and for forcing me to come out here and bring you back inside.”

Lily blinked down at him and then said, “You know, I don’t have to go back in.”

“What?”

“I could stay out here, put the wards back up, maybe even walk into Hogsmede.” She shoved her hands into her pockets and observed Snape, “Besides, ruining the purpose of the house cup competition thing just to spite me is kind of ridiculous.”

“You’re coming back whether you like it or not!” He moved towards her but was met with a very solid invisible shield. Muttering he brought out a wand and tried to dispel it but the words fell uselessly against the shield and into the dirt where they lay there like crushed butterflies.

“Yeah, so here’s what we’re going to do. You deduct four hundred points, to make up for the two hundred you arbitrarily gave me and to punish me for my terrible behavior and then I go back inside and we talk about me skipping Potions and stuff.” She paused noting the bitterness in his eyes and
added, “You know, Mr. Snape, you can make this easy or you can make this extremely difficult.”

His eyes were like Dumbledore’s, in that they had changed in regards to her, she doubted he had really taken her seriously before this moment.

He had wondered, perhaps he had even thought he was taking her seriously, but something had always gotten in the way before. Whenever he looked at her it had seemed as if something else was standing in front of her and that he hadn’t bothered to look around, her father, her mother, Eleanor Potter, and perhaps even the dark lord Hindenburg, but he wasn’t looking for Lily.

Now though the illusions were gone and they were staring at each other face to face. The trouble was that Snape was a pawn who imagined himself to be a player or in his darker moments a higher ranking chess piece; it was dangerous when you imagined yourself to be more powerful than you really were.

He smiled grimly at her, a forced and faked smile, and through gritted teeth said, “Fine, then, four hundred points from Slytherin.”

The shield fell as if it had never existed in the first place and Lily pulled Rabbit through the wards, once on the other side, Snape continued, “However you will serve detention this entire week.”

“With you?” Lily asked and here the smile she received was more shark like, as if she had said exactly the question he had wanted.

“No, with professor Quirrell. Enjoy yourself.”

“Well, shit.”

And with that he walked back into the school leaving her behind to stare after him and all she could think was that for someone so out of his league in vindictiveness he was surprisingly crafty after all.
The Roles We Sometimes Play

In which Rabbit’s highly attractive features gain him considerable popularity with the ladies and causes Lily quite a few headaches, after months of isolation and disappointment Hermione Granger finally reaches her breaking point, and Wizard Lenin and Lily discover the reason for Quirrell’s entire existence.

Progress was a strange beast at the end of the day; or so Lily thought. Many tried to mark it out in goals and benchmarks, tracking its slow but steady progress, and stating at the end whether enough of it had been made or none at all.

Lily didn’t think it was that simple but then things rarely were.

By the end of October, Ellie Potter Day, she and Wizard Lenin had finally started to make significant progress regarding the stone and yet in some regards they had gone nowhere at all. And in the end she felt it all came down to Quirrell.

She’d learned a lot about Quirrell in both September and October, she hadn’t necessarily wanted to (beyond his role as the instigator of A.L.F and his bizarre ability to cause her physical pain by merely existing she didn’t really care about him) but she’d learned none the less.

Snape had been unusually proud of himself after assigning that first detention with Quirrell. So much so that he took to assigning her attentions at every opportunity so that she was in Quirrell’s office for hours at a time on a nightly basis. And each time Snape would smugly smile across at her, his eyes dark, and would say in an overly dramatic tone, “That’s another week’s worth of detentions, Miss Potter, with Professor Quirrell.”

(Snape probably imagined that this was some form of winning and for the moment she allowed him the illusion but it didn’t change the fact that Slytherin had lost more points in a single week than any house had lost in an entire year in all of Hogwarts history. At the end of the day, when the house cup was so far from Slytherin that was only a shattered dream, they would know who had really won.)

Quirrell was never really sure what to do with her in these sessions, the first time he’d just sort of blinked at her for a few moments and said, “Well…well… well… Miss Potter… Potter you should…should…should write… write… lines.”
After she’d used a glitch to write all the lines and left immediately he’d taken a different approach that was surprisingly refreshing. She now wasn’t required to do anything, just sit in a room with him for a few hours, and then she could leave and he wouldn’t say anything to Snape.

It was an odd unspoken arrangement of toleration on both their parts. It was clear that he didn’t want her in his office but that he wasn’t willing to directly confront Snape about it and it was clear that she didn’t want to be their either but was unwilling to declare all-out war on her head of house just to get what she wanted.

That was when she first noticed it; that Quirrell wasn’t quite what he presented.

Wizard Lenin had been too interested in the stone to think or even care about Quirrell but during that month Lily had started to make careful observations about the man. Each noted in detail in the notebook she kept on people’s personalities and ticks once she ever got back to seeing Doctor Mitchell and Quirrell’s entry was very extensive.

When in stressful situations, when threatened, when angry, and when facing direct confrontation especially on his encounter with the vampires his stutter would disappear entirely and he would talk with all the clarity and focus of a thespian. And when he spoke like this his eyes were hard and cold, there was nothing that flinched within them but he would also grow pale, and tired, as if this exhausted him beyond imagination.

His office, beyond containing his old muggle studies texts, was generic to the point of being a façade. The books didn’t make any sense, not for a professor, including titles like “Transforming Transfiguration” as well as Gilderoy Lockhart’s entire collection of memoirs. It was like someone had gone shopping for books that a normal boring pseudo glitch manipulator might own but that no one would really have on their shelf no matter how generic they were.

He was generally silent, rarely speaking even a word, and even at the sight of Rabbit he made no move to remove the Albanian transfer student from his office. He didn’t care what she did or who she brought as long as Lily sat down, shut up, and let him grade papers or else scribble out furious notes.

It was as if, while she was in his office outside of class, he could stop running the show for a few hours. The play was over, the audience had left, and backstage Quirrell tore off the mask he wore and silently, diligently, furiously worked.
It seemed she wasn’t the only one who believed in roles that deserved playing.

Eleanor Potter was an understandable role though, an important one. She had noted as much to Dumbledore in their last meeting, the chosen one was not a part you simply didn’t play. It was clear to everyone, whether they liked her or not, that Eleanor Potter was the protagonist of the story. She was a role that needed playing and to discard her would have disastrous consequences.

Why would anyone need a Quirrell though? He wasn’t exactly an integral character, as far as she could tell none of the professors even liked him, certainly Snape seemed to think Quirrell was his bitch with all the detentions he had Lily serve with him. Quirrell was that man that everyone walked all over, the stuttering wizard that was almost eaten alive by vampires in Albania, the Muggle Studies professor, comic relief at best.

Comic relief was never strictly necessary so why was he so insistent on it?

While Wizard Lenin thought about stones, transfiguration, and alchemy she thought about Quirrell, ALF, and everything in between.

And so it was October 31st, Ellie Potter Day, that their two ideas collided and that slow moving erratic beast called progress finally shifted.

It’d started, as most days did, with her desperate hunt for Rabbit the only difference was the fact that Neville had decided to tag along.

“Goddammit Neville, this is the third class this week I’m going to be late to because of him.” Lily said as they walked through the hallway, her waning tolerance clearly etched onto her features. She must have been channeling Wizard Lenin, because each group of students she passed parted like the red sea before her, desperately getting out of her and Neville’s way as they passed.

Lily had gained something of a reputation while at school, part of it stemmed from being Eleanor Potter, but the majority of it came from her. After the first few weeks or so most of the Slytherins had backed off, recognizing that it wasn’t a good idea to get into a duel with Lily, and they now showed hesitation at even talking to her. Only Pansy Parkinson bothered to publicly insult her anymore and whenever she did everyone in the room flinched a little. The older students sometimes eyed her, she’d gotten a warning from Flint to back off with all the Gryffindor nonsense, but they too seemed to stay out of her way.
She didn’t know how she was perceived in other houses, well in Gyrffindor she was almost worshipped by the Weasley twins and generally well liked for reasons she didn’t really comprehend, but in Slytherin she was certainly something not to be touched.

It made getting through the hallways easier though; which was always useful in finding Rabbit.

“You know, we could just go to Potions and maybe he’ll show up…” Neville started but she cut him off before he could continue.

“I doubt Rabbit even knows what Potions is, so no, I don’t think he’ll show up for it.”

“His English can’t be that bad…”

“It’s not about his English!”

Rabbit had gained the alarming pastime of disappearing before breakfast. After having been kicked out of the girl’s dormitory for being a boy Rabbit went to live with Malfoy and the other Slytherin first years, this would have been fine as at least someone was keeping an eye on Rabbit, but then when she’d wait for him at breakfast or else in the common room he’d never show up. She’d then have to search the school for him and usually she’d find him with some first year girl with her batting her eyelashes at him and telling him that he was so sensitive for his dark and mysterious past.

It was alright the first few times as it was practically free advertising for A.L.F. even before it got really rolling but it was really starting to piss Lily off, mostly because it gave Snape more excuses to give her an infinite amount of detentions.

So there they were, her and Neville, climbing stairs at a pace that had Neville panting at each landing, and opening every single door they passed on their way through the castle. It was right outside the library that Neville stopped her.

“I, Ellie, I really don’t want to be late to Potions.” Neville said in a rush his face flushed and sweat on his brow. He looked miserable, not just from the thought of exercise either, to Neville Snape was more terrifying than anything in the world and defying him would bring only pain and suffering.

“Snape’s not nearly terrifying as you or he thinks he is.” Lily said and Neville shook his head as if to cast out that thought.
“No, I, maybe not to you Ellie but I’m… I’m not very good at Potions or magic and… We should probably just get to class, I mean, it will take forever to find him and…” Neville trailed off weakly looking at his shoes for reassurance where there was none to give.

She wouldn’t say she knew Neville well, she liked Neville, more than she liked any other Hogwarts student but that didn’t mean she knew or understood him. He was so uncertain of himself, as if he was so much weaker and less defined than his peers, and whenever he talked about magic there was always a strong sense of shame in him as if he wasn’t good enough and that everyone else inexplicably was. Still, it was nice to have him around all the same.

He was good company, and it was refreshing sometimes, certainly different from Wizard Lenin. While Wizard Lenin was busy thinking and obsessing about the stone he was really the only company she had as she only saw Death on the weekends and Rabbit didn’t do anything when anyone was looking. More than that though he was nice, even when she wasn’t, even when she had detention with Quirrel on an almost nightly basis and wanted to prattle on about how odd life was he listened.

He never really understood it, especially when she started getting into real pseudo glitch manipulating specifics, but he at least listened which was more than what Wizard Lenin had been willing to do recently.

“If you need to go to Potions go to Potions, I’m always looking for Rabbit, don’t worry about it.” Lily said releasing Neville from whatever duty he’d felt he needed to fulfill.

He flushed slightly, looked up at her, “No, that’s… That’s not why I came with you, although I guess it’s important to find Rabbitson, I mean Lepur, before…” Here he gave a small choked laugh and cleared his throat before he went on, “I… I just thought that maybe today, well, neither of us should be alone.”

“…Right, before that.” Neville said and he stood there, silently stupid for a moment, as if waiting for her to talk when it was him who was supposed to be giving explanations.

Finally he said softly, “Today’s Halloween, you know… Well, I guess it’s Ellie Potter day…” Here he gave a small choked laugh and cleared his throat before he went on, “I… I just thought that maybe today, well, neither of us should be alone.”
She had a strong urge to ask him why right then but the look on his face stopped her. He was looking at her like he wanted to cry, like she should feel the same, as if these were words you didn’t press for and didn’t ask.

Alone, no she supposed that no one should be alone, alone was before she was five when it was just her in her head and Death in a train station she had never visited and Wizard Lenin trapped beyond her reach.

No one should be alone.

“Well, alright, but we’re going to be unbelievably late to Potions if we don’t find him fast.” Lily warned and she opened the library doors.

She’d become a recent tenant of the library in her Hogwarts career. On the whole she liked books, she understood books and she felt that they understood her, and they held a whole world of knowledge in them. Everything she knew could be sourced from four different places television, books, Death, and Wizard Lenin.

The trouble was that she didn’t really see the point of the wizarding books as they were just plain wrong most of the time. They were filled with diagrams, theories, instructions for glitch manipulation, that were only pseudo glitch manipulations at best.

That and Wizard Lenin had her coming there every other day to read through thick volumes sometimes ones only found in the restricted section which had become very old very fast as none of them seemed to have what he was looking for.

She was speedily wandering through the stacks with Neville jogging behind to keep up when she found him, them she should say.

“Hermione Granger, even you, Wizarding Britain’s most treasured encyclopedia have descended to this.” Lily said with a sigh rubbing her temples slightly and wondering why this always happened.

She and Hermione hadn’t gotten much of a chance to chat. Ever since Hermione had offendedly stormed away from Gryffindor’s table, complaining about Lily’s treatment of her as a reference book, she’d more or less disappeared from Lily’s life. She was in Potions and Defense, where she raised her hand for every single question and turned in stellar assignments, but she was fairly quiet and seemed to go out of her way to avoid everyone.
She had noticed though that Hermione and the library were very close because every time Lily found her way to the books Hermione was in some corner with a stack of books that were almost as tall as she was.

“Oh, uh, hi Hermione, we were looking for Lepur…” Neville said waving slightly at Hermione.

Rabbit blinked back at both of them in response as Hermione flushed, “I… It’s not what… Lepur and I were having a fascinating discussion about his home country!”

Her eyes were red as she said this, almost as red as her face was in that instant, and she looked uncertain and flustered as well as embarrassed as if she and Neville had just caught her at the worst time.

“Hermione, comrade Rabbit doesn’t speak English.” Lily said looking over at Rabbit who neither confirmed nor denied that statement; which was very typical of him.

“Oh, Ellie, what would you know? He’s just quiet and sensitive, unlike some people at this school.”

Lily considered this thoughtfully, what did she really know about Rabbit, not much besides his origins and even those were a guess. Still she knew what he was not, exactly what he appeared to be, “I suppose I don’t know that much about him, really, but then in knowing that I know far more than most.”

Hermione’s flush deepened at the words and suddenly her eyes became hard with anger as if Lily had just crossed some uncrossable line, “Right, you know what Ellie, we need to talk.”

“Oh, that’s great but we need to get to Potions…”

Hermione must have been in a very bad state because normally Hermione would never be late to Potions or any other class. Hermione Granger prided herself on being responsible, on being on time, on having the best homework, on all the things that Lily really didn’t care too much about and here she was disregarding one of them as if it wasn’t important at all.

She steamrolled right over Neville and looked directly at Lily, “I don’t know why Lepur or anyone
else puts up with you but I’m not going to. You’re rude, you coast on your unbelievable unfair talent, you don’t respect any of our professors, you think the world revolves around you, and I’m tired of it. Not everyone cares about Ellie Potter, you know, and other people besides her have real lives with real problems that you disrupt all the time with your nonsense!”

She looked on the verge of tears as she said it even though she had only whispered harshly so that the librarian wouldn’t come and shriek at us like a banshee. And then in a voice that was smaller and more desperate than before she said, “It’s like you don’t even care.”

Neville looked severely uncomfortable with all of it, holding up his hands as if in surrender, opening and closing his mouth looking for something to say and not finding anything. Lily meanwhile shoved her hands deep into her pockets and contemplated the small and pathetic looking Hermione Granger in front of her.

“It seems to, you know, not that seeming is but nonetheless, it is Ellie Potter Day after all you know.” Lily said, responding to the comment that Hermione probably cared about the least.

“What?”

“The world revolving around Eleanor Potter, spinning on its slightly tilted axis with her at the center.” Lily offered her a brief grim smile, the truth was hard sometimes, and grabbed Rabbit’s hand, “I can’t really explain it, you’ll have to go to the wizards for that, but it does at least seem to be true.”

“Now, if you don’t mind, I think we all have Potions that we’re very late to and if I miss class again then Quirrell and I will basically be living together. And I’d rather not spend any more time than I have to on my own holiday trapped in a room with Quirrell.”

With that she stood, pulling Rabbit with her, and waved to Neville, “Come on Neville, let’s go blow shit up for credit.”

She hadn’t realized that this conversation, that leaving Hermione Granger there red eyed and blinking and looking positively miserable, would somehow prove to be important.

Hermione did show up to class, a little later than her and Neville, and she looked even more miserable than she had in the library when Snape reprimanded her for being absurdly late but she didn’t say anything.
“It seems we have several members of the class who fail to take Potions seriously.” Snape said in a tone that had Neville and Hermione looking as if they wanted to crawl into holes and die.

The four of them were at the head of the class, staring out at their peers who had already started brewing their potions for the session, all of them looking carefully away so that they wouldn’t have to witness whatever horrors Snape inflicted upon them.

“I…” Hermione started but then stopped, her face growing red, appearing to be out of words to say.

“It’s not that I don’t take Potions seriously. It was for the greater good, you understand, at the end of the day I have to put the stake of the nation before your class.” Lily said nodding her head towards Rabbit.

“Potter, do you want another detention?” Snape said whipping his head towards her and she wondered if she should point out that there were only so many days in a year and as it was she was already slated to spend the majority of it with professor Quirrell. Snape didn’t have that many hours left at his disposal.

“Ellie, can’t you just?…” Hermione asked, and the room’s eyes shifted towards her, everything stilled and even the Slytherins appeared to be taking it seriously. She trailed off though, unable to finish this either.

Snape glowered at them all silently for a moment and then said, “You will begin your Potion and you will continue to brew through your lunch hour and on into our next session. Longbottom, you will be paired with the imbecilic Albanian, I will be impressed if one of you is not dead within the hour. And Potter, you and Granger will be paired together, and I will expect a masterpiece. Now, get to work.”

Snape once again had proved just how crafty he could be when given the opportunity. Rabbit was usually Lily’s partner in any given class, as without her he didn’t really have much motivation to do anything, but by mixing things up Snape was keeping everyone on their toes. More than that though Neville was always a little wary of Rabbit, he of all the students was at least partially aware of what Rabbit really was, and forcing them to sit together would do him no emotional favors. There was also the small but far from negligible fact that this meant Neville was on his own for the class on a difficult potion that required two people; and the results could be disastrous.

Neville stared over at Rabbit in horror, Rabbit was only better at Neville in Potions because Rabbit
always failed to make the potion in the first place and instead would spend the hour staring at walls and receiving notes from various first year girls in the class.

Hermione was looking at Lily with a similar expression, which was ridiculous because Lily’s potions were always great.

As they sat at Lily’s customary table in the back of the Slytherin half of the room, shunned by everyone but closest to the door when things began to get dicey, Hermione only stared at Lily as if trying to make up her mind about what to do. She looked torn in between being petty, bewildered, frustrated, sad, and perhaps a dozen other emotions that no eleven year old had any right to given the situation.

Lily meanwhile decided that perhaps it was best to start warding the immediate area in case Neville and Rabbit really did kill themselves and blow up the classroom.

“What are you doing?” Hermione asked blinking as a thin veil surrounded the table summoned by Lily’s slight hand movements and concentration.

“Setting up wards, you know, in case we get blown up or something.” Lily said before sitting down wondering how probable it really was that the combination of Neville and Rabbit was lethal.

“Without a wand?!” Hermione shrieked looking at Lily’s hands and then added, “And wards, we’ve only just started the levitation charm! How are you doing wards already?”

Hermione answered herself before Lily could respond, “Never mind, I don’t care, let’s just get the potion ingredients and start brewing.”

Lily went and fetched the various ingredients and began thinly slicing as the directions indicated all the while aware of the immense amount of tension at her table. Hermione was purposefully not looking at her and instead at the cauldron, saying nothing that wasn’t necessary, only asking for ingredients here or there.

Lily had received the cold shoulder many times in her life. The Dursleys had perfected the art of it and they were always of the belief that freakish children should be neither seen nor heard because then you could pretend they didn’t live in your cupboard. Wizard Lenin was giving her the cold shoulder at the moment, not so much out of pettiness, but more out of an obsessive desire to regain his body. Still, there was something so obnoxious about Hermione doing it to her right at her own
“You’d think, with it being Ellie Potter Day and all, that I’d actually get some free time to celebrate.” Lily noted to Hermione, she’d been looking forward to it too since she’d never been able to celebrate it before Hogwarts. The Dursleys were very anti-Halloween and wizards weren’t too keen on Lily Riddle celebrating the end of the wizarding war. It seemed though that even in Hogwarts she wasn’t catching much of a break when it came to her own national holiday.

Hermione said nothing, instead stirred the potion with a single minded focus that was completely unnecessary given the step they were on. Lily tapped her fingers on the table, again finding herself bothered by the quiet, and decided to try again.

“So, what were you talking to Rabbit about?” Lily asked and Hermione nearly jumped out of her seat.

“I don’t see how that’s any of your business, Ellie Potter.” Hermione sniffed trying to look as if she was perfectly indifferent to the question.

“Of course it’s my business, I’m the one who summoned him into this universe after all.” Lily pointed out.

“Are you serious? You really do think the universe revolves around you, don’t you?”

There was a look of shock on her face as if she couldn’t quite believe what she was saying but was saying it anyway. Her words were softer, shakier than they had been only moments before, and the way she said it made it seem as if Lily had just delivered her a deadly blow.

“I usually am.” Lily said, and she wasn’t sure why anyone wasn’t willing to believe that fact because it was always true.

“That’s the most… I can’t believe you, I can’t believe that you’re the girl who lived!” Hermione said and then added, “You know I actually wanted to meet you on the train, I was excited, but I should have known better. I should have known that you’d be a shallow, stupid, self-absorbed, crazy, arrogant little girl who thinks the world’s been handed to her on a silver platter!”

It wasn’t the worst thing that had been ever said to her, not by a long shot, but all the way there was
something about it that was so clear and sharp and unexpected.

Everyone had turned to look at their table at that point, Lily scanned the classroom and on the way met the eyes of Draco Malfoy, his two robot minions, Ron, Neville, Rabbit, and even Snape who was too shocked to even call the classroom back to order. The room was quiet except for the soft bubbling of potions, far too quiet, and Lily felt it weighing on her as she turned back to Hermione’s indignant expression that was all too content to blame it on her.

And inside her head even Wizard Lenin looked up at her, expectant, as if waiting for her to say something.

“Nothing has ever been handed to me, Hermione Granger.” She said slowly a dull sort of anger pushing her words forward, “I may be more talented than you are and maybe a bit smarter but that’s not the same as being handed things. I’ve had to work hard for everything I have that’s worth having; and you have no idea what the hell you’re talking about.”

Hermione probably realized she had gone too far in some direction she hadn’t intended but she didn’t take back her words. Instead she blinked back tears, her face growing red, and her mouth set in a grim line of determination that indicated there was no turning back. In a voice that tried to be steady she spoke and it echoed through the room like a gunshot.

“That’s a bit rich coming from the girl who lived.”

“Punch her in the face.” Was Wizard Lenin’s soft and cold advice and Lily had to admit it did sound very appealing.

Before she could though, or Snape could force everyone back to work, Neville stood dramatically from his table. He looked almost unlike Neville in that moment, he was shaking but it wasn’t from fear or crippling shyness, instead his eyes were dark and sharp and it looked as if he was restraining himself from breaking something.

“You really don’t have any idea what you’re talking about, Hermione!” He shouted slamming his hand onto his table without any care for the cauldron simmering away in front of him.

Hermione looked like she’d been shot her eyes growing wide but she mastered herself quickly enough, “Neville, this isn’t about you; this is between me and…”
He cut her off, “No, it isn’t, it isn’t just between you and Ellie!” He took a deep breath then trying to calm himself but it didn’t work, “If you really were as smart as you think you are you would have shut up before you even started! It doesn’t matter what kind of grades you get or how good you are at spells because you’re an idiot!”

They all stared at Neville in shock for a moment, Slytherin and Gryffindor alike, and then slowly almost reverently Ron Weasley started clapping and then Pansy Parkinson gleefully joined in soon it seemed as if the whole room was clapping except for Lily, Hermione, Neville, Rabbit, and Snape.

Hermione couldn’t hold back the stray tears caught in her eyes then.

“Enough!” Snape commanded his voice thundering over the applause and causing instant silence, “Ten points from Slytherin, twenty from Gryffindor for your terrible behavior.”

His cold stare then turned to Neville who seemed to shrink into himself, “Mr. Longbottom, you will take your seat immediately and be silent for the rest of the class. Is this clear?”

Neville nodded timidly and hurridly took his seat but by that point it was already too late. Rabbit was holding in his hand a single ingredient, one that had not been in the potion, and was eyeing Snape coolly.

Snape looked at the ingredient then at Rabbit and seemed to realize what was about to happen, “No you idi…”

Later, when she, Neville and Rabbit were at dinner right before their joint detention with professor Quirrell, she summarized it to the doppelgangers who hadn’t been present themselves, “Well, it could have been worse.”

“Worse?! There’s a bloody hole in the wall!” Ron said looking torn between being terrified and awed.

Neville glumly pushed at his food, ignoring the festive mood of the feast, and the general excitement that always surrounded Ellie Potter Day, “Yeah, I guess.”

“No one died, there was minimal fire damage, I’d say we fared fairly well considering.” Lily said and then shrugged, “Although Rabbit’s been suspended from potion brewing for a week but you
know the thought of him around dangerous chemicals always made me a bit nervous anyway.”

“For the best no doubt.” One doppelganger said knowingly only for the other one to add, “It seems that Lepur Rabbitson was just too much for potions.”

“The real question is will the dungeons be fixed by next week when we have potions, isn’t that right Gred?”

“That certainly is the very real and true question, Forge.”

It certainly was an odd incident though, and she wasn’t really sure how she felt about it, it nagged at her and she had the feeling that it was still unfinished. She hadn’t seen Hermione since the class and Neville looked drained of his anger and even his fear and seemed more tired than anything else only capable of pushing his food around.

“Unless this has something to do with Flamel’s stone, I don’t care.” Wizard Lenin cut in.

“I wasn’t asking you about it.” Lily commented, she was allowed her own running commentary after all since Wizard Lenin wasn’t pitching in.

“You were thinking loudly and it was getting irritating.” There was a slight pause here and then Wizard Lenin continued in a voice that mocked his own words, “Granger has no friends, has lost her standing as the star student since you outdo her in terms of practical work in every class, and it appears that she’s finally reached her limit and you just happened to be in the way. But as I said, I don’t care, so unless you have something useful to think about please keep it down.”

Well, unlike Wizard Lenin she couldn’t think about the stone all the time. Besides, it wasn’t like it had gotten him anywhere either considering it’d been almost two months and he still hadn’t found anything.

“Did I ever say it was an easy problem to solve?”

But it could be, he didn’t really need the stone after all, she was fairly sure that she could do it and that she could do it well. As much as she hesitated to use glitches for something so crucial she was getting tired of being ignored by Hermione Grangers and Wizard Lenins alike and it would make things much easier.
“Your glitches are what brought the rabbit into existence, I’d rather not rely on them.” He said shortly and then added, “Besides, you’re not lacking for pet projects, what with your Albanian vampire revolution in the works. I’m sure you can keep yourself busy without needing me to comment on your every banal thought and opinion.”

That wasn’t the point, the point was more elusive than that and it ran deeper, but all the same she felt that they both were aware that Wizard Lenin hadn’t really given her an answer.

He was starting to get nervous too, she thought. There was almost no literature on the stone, theories that didn’t work, documentation of attempts to create it, but on the actual stone itself and how it might be used there was nothing. And everything he seemed to think of didn’t have enough of a foundation; they were castles built on pillars of sand.

They had run a few experiments, created elixers, turned lead into gold but beyond that they hadn’t even gone so far as testing the elixir to see if it even worked or how it would work. Was it as powerful as Wizard Lenin had suspected it was or was it played up for fame on Flamel’s part? The answers weren’t clear because so far they only had a vial of what looked vaguely like the red flavor of Kool-Aid and a pile of gold stuffed into her pockets.

He wasn’t saying anything explicit but she could tell from how he was talking, from the circles his thoughts ran in, that he was beginning to get a little anxious as well.

They didn’t know that on that Ellie Potter Day, 1991, there were three things in motion without any awareness that they were going to hit. The philosopher’s stone in Lily’s pocket, the missing and miserable Hermione Granger, and Quirrell.

“Troll… Tr… Troll… In… the… Dun… Dungeons!”

They all turned to look at the entrance to the Great Hall where Quirrell was quivering, looking more panicked than Lily had ever seen him in his life.

For a moment they all stared at him and then there was action, Dumbledore commanding everyone to return to their dormitories, the Gryffindor prefect (Ron’s brother) coming and rounding everyone up to return to wherever Gryffindor lived and Lily not moving but rather staring at the frantic looking Quirrell.
“He’s stuttering.” Lily remarked to Wizard Lenin, “*He never stutters when stressed*…”

Wizard Lenin meanwhile was looking at Quirrell in a new light, seeing his shaking limbs, his pale sweating face, the dark circles beneath his eyes, “*Has he always looked this ill, Lily?*”

There was some idea forming there inside her head without her knowledge, rolling around as she looked at Quirrell, and she wasn’t sure what it was only that the stutter was bothering her more than it should.

And the troll, Quirrell had a live demonstration with a troll earlier that week, how had it gotten loose and how was it that Quirrell had been the one to find it roaming the halls?

Someone grabbed her arm, “Hermione, where’s Hermione?”

Neville was shaking her, looking incredibly panicked, terrified even as the swarm of students moved past them.

“Not here, I haven’t seen her since Potions.” Lily said craning her head to look continue looking at Quirrell who was now making his way out of the great hall with his wand in hand looking determined and far less squirrelly than even a few seconds before.

Dropping the act before he’d even left the room; he normally wasn’t that careless with it.

“Oh Merlin, Ellie, we have to find her! The troll, all those things I said and…” He trailed off looking bewildered and then said, “I think some girls said she was in the loo last they saw her, come on!”

With that he pulled her and Rabbit with him as they sprinted through the halls and away from the Gryffindor prefect towards whatever bathroom the Gryffindor girls had seen her in last. It was strange how much faster Neville was when he truly panicked, that morning he’d barely been able to keep pace with her but now she was the one trailing behind.

It wasn’t hard to realize Hermione really was in there once they started hearing the sobbing.

“Hermione?” Neville asked wandering into the girls’ room with some trepidation.
“What are you doing here?!” The door to a stall burst open and Hermione glared at both of them from inside, “And Ellie Potter too, great just… Are you going to call me stupid again?”

“No, I’m… I’m sorry, Hermione, I’m really really sorry I said that.” Neville said, “But we have to go because there’s a troll loose and…”

“No, you’re not sorry. I know you’re… I’m sorry I said what I did but…” Hermione trailed off and put her face back into her hands shaking her head, “Go away and just leave me alone.”

It was hard to think when her thoughts were stuck on Quirrell but all the same Lily took a long good look at Hermione.

And then Lily realized what Wizard Lenin really meant earlier when he was talking about Hermione, and maybe even why that conversation with Hermione in potions had seemed more important than it needed to be. Alone, it was all about being alone and not alone.

Lily was never really alone, not even with a silent Wizard Lenin, an absent Death, because they were still there if she truly needed to find them. There were others too, Neville was there, and even Rabbit.

Hermione Granger was alone in an empty bathroom sobbing because the one thing she’d had to cling to, her intelligence, was ripped from her in a public display.

Hermione Granger was in her very own cupboard under the stairs.

“You’re not an encyclopedia.”

“What?” Hermione asked looking up and rubbing at her eyes.

“You’re not an encyclopedia. For most things I’m sufficient, I don’t really need help, but there are a lot of small details about Wizarding Britain I gloss over because I don’t consider them important. Sometimes they’re useful, and you know more of them than anyone else, that’s why I always ask you.”
Lily continued as if Hermione hadn’t interrupted, “We may not agree on the state of the universe, on Hogwarts, on this whole magic business in general but those things aren’t really important. Well, they are, but all the same I’m ignored all the time by many people besides you. Really, it’s a profound and unexpected day when someone does listen to anything I have to say.” Lily trailed off then feeling she was getting off subject, things Hermione didn’t necessarily need to hear, and so she wrapped it up in a neat little bow.

“You can’t really help my ability to alter the fabric of reality, you can only help yours, but if you do want my help I can give you a few pointers.”

Lily smiled at her and inside her head Wizard Lenin was stunned and for once abandoned his thoughts on the stone and instead only thought about her and how amazing it was that after ten years he could still be surprised.

“Lily, that was…”

He didn’t get to finish as the sound of a troll’s cry of rage just outside the doorway cut him off. Hermione and Neville immediately started screaming, backed themselves into a corner away from the entrance as the troll wandered in. It was large, larger than any human she had ever seen, including uncle Vernon and its features were squashed together so that it appeared nearsighted and dim. Its shadow engulfed her even before it fully entered the room.

Almost without thinking Lily dug into her pocket and pulled out the sword.

“Are you seriously going to fight a troll with a sword you can barely lift?!” Wizard Lenin shouted painfully in her mind, “You can’t afford lose this fight, Lily, if you lose Granger and Longbottom will both die!”

She aimed for its legs first ducking under its giant fist as it swung it towards her head. Its blood was dark almost black, and it buckled under the blow giving out a low moan that sounded almost like a horn. It rebalanced itself fairly quickly, keeping hold of the massive club, and his eyes still tracked her even as Hermione and Neville were both screamed behind her.

She raised a shield in time to block the next hit of its club, the shield shuddering slightly under the weight, and this time she thrust forward towards the left side of its chest where the human heart
Again it stumbled, buckling on the bad leg, limping backwards but she hadn’t made it through the rib cage and it was still standing tall.

“Ellie!” Hermione screamed from somewhere behind her but Lily ignored it keeping her eyes on the troll.

It raised its club again, less high this time, weaker as its other hand applied pressure on its chest. Lily moved the shield to block the hit renewing it when splinters began appearing in the surface.

“Lily, even with the aid of magic you won’t move fast enough or with enough power to kill it instantly.” Wizard Lenin commented swiftly inside her head, as if whispering so as not to distract her, and she appreciated the thought because the thing was very fast for being very large making it difficult to weave together more prominent glitches.

She was beginning to realize Wizard Lenin’s point because weak and wounded though it was it wasn’t falling over and it was learning new tricks, they were circling each other now, and it was keeping out of her reach swiping at her with its club while changed tactics to sending sharp beams of light that would touch the skin only to ricochet and burn through the walls of the bathroom. The trouble was she couldn’t concentrate for long enough to produce a large enough shield to fully deflect blows, send the troll elsewhere, stop its heart, or any number of other cheap tricks that required a bit of finesse; all she could do was small parlor tricks that seemed to have no effect whatsoever.

There was a certain irony in there, because at one point Quirrell had talked about trolls, had even brought in this same troll to class but neither Wizard Lenin nor Lily had been paying any attention.

“Ellie!” Hermione shouted again and this time Lily did respond.

“I’m kind of busy, Hermione, could you please stop shouting my name for a few minutes if you don’t mind!”

“Ellie, trolls are very magic resistant, you can’t use spells to beat it!” How was it that Hermione was so very informative even in the worst of settings.
“That’s very useful information that I figured out five minutes ago, Hermione.”

“Trolls turn to stone in sunlight!” Hermione shouted then, “They turn to stone in direct sunlight, it’s why they live in caves!”

Lily stopped circling and raised up a hand removing the shield entirely for a few seconds she and the troll only stared at eachother; it cocking its head in confusion. She closed her eyes and thought about the sun. A moment later opening them it was there, a giant statue, staring at her in horror as if in the last moment it had realized what was going to happen but had been helpless to stop it.

Blood still dripped from the sword onto the floor, dark and thick it spread beneath her shoes onto the white tile, and in the background the spraying of broken sinks could be heard. And for a moment she could only stare at it and think how strange it was that one moment it had been there and moving and the next it was nothing more than a too realistic statue.

Neville and Hermione slowly walked towards her and what was left of the troll, carefully stepping over the rubble with equally stunned and relieved expressions on their faces. Hermione grabbed at Rabbit’s hand, bringing him to stand with them, so that they could all circle around the dead thing and wonder how it looked smaller now that it was dead.

“Ellie, you just killed a troll.” Neville said slowly as if he couldn’t quite believe it his eyes locked on the sword in her hand, “You just killed a troll.”

It did seem anticlimactic, she supposed, she wasn’t sure what she had expected but certainly something more than this. She said nothing for a moment, stared at it, at the wounds that were still visible in its skin although now they were frozen solid.

It probably was best not to linger on those kinds of thoughts.

“Do you think that will get me an automatic O in Defense?” Lily asked as she began to use her school robes to wipe the blood off of the sword, the great thing about black was that stains rarely showed although she probably would have to glitch them out later, “No, really, if I never have to go to Defense again because of this it’d be great.”

“I… How did you do that?” Hermione said equally stunned, “That isn’t, I mean I know I…”
“Oh it’s easy, once you get the knack for the whole glitch thing it’s really not that big of a deal.”

Hermione didn’t really seem satisfied with Lily’s answer, staring at her with a peculiarly analytic expression for an eleven year old, as if she really couldn’t decide what she thought about Lily anymore. Lily continued to clean the sword and slid it back into her pocket as if she had never pulled it out in the first place.

“You saved our lives.” Hermione said slowly.

“Yes, probably.” Lily agreed.

“You, you and Neville saved my life, if you hadn’t come…” She didn’t let herself finish that sentence. For a few moments it was quiet no one seeming to know quite what to say and then Hermione tentatively asked, “You said you’d offer me pointers, about magic, did you really mean it?”

“I usually do.” Lily responded and Hermione didn’t say anything in response but instead continued to stare at Lily as if she had never really seen her before.

Beyond that the night had been far less interesting; Dumbledore, Snape, and McGonagall had soon showed up and then began bickering amongst each other on what to do about the situation. Eventually they settled on deducting ten points from each of them for abandoning the pack but then awarding twenty for killing a troll and saving Hermione Granger’s life.

Perhaps it was important to note that Dumbledore was mostly silent throughout this, that he had smiled at Neville and Hermione, but that he had kept his eyes mostly on Lily and his expression for her had been very hard to decipher.

He no longer looked at her the way someone would look at an eleven year old girl.

And then, like the end of most days, Lily found herself in Quirrell’s office for detention.

“I am not your garbage disposal, you know.” Lily commented once she had sat down and situated herself.
“Wha… What… What?” Quirrell stuttered out looking like his usual squirrelly self now that the disaster was over.

“The troll, I remember that live demonstration from class, you were ultimately responsible for it and I had to clean up your mess.” Lily said.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.” Quirrell said sharply, his lips twisting down into a frown.

“You’re not stuttering, you know exactly what I’m talking about.” Lily said and watched as Quirrell paled slightly at the observation, “It’s not that easy to kill a troll you know, not that I can’t do it, but it wasn’t that much fun. Try to keep better track of your things.”

Even pale and sweating and looking as if he had just crawled off of his death bed Quirrell managed to give her a smile, one that was more a brief twisting of the lips than a real smile, because his eyes were cold, “Are you really threatening me, Eleanor Potter?”

They looked at each other for a moment, considering the other as if they were an opponent in a game of chess, and finally Lily said, “No, not really, just giving suggestions. It’s generally not a good idea to lose things as large and lethal as trolls in a castle filled with children.”

And with that his expression faded and his stutter returned leaving him twitchier and paler than ever, “Fair… Fair… Fair enough.”

Wizard Lenin was right, Lily thought to herself, he did look ill. She had originally thought it was just a quirk of being Quirrell, some side effect of being a stain on the universe, but he looked as if he had some terminal disease or like he was a junky in far too deep.

Quirrell looked like at any moment he could keel over and just die.

And it was then that everything came together.

Wizard Lenin needed a test subject, to see just how powerful the stone really was, he needed someone chronically ill who looked as if they were dying. He needed someone that no one would really miss if it went wrong somehow, if someone could overdose on life elixir.
"Bingo."

"Bingo."
The Waiting and Watching Game

In which Quirrell has a surprising and somewhat disconcerting recovery, Hermione Granger proves to be more of a handful than Lily anticipated, and Lily feels as if something more is still to come.

The effects of the elixir of life, otherwise known as super mysterious Kool-Aid, had been almost immediate and also somewhat unexpected.

Quirrel had made remarkable progress physically, his skin no longer had that sickly pale yellow cast to it, he no longer sweated profusely for seemingly no reason, and he no longer looked continually fatigued. Within a few short weeks he'd progressed from looking like a terminally ill cancer patient or else heroin junky to a relatively healthy man in his thirties.

What was unexpected, what had Lily and Wizard Lenin regarding the whole thing dubiously, were the other changes.

The main and perhaps most noticeable was that he no longer stuttered. This had been a gradual change, during the first week or so he had even stuttered more than usual barely making it through two words before giving up entirely. He actually would sometimes have manic fits during her detentions with him during this time, tearing at his face and the back of his head with his nails, falling onto the floor and screaming in agony, and those were always more than a little disturbing. She usually just left the room whenever those started up making a small note in her journal.

Then slowly but surely these incidents had stopped and his stutter had vanished as if it was never there in the first place, much to the relief and astonishment of all of Hogwarts; all of Hogwarts except Hermione Granger.

“Don’t you think it’s a little odd that professor Quirrell just suddenly changed completely?” Hermione had asked one day at breakfast.

Hermione, since having been saved from certain death by Lily, had now taken to eating breakfast with Lily and Neville and pretending that Ron didn’t exist. She also took this time to discuss magical theory, their classes, their professors, Lily’s manners, and all sorts of topics that Hermione felt she was something of an authority on. Lily and Neville now mostly spent breakfast in silence, just staring at Hermione wondering which of them should tell her to shut up first.
“Hey, Ellie, why do you keep hanging out with Granger all the time?” Ron asked between bites of food looking morally offended by her presence. Ron was back to his usual malfunctioning self, Hermione was slightly more tolerated than snakes and Slytherins but not by much, and Ron made sure that everyone knew it.

“I saved her from being pulverized by a troll; apparently this makes us friends.” Lily summarized, it really was amazing what violence could accomplish.

“That is not why we… Oh, Ellie, do you even understand what friendship is?” Hermione responded, looking almost as indignant as Ron.

The truth was Lily didn’t think Hermione knew what to make of her. She hung around, joined her and Neville around the castle, took magic lessons from Lily and then stormed off when she said Lily was talking nonsense, and provided useful information when needed but beyond that she seemed lost. She would alternate between correcting Lily on her behavior and opinions, being so morally offended by Lily’s opinions that she had to leave the area, and just staring at Lily with a pensive expression.

Lily thought about Hermione’s question for a moment, the answer was probably no. Before Hermione, and then Neville, had used the term she hadn’t really regarded them as friends. Casual acquaintances, peers, people whose fates she vaguely cared about, but she’d always assumed that friendship was something closer and deeper than that.

Friends belonged to Lily; not to Eleanor Potter.

That and while Neville and Hermione were all well and good sometimes they chafed at her a little bit.

They always wanted to be around and when Lily wasn’t in class or was late to class they were always asking why. Hermione in particular liked to dig into things that she had no business knowing such as the reasons behind Lily’s feud with Snape, what went on in Quirrell’s detention, every single grade Lily had gotten on every single homework assignment, and where Lily went when she couldn’t be found.

And whenever Lily gave her any explanation on magic or the universe in general, things that Hermione had asked for after the whole troll thing, she’d always object saying, “That’s not what my books say, Ellie. You can’t just make things up and call it a fact.”
So perhaps they were friends and perhaps they weren’t; and perhaps like Hermione had pointed out Lily didn’t really understand what friendship was.

“Friendship is the antithesis of cupboards beneath the stairs.” Lily finally stated after a lengthy bit of silent contemplation.

“So…” Neville started with his usual hesitantly confused expression on his face.

“What does that even mean?” Hermione exclaimed throwing her hands in the air as if she had just reached some limit. She then took a deep breath, found her inner Hermione zen, and blurted out something that sounded as if it had been stolen from a dictionary, “No, friendship is, well it’s a bond between people who share similar interests.”

“Oh, we share no interests.” Lily responded.

“Ellie!” She snapped looking on the verge of another trademark Hermione rant before visibly controlling herself and redirecting her train of thought.

“I did not want to argue with you about friendship this morning, although you really don’t have any idea what you’re talking about as usual. Now will you all please listen to me? There’s something very… odd about professor Quirrell recently.” Hermione said and then leaned forward expecting them to contribute.

“It is kind of weird that he doesn’t stutter anymore.” Neville agreed with a small nod, “And he got rid of the garlic.”

Lily wasn’t about to tell two eleven year olds that it was most likely a side effect of the philosopher’s stone she stole from Dumbledore’s hat so she came up with her next best answer, “Maybe he miraculously got over his crippling fear of vampires.”

“Ellie, people do not miraculously get over crippling fears!” Hermione looked as if she wanted to add something about how Lily was the dumbest person she knew but once again with visible effort she managed to hold her tongue.
“You know I don’t like thinking anything bad about professors but… this isn’t normal and I think something is going on.” Hermione concluded with a very worried expression given how calm the situation appeared to be.

As much as Lily hated to agree with Hermione as a personal rule, later that week in detention, facing a Quirrell without the threat of stuttering or garlic, she couldn’t help but think something similar.

The stone was having a variety of unexpected side effects.

He was looking at her with a polite smile. More than that though she found herself thinking, as she’d found herself thinking a lot recently, that it looked familiar. Or rather, that he felt familiar, the way he held himself, his range of smiles, the cold texture of his eyes she’d all seen before only… Only she’d only glimpsed it in Quirrell before she’d started feeding him the elixir, she’d only seen it somewhere else.

“Miss Potter and Mister Rabbitson, so glad you could join me tonight. I take it that you’ve somehow managed to once again prompt a fit of rage from professor Snape?” Here the smile twisted somewhat, became somewhat more genuine, but it was more amused than happy to see her as if he found this whole situation somewhat funny.

“I wouldn’t call it a fit of rage, or anything really, I think he thinks that by sending me to you enough times I’ll eventually break. I really think he’s just out of ideas but doesn’t want to admit it.” Lily said as she took her customary seat and then added, “You know, you could always just tell him to do his own damn detentions and leave you out of it.”

“Oh but I like our nightly chats, Miss Potter, you’re a… very interesting girl.” He said pausing before very interesting as if it wasn’t quite what he wanted to say and as he said it his eyes sparked.

She had the distinct feeling that Quirrell was in some ways humoring her, playing the part of the genial professor, and perhaps some of it was real but there was more to it than that. Sometimes, when she caught him staring at her, there was something dark, bitter, and angry lurking in his expression; almost out of sight.

“Did you bring that tea of yours?” He asked and Lily made a mental note to add addictive into the list of growing side effects.

He’d asked about the tea almost every time she came now, asking her what was in it, where she
found it, if he could keep some, all sorts of questions that she evaded each and every time. It was a
marked difference from the first time they’d had it when she’d had to resort to “These aren’t the
droids you’re looking for” for him to even touch the stuff; force feeding magic Kool-Aid to Squirrel
was not one of her fondest memories.

“Are you sure you want more tea? I mean we’ve had it every night for the past few weeks.” It wasn’t
as if Lily was running out, the stone had the curious quality of never being able to fail to produce
elixir, but all the same both Lily and Wizard Lenin were wondering what would happen if they cut
him off.

Would he regress? Would he stay as he was? Would he continue to become healthier as it was
already in his system? All these questions would remain unanswered if they continued to feed him
tea. That, and something in the back of her head, some instinct was telling her that it was a very bad
idea to keep feeding him elixir.

(What was it that Death had said about the stone? She couldn’t quite remember but the look in his
eyes had been so serious and she had ultimately disregarded it in favor of helping Lenin.)

“I really would like some more tea.” There was no politeness in these words, they were a command,
and the expression he gave her left no room for negotiation.

Lily took the pot on Quirrell’s desk and set about preparing the tea under his watchful eye, a habit
he’d taken up recently, and carefully manipulated glitches to hide the existence of both the elixir and
the fact that her own cup didn’t contain any.

She handed it over to him and he took it with a grace that was so foreign to Quirrell she could hardly
believe it was the same squirrel he used to be, “Thank you, Miss Potter.”

“Yeah, no problem.” Lily said slowly sipping from her own cup.

“You need to cut him off, we learn nothing from this.” Wizard Lenin said in her head as they
watched Quirrell’s smile soften somewhat as he chugged down the steaming liquid.

“I know but...”

“But what?”
She didn’t know what, but something was bothering her, he seemed familiar but more than that this Quirrell sometimes seemed dangerous. She caught Rabbit staring at him now as if Quirrell’s warranted interest and that on its own was more than enough reason to be alarmed.

Hermione’s words kept ringing in her head, something odd going on, and she couldn’t find a real reason to disagree with that.

“Miss Potter, there’s been something I’ve been wondering about these past weeks.”

“Hm?” She looked up at him jolted from her thoughts.

Quirrell was staring at her intently, as if she was some interesting machine whose function he could not quite work out, and she couldn’t bring herself to look away. He probably was wondering why he was making such a miraculous and rapid recovery from chronic Squirrel, a terrible life threatening and irritating disease.

She wasn’t sure how she was going to answer that.

“Why are you here?”

Well that wasn’t the question she had been expecting, “What?”

“Why did you decide to come to Hogwarts?” He clarified with that sharp look in his eyes and how was it that it was him who asked her and not Snape, Dumbledore, Hermione, or even Neville.

“To learn things?”

“No,” He mused negating her answer completely, “I think we both know that you have nothing to learn from Hogwarts. I’m certain that if you were to take your NEWT exams tomorrow you would pass with all Os, well, excluding History of Magic of course.”

He paused considering her for a moment, “You’re a regular discussion at faculty meetings, you
know. Professor McGonagall and Flitwick claim you’re the next Merlin and describe feats of magic
the likes of which has never been seen in any wizard, let alone an eleven year old girl. The fact is
they don’t know what to do with you, you’re beyond the Hogwarts curriculum but you’re too
inexperienced and young for an apprenticeship. It’s fairly clear that you have nothing to gain from
going to Hogwarts in that respect.”

“What about friendship?”

His smile was jagged this time, a sharp thing, almost as sharp as his black eyes.

“Friendship.” He said as if the word in itself held so much more in it, “Are you talking about Neville
Longbottom and Hermione Granger? Forgive me, but you don’t seem very close to them.”

“Close enough.” Lily said.

“But not that close.” Quirrell corrected, “Miss Granger seems to be under the mistaken impression
that you’re an idiot savant. Oh I’m sure she’s polite enough not to say it to your face, to give you the
benefit of the doubt in public perhaps even try to listen to your opinions, but at the end of the day
trolls don’t mean that much and it will take more than almost dying to convince her that she’s wrong.
She may think she’s your friend, may believe it full-heartedly, but we both know it takes more than that.”

Lily took a sip of her tea and ignored the stinging accompanied by those thoughts. Instead she
maintained eye contact, keeping her thoughts quiet and out of sight, and waited to see where they
were going with all of this.

“And Neville?” She prompted.

The air seemed to stiffen at his name as if Neville was somehow more important than Hermione
Granger. Quirrell’s smile thinned, stretched itself to the point of breaking, “Neville Longbottom is
more desperate for friendship than he is a friendship with you specifically. Push him too far and he
will go elsewhere.”

This was a fair point, there were times she’d wondered this as well. When it came down to it neither
Neville nor Hermione knew that much about her. They knew a lot about Ellie Potter, knew her quite
personally, but that didn’t mean they knew Lily. They didn’t know about Wizard Lenin, they didn’t
understand about Rabbit, they didn’t know about Death, and they seemed incapable of
comprehending the true essence of magic.

One day they might have to confront these things and when they did would they walk away?

She didn’t know the answer to that so she usually tried not to think about it; but it seemed that Quirrell wasn’t willing to let it go as easily as her.

“So not friendship then either.” Lily summarized for him dully and a variant of that hard spark returned to his eye as if that meant he had won.

“Not friendship.” He agreed, “So what is it?”

They each waited for her answer, listening to the silence in the room, the clock ticking away the seconds in the background.

“There’s something wrong with him.” Wizard Lenin noted in a disturbed tone as they watched Quirrell’s hysterical breakdown.

“You think I don’t know that.”
Wizard Lenin was stating the obvious, what he didn’t want to state, what he didn’t want to think was that he had no idea what was going on with Quirrell. The stone wasn’t working, well it was working and it wasn’t, it was superficially working. Quirrell was physically healthier than she had ever seen him but he wasn’t Quirrell anymore.

This went beyond masks.

“I never imagined that you’d be so…” Quirrell finally said once he managed to catch his breath his hand gesturing for a word, “Perceptive.”

“People usually settle on weird.”

He laughed a bit at this again shaking his head before waving off her comment, “Yes, strange, undeniably so but for an eleven year old girl… As for your question I can’t help but notice that you didn’t answer mine.”

He smiled politely across at her as if to officially signal that they were at an impasse.

“I’m here because I’m expected to be here.”

“Eleanor Potter gets a ‘pass backstage’ as you call it because she is a symbol. As you may have noticed symbols, like children, are to be seen and not heard.”

She translated that for him, “In other words I’m not going to tell anyone because no one is going to listen.”

“Precisely.” He responded, as if this was some insightful point that should have cut her straight to the core.

He was right, Quirrell along with losing his stutter had gained an uncanny ability to be right, but that didn’t mean that it really mattered. People didn’t listen, she’d known that for a very long time, and she had never intended to tell people Quirrell’s little secret.

He wanted someone to see it was a mask but he didn’t want to deal with the consequences of
“Interesting.” She commented, “I think that’s all the time I’m willing to spend in detention today, Mr. Quirrell. Until tomorrow.”

Lowering the tea dosage didn’t help; whatever reaction she had set off in Quirrell was permanent and accelerating. That being said there didn’t seem to be any consequences beyond that; Quirrell was content to play the part of Squirrel as she was to play the part of Eleanor Potter. There were no more loose trolls in the dungeons, no more near death experiences, and life went on.

Lily found herself going to classes, being given special projects by professors when it was clear that she had already mastered the first year syllabus, keeping Rabbit out of trouble and away from girlfriends, and sometimes just loitering around in odd places with Neville and Hermione.

And of course she and Wizard Lenin researched and refined theories on the stone and what exactly it did and how they would make use of it.

She felt like she was in some kind of limbo though, where reality was suspended and things fell flat, like she was in a bubble just waiting for the walls to pop.

But it wasn’t popping and so she kept waiting.

Soon enough it was almost Christmas break and Neville and Hermione were both heading home for the holidays.

“Lepur, you have to at least try to learn English. I know that your past was… harrowing to say the least but you have a new life here in Britain you have to take hold of it and… Oh, Ellie, you say something to him.”

Neville and Hermione were leaving later that day and so Hermione had felt it best to organize one last get together where she could lecture both Lily and Rabbit before the holidays.

She had come to realize, after being blinded by Rabbit’s unusually attractive face, that Rabbit was more or less failing school by not doing any work at all.
It was generally accepted that Lepur Rabbitson was so traumatized by the events in Albania that it had driven him mute and almost comatose. He always appeared to be brooding, mulling silently on the horrors he had witnessed, which caused his popularity amongst the female population in the school to soar. He had that traumatized man appeal, the kind that just begged someone to come and fix him, to make him good and teach him the meaning of life.

Hermione had taken that appeal as a call to action.

“He still doesn’t speak English, Hermione.” Lily commented.

Hermione was smarter than most children their age, even Wizard Lenin had agreed to this after they had hung around her long enough. The trouble was that she knew she was smarter than most children her age but she didn’t realize that being smarter than some didn’t make her smarter than everyone. So sometimes she’d have these opinions which sounded reasonable but were clearly incorrect, like the nature of magic, believing in authority, and Rabbit’s ability to process language.

“I know he doesn’t speak English, Ellie!” Hermione snapped, “What I’m saying is that you’re his best friend, you’re the one who brought him to Hogwarts after… Surely you’ll know what to say to him?”

She was looking at Lily imploringly, almost desperately, while Rabbit stared blankly ahead at the general student population in the great hall as if they were nothing more than dust.

It was best, Lily had discovered, to go along with Hermione’s plans. Not going along with Hermione’s plans, which Lily did quite frequently, brought with it a lot of irritation as Lily found herself roped into the plan or at least lectured about how defying the plan was a bad idea. In the end it was easier, and faster, to just go along with the plan until Hermione was distracted by something else.

If Hermione wanted to teach Rabbit how to be human Lily wasn’t going to waste breath stopping her.

“Rabbit,” Lily said and Rabbit turned his head to look at her. There was always something wrong with Rabbit’s eyes, they were too deep, they just kept going like a black pit where there was no bottom but only a hole where light disappeared. There was nothing in them only the idea of something and sometimes not even that, “Hermione would very much like you to speak English and pass your classes.”
Lily was about to turn away, expecting Rabbit’s usual non reaction, but before she could she felt something in her stomach drop as Rabbit gave a slow nod of ascent. As if he understood.

“Oh shit.”

Rabbit wasn’t entirely passive, he never had been, he moved, he sometimes did certain actions like dropping things in potions, he’d learned how to sit, how to pretend to eat, how to do all sorts of human things but he’d never interacted before. He’d never given signs of being aware or even caring about what was going on around him.

“Ellie! Language! And Lepur that’s good … Now I won’t be here over break but I want you to work with him daily on his English; can you do this for me Ellie, please? He needs us, he needs to learn how to adjust, and I don’t think anyone’s taking him seriously enough.” Hermione said rambling on as Lily continued to stare at Rabbit.

“Oh, I’m taking him very seriously right now.” Lily said.

“Ellie, will you help him?” Hermione said, Lily’s response apparently not being good enough.

“I don’t think that’s the best idea.” Lily started and then stopped sighing at the offended expression on Hermione’s face, “But I’ll do it anyway, sure, why not? It’s not like there will be huge disastrous consequences beyond even my imagination, or anything.”

“Good, Ellie.” Hermione said smiling at her as if Lily had just earned a gold star.

“I don’t know how you stand her.” Wizard Lenin muttered in the back of her head.

To tell the truth Lily wasn’t sure how she did either and the prospects of a few weeks sans Hermione were looking very pleasant.

“Right, well, I got you this for the holidays. Here’s one for you too Neville. I’m glad, well, I’m very glad we all met this year.” Hermione said handing wrapped rectangles that looked suspiciously like books to each of them.
“I’m glad we met too.” Neville said, “I can’t wait for next term, well not Potions but…”

“Oh Neville, you’re getting better.” Hermione said, “And I’m sure if you study you’ll only improve.”

Under Hermione’s tutelage Neville had been improving, things no longer exploded quite as much but he was still just under mediocre and Snape wasn’t about to let him forget it.

“And I’m sure you, Ellie, will learn to stop provoking Snape and getting detention with Quirrell.” Hermione couldn’t help but tack onto the end of that sentence.

“Unlikely.”

Hermione sighed looking slightly frustrated, “I really don’t understand it. If you just listened or didn’t say anything he wouldn’t be so hard on you.”

“Also unlikely.”

“Well, all the same.” Hermione responded with a weak smile.

They all looked at each other then, without words, and Lily felt kind of odd about the fact that she wouldn’t be seeing them for a while. There were times when they were around too often, where Hermione especially poked her nose into places where it didn’t belong, but all the same she liked them.

Friendship, perhaps it wasn’t friendship like Quirrell had said, but they did care. They cared enough, more than the Dursleys ever had, and Lily did appreciate that even if it wasn’t as deep as Hermione and Neville seemed to think it was.

“I really am glad I met you both.” Hermione reiterated voicing Lily’s own thoughts and apparently Neville’s as well as he nodded.

“Yes, glad.” Lily repeated.
It really was just like a Christmas special, she ended up thinking to herself. Only, instead of ending with the warm glow of friendship and smiles it began with it as Hermione and Neville boarded the train.

She waved them off at the station with Rabbit, watching as the train, that red train she was so familiar with, moved off into the distance and back towards London.

And the bubble had yet to burst.

Lily stood outside the wall that contained the entrance to Dumbledore’s office wondering just how one should go about breaking in. She also had a migraine on the level of Squirrel as Wizard Lenin had been beyond angry at the fact that she considered this a legitimate option and was, as he had put it, risking everything for nothing.

It had been different when she had nothing to lose and everything to gain, they’d needed access to Dumbledore’s office the last time, and before that she’d been indifferent to the prospect of meetings with headmasters. Now there was a stolen philosopher’s stone hiding in her pocket.

Not that she didn’t think she couldn’t handle Dumbledore or anything, if push came to shove, she’d just rather not test it out when important things like Wizard Lenin’s body were on the line.

In general Dumbledore was not to be trusted, toyed with, or even talked to if it could at all be avoided.

But these were not normal circumstances and it seemed best to be proactive instead of waiting for it all to go to hell. Even if Wizard Lenin didn’t agree.

The easiest, cleanest, way to get rid of a professor would be to go through Dumbledore.

With that a look of determination passed onto her features and she began listing through all the wizard candy she knew waiting for the gargoyles to move, “Ice Mice, Lemon Drop, Chocolate Frog…”

Unfortunately she didn’t know that much wizard candy.
Wizard Lenin didn’t respond whether it was because he thought that the password wasn’t candy, even though it had been candy the last two times, or because he just didn’t want to say anything was unclear. Either way Lily’s question was met with silence.

“Even more lemon drops…”

The gargoyles remained impassive.

“Oh to hell with it, open!” Manipulating the wards that hid the entrance she forced the stairwell to open and stepped inside. It wasn’t really the cleanest of methods but she didn’t have time to provoke Snape into having her meet with the headmaster so it was the best she could do.

“One wonders why you bother to work at anything when you can just cheat and have the universe do it for you.” Wizard Lenin muttered in the back of her head but it was not a comment worthy of a response. That was, after all, the entire point of anyone becoming a wizard.

The stairwell seemed narrower than before, perhaps because she had forced it into letting her through, either way it seemed as if the walls were just itching to close in on her. It was on the final step that she stared blankly at the closed door, just blinking at it, and then knocked.

“Um, it’s Ellie Potter.” Lily started not sure what else to say, “We need to talk about stuff.”

The door opened, slowly, as if hesitating to let her inside.

It looked the same as the last time, filled with innumerable shiny things aimed to catch the eyes, many ticking and whirring and looking very busy measuring all aspects of the universe. On the wall the old headmasters looked down at her, many with disapproving or else wary expressions. In the center of it all was Dumbledore, seated in his chair, in bright fuchsia robes staring at her as if she was anything but an eleven year old girl up to eleven year old girl shenanigans.

As if he was taking her very seriously.
Since her last conversation with Dumbledore they hadn’t really talked and even then the portion of conversation that Dumbledore actually remembered was pretty brief. Sometimes they caught each other’s eye in the Great Hall and it would seem as if he was saying something wordless and integral to her but they hadn’t actually sat down to have a chat. If there was any interaction they had with each other then it was through Snape but even then Lily doubted Dumbledore had given Snape express orders to have her in constant detention, maybe to keep her out of trouble, but not to dump her on Quirrell.

“Miss Potter, it has been some time.” Dumbledore said as she made her way inside, tugging Rabbit in with her, and he offered that trademark grandfather smile to the pair of them (it didn’t reach his eyes), “I see you’ve brought your friend Mister Rabbitson as well.”

“Yeah, well Rabbit and I are sort of a package deal. What with him being an unspeakable horror, and all…” Lily said as she made her way over to his desk noting the untouched pile of lemon drops that no one seemed willing to eat.

Rabbit nodded at Dumbledore’s attention, acknowledging his existence, and Lily was on the verge of telling him to cut it out and go back to being comatose but she didn’t have time to distract Dumbledore with that aspect of her existence.

“Was there something you needed, Miss Potter?”

It was surprisingly blunt for Dumbledore, without prelude, it was the sort of talking she could expect from Wizard Lenin, Quirrell, and sometimes even Snape if he was really pushed to his limit. As if he didn’t know what to make of her and so he’d rather just get on with it; well that suited Lily’s interests just fine.

“Well, have you noticed that Quirrell is a bit… Well, it’s kind of hard to describe… Alarming?” Lily finished lamely and at Dumbledore’s look, that penetrating steel in his gaze, she continued, “I mean normally it wouldn’t bother me at all, hell hire whoever you like, but he’s been going through this creepy metamorphosis… And I think he’s after your mysterious treasure in the third floor corridor and who knows what other shenanigans he might pursue!”

He stared at her for a few moments and then smiled, a soft pitying sort of smile, “Alas, Miss Potter, if I did something about all faculty members who seemed odd or else strange there would be none left.”

“Even if they’re planning to steal from you?” Lily asked and Dumbledore did smile at that, as if she was being unwittingly funny.
“Do you have any proof of your suspicions, Miss Potter?” He asked and when she didn’t respond he continued, “Quirinus is a humble and hardworking man, it was tragic what happened to him in Albania this summer but he’s been on staff for quite some time and appears to be recovering…”

“You mean getting worse, because he’s getting much worse. Look, it’s easier for everyone involved if you do something about it, instead of me.” Lily cut him off.

Something had to be done about Quirrell. It wasn’t that he had done anything, had acted on anything, but every time Lily was around him her headache became ten times worse and he would smile like he knew something that she didn’t dare to even guess. Whatever Quirrell, the man who pretended to be Quirrell, had in mind it was not good. You didn’t pretend to be Quirrell, the doormat, unless you didn’t want anyone looking in your direction until it was already too late.

And he didn’t think there was anything she could or was willing to do about it; so whenever they had tea he smiled and he asked questions he had no right to ask her. Quirrell liked to dig, to see into her very soul, and to see just how the machine called Eleanor Potter worked and sometimes he went even further than that to what she really was.

For once she was willing to pursue a course of action that Hermione would approve of; it would be easier if she and the authorities were on the same page or if they did it for her. Either way Quirrell was really freaking her out, slightly less than Rabbit’s sudden tendency to show thought but still enough to put her on edge.

“I talked to your relatives, Miss Potter.”

She blinked, he looked very serious, the twinkle in his eyes gone as if he had caught her in some terrible act that she should be afraid of. It also had nothing at all to do with what she just said or anything important. She didn’t even know what the Dursleys would say to him, probably something about the greatness of Dudley, or hardware, they really had a limited range of topics so she had no idea what Dumbledore would consider so important from that.

The truly odd thing was that Wizard Lenin was taking it seriously, she felt his attention shift from being irritated at having another meeting with Dumbledore to being still as he thought about the implications of this, of Dumbledore contacting her relatives.

“And..?” Lily asked, “What does this have to do with Quirrell’s mental breakdown?”
“You know they love you.” Dumbledore said and his lips twitched into that sad smile again, that smile that pitied, as if this should have cut deep.

“Um, what?”

They were getting seriously off topic, away from the inherent creepiness that was Quirrel high on elixir, and it seemed Dumbledore wasn’t in the mood to bring it back.

“They love you, my dear girl.” He repeated again, softer, his eyes never leaving her face.

They didn’t, love her, that was. She didn’t necessarily know what love was, the great all powerful mysterious love, but she knew what the Dursleys felt for her wasn’t it. She didn’t think the Dursleys were even capable of profound emotions like love. That required too much thought and programming. They liked Dudley, money, suburbia, and normalcy and they disliked her; it was that simple.

“… Yeah, that’s great, back to Quirrell…” Lily said but was cut off by Dumbledore who was more sober than she had ever seen him; his eyes as hard and clear as Wizard Lenin’s.

“You aunt told me that you left no note, did not talk to them, gave no indication that you were to attend Hogwarts in the Fall. You simply left one day with all your belongings, as if you had never lived there in the first place.”

That was true enough but she wasn’t about to explain a magic school to uncle Vernon. Uncle Vernon wouldn’t even let Dudley watch television shows that had the word magic in them; she couldn’t imagine how purple he’d get about a wizarding school in Scotland.

Also there was the question of why, why should she, they’d never mattered before. The Dursleys were just there, they were props, they were around to keep the universe from collapsing or else were just irrelevant aspects of the universe. You didn’t question their existence and you didn’t regard them as more than they were. You didn’t tell them you were going to Scotland for wizarding schools because you were the not-prophesized warrior who blew up a dark lord when you were an infant. It wasn’t necessary, it wasn’t even warranted, and the very idea that any of them had gone to Dumbledore of all people and asked where she’d gone was downright bizarre.

“Did they need me for something?” She asked.
Dumbledore’s expression changed from determination to disbelief and perhaps a bit of fear, “… Eleanor, they care about you, how can you fail to realize that?”

There were a lot of things that Lily apparently failed to realize. Friendship was Hermione’s main point of contention, valor and bravery had been brought to the table by Wizard Lenin, and now Dumbledore was bringing love and caring. She was beginning to wonder if there was any aspect of humanity that she actually did get or if they all had to be scratched off her list.

Caring though, she’d seen it. Death cared, and some of the time Wizard Lenin cared, and maybe Neville and Hermione cared but beyond that no one cared. The Dursleys were far down on the list of people who cared about Lily.

“He’s not going to help you with Quirrell, I hope you realize that.” Wizard Lenin remarked softly trying to cut off her own train of thought before it barreled too deep too fast.

There was also a thought, deep in there, that she was having a moment very similar to that boy in the orphanage. Where she said something, or acted in some way, that made Dumbledore question her ability to love or empathize with others.

Tom Riddle had said he liked to make others hurt and then his wardrobe had been on fire.

Eleanor Potter said she didn’t give a damn about her relatives opinions and feelings; what would Dumbledore make of her then?

For a moment she forgot about Quirrell, about Rabbit’s alarming tendency towards sentience, only the cold feeling growing inside her. A quiet bottomless rage that asked how Dumbledore could just sit there and look at her, the thing he had supposedly created, and say that it wasn’t working properly?

“They are automatons, thoughtless simulations of humanity that serve no real purpose, they like to think that they can think.” She said staring Dumbledore in the eye, her own voice cold, “And they put on a good show, for the most part, but if you’re around long enough it all falls to pieces and the bugs in the programming show through.”

He looked alarmed, perhaps not expecting that from her, although what he did expect wasn’t clear. She felt one of Wizard Lenin’s jagged grins stretching on her face.
“They like to think they’re human, but they’re not.”

There seemed nothing else to say beyond that, she looked him in the eye, met the steel that waited there with her own unending gaze, “Are you going to do something about Quirrell or not?”

He didn’t answer, she turned from his desk grabbing the dazed looking Rabbit, but before she could leave he asked one final question, “One question, before you mysteriously disappear down my staircase from whence you came. I assume you’ve heard of Lily Riddle?”

She stopped, her hand on the doorknob, and waited for him to continue.

“I’ve heard a rumor that you’ve been impersonating her for some time now; is this true?”

She didn’t answer but instead let the door slam behind her and made her way down the spiral, too narrow, stairs with Rabbit in tow.

As she walked through the glittering Christmas decorated hallways Wizard Lenin’s voice cut through the tinkling of small bells and the sound of her footsteps.

“You didn’t even bother to erase his memories.”

“It needed to be said.” And it did, there were only so many times she could erase Dumbledore’s memories until it started being pointless, maybe she should just let him see that the ballad of chosen one wasn’t so easily written or played.

She shouldn’t have to hide things like that.

“It did not need to be said! Certainly not to the likes of him.”

But it did, to someone, someone beyond Wizard Lenin and Death who already knew her so well. She wouldn’t play the little games the young Wizard Lenin had forced himself to play, to smile and laugh on cue, to only seem like the thing they so desperately wanted to see. And even on Dumbledore that hadn’t worked.
She’d never been interested in that game, not even with the Dursleys when she’d faced trial by cupboard, and she wasn’t about to start in that office.

“But I wasn’t honest with him either.” Wizard Lenin pointed out, as if this made a difference.

Feeling that he was getting nowhere arguing with her Wizard Lenin brought up his second point, “And now he suspects your impersonation of Lily Riddle; that’s certain to end well.”

It would probably end in violence and terror, if Dumbledore chose to act on what he knew, but Dumbledore liked to play a long game so he’d probably keep quiet about the whole thing and wait for the real Lily Riddle to get back from vacation. If Lily really hadn’t secretly been Lily Riddle the whole time, considering she hadn’t shown up in almost fifty years.

She stopped in the middle of the hallway, taking a deep breath, and letting the tension and anger bleed from her.

She’d always liked Christmas, it glittered, and it was filled with light. She’d never received anything as a gift, naturally she was a servant and they were expected to clean up the mess from the holidays, not to participate but she’d liked it all the same. There was something so warm about the holidays… it reminded her of Death.

She would have to visit him tonight, she thought to herself, she’d been putting off visiting him for some time. It was difficult to find places to commit suicide in Hogwarts but more than that she had felt uncomfortable since breaking her promise to him and not destroying the stone. He had been so insistent, so desperate, and he had forced her to choose.

Dumbledore’s bizarre conversation had her feeling more sentimental than usual though; something in there really had struck a chord.

It was then that Quirrell appeared around the corner.

Now that the majority of the student population had fled the campus Quirrell had gained a new habit of being everywhere Lily didn’t want to see him. In the Great Hall, in the hallways, just outside the Slytherin common room; and pretty much anywhere else she could really think of.
“Lost in thought, Miss Potter?”

He looked different, again, despite the fact that she’d been giving him minimal dosage of magic tea the effects of it were still very evident. Or at least, she assumed they were the effects, because God only knew what else could cause second puberty.

He was taller than when the break started. Quirrell had been a petite man, shorter than McGonagall and most of the staff; but he’d had a recent growth spurt and now was almost as tall as Snape. His face had also changed a lot as well, his cheekbones were higher, his nose thinner and smaller. He looked like he was in some weird transitional phase; half-baked and it made it hard to pick out distinguishing features on any given day.

How was it that Dumbledore and the rest of the staff wasn’t finding this alarming?

“They probably aren’t looking close enough.” Wizard Lenin rationalized, because who in their right mind would pay any attention at all to Quirrell beyond relief that his stutter had vanished.

It sounded like a fairly flimsy excuse to her.

But then again between Snape having the emotional maturity of a fifteen year old and his past as a murdering cultist and Hagrid having once been accused of manslaughter Dumbledore did have a point in that all faculty had their sketchy history. Compared to them Quirrell wasn’t that odd of a duck.

“Mmmm, kind of, don’t you have… things to do?” Lily responded when Quirrell waited for her to talk; as if they weren’t standing in the middle of the hallway on Christmas Eve.

“You mean for the holidays, well I don’t have any family and I’ve only celebrated it once and it was an… interesting experience.” He finished as if not sure what he even thought about the one Christmas he celebrated.

Lily didn’t really get why wizards celebrated, they were all pretty much atheists according to Wizard Lenin, there were some pagans floating around but for the most part wizards didn’t believe in any higher power. It showed in their expletives even, if wizards used any name in their cursing it wasn’t God but Merlin who was the next best thing for the British.
Either way somewhere along the way the wizards had picked up Christmas and just ignored the religious aspects to it.

“That’s great.” Lily said and waited for him to leave but again he just stood there, as if he was waiting for her to make some move.

“Did you need something?” Lily asked.

He didn’t respond right away, just observed her casually, as if breaking her down and building her back up in his head. And then he smiled.

“Not particularly, I just thought I’d say hello. Oh, and I was wondering if you might give me a batch of that tea for the holidays. It’s my favorite blend.” His eyes were always cold, even when he smiled, and he never seemed to really enjoy anything or if he did it was never for very long.

“No dice.” Lily said.

“If you do I’ll pass your friend Mr. Rabbitson despite his complete illiteracy and muteness.” Quirrell said and then added, “And I’ll personally see to it that Slytherin loses the cup by a historically unprecedented amount.”

He was looking at her with that smile still, as if he really expected her to take this deal, as if her petty battles with Snape and Hermione’s nagging her to have Rabbit pass his classes was equivalent to magic Kool-Aid.

“No, maybe he wishes to see how much it is worth to you.” Wizard Lenin said slowly and with it the thought that Quirrell didn’t expect this to work, this was more of a test, to see if she thought it was odd that he’d ask for so low of a price.

They all knew something was up with the magic tea but more important was what was up with Quirrell and that familiar smile he was always giving her.

“I’ll think about it.” She said.
“It’s December 24th, Miss Potter, you only have a few hours.” He said his eyes darkening slightly.

They said nothing after that, just stared at each other intently, and again his eyes seemed to pierce through her as if seeing everything there was to see.

“Well, I suppose that’s all then. Have a very happy holiday, Miss Potter and you too Mister Rabbitson.”

And then he sauntered off leaving Lily to stare after him as he made his way through the hallway and rounded the corner.

“He is a very weird man.” Lily concluded.

And he also put her on edge more than she would like.

“It would have been easier if Dumbledore had just agreed to get rid of him.”

“Dumbledore was hardly going to get rid of the professor in the middle of the year, especially with the flimsy excuses you gave him, no… Perhaps he even suspects something’s wrong with the man, it’s almost self-evident at this point, but he wishes to wait and see what Quirrell is for himself.” Wizard Lenin said and that made more sense than the possibility that Dumbledore noted nothing at all.

“Do you have any idea what’s wrong with him?”

Here Wizard Lenin paused, hesitated, and here were the thoughts that had distracted him even from the stone. A whirring, sinking, doubt that sat at the bottom of his stomach that he refused to look at too closely. He had yet to put it into words to her, suffice to say that it was not of the good.

“An idea.”

Something he didn’t feel like sharing.
For a moment she considered pressing it but things had been tense enough between them. She had been talking too much about love, friendship, and caring recently to push too hard in places she wasn’t wanted.

There were very few people who were truly close to her. So instead she started walking again pulling Rabbit along with her back to the Slytherin dormitory where she would spend the remainder of the day.

“We’ll talk to Death, tonight, and tomorrow we’ll deal with Quirrell. He can wait until Christmas.”

So it was that she would find herself in the dorm room, alone with Rabbit, and summarizing the semester before she took the plunge into icy death.

“Friendship, honor, valor, heroism, love… Why do people make words, ideas, into such important things?” She asked Rabbit, he gave no response but he was listening, as odd as that sounded. His eyes didn’t look like fish eyes anymore, they weren’t glazed and unfocused, instead they were trained on her as if he was taking in every word.

“As if they were manifestations of the physical reality, the same as a chair, a book, maybe even a body. As if they were as necessary to life as oxygen and the blood in our veins…” She trailed off looking at her surroundings, the dark green fabric, the soft light of the sunset filtering in through the curtains.

“I really don’t understand this place at all.”

With that she transfigured one of her quills into a knife, holding it to the side of her throat, “You ready, comrade Rabbit?”

Rabbit nodded, and although she’d gotten sort of used to the sight of it, it was still unnerving to no end. But at least he wasn’t actually speaking English.

She offered him a small smile, took his hand, and then shoved the knife into her neck and with a few minutes of pain bled out on her own bed and woke up in the familiar train station. And there, as if he had never left, never moved, was the tall figure of Death staring pensively at the train.

“Lily…” He started but by then she had run over to him and hugged him. He stiffened in surprise
and behind her she could almost hear Wizard Lenin and Rabbit’s confusion at the scene.

Lily was not a touchy person, she did not go out of her way to initiate contact, but it had been a long time since she’d seen him.

“It’s good to see you, Lily. How has school been treating you?” She looked up to see his soft, sad, smile that had everything in it that Dumbledore strove for in his own smile but failed to reach.

He looked past her to Rabbit then and his eyebrows raised, “My God, he’s become human.”

“Oh, yeah, I forgot I hadn’t told you about that… It’s alarming…” Lily said.

They all walked to the café table, Wizard Lenin and Rabbit trailing behind and coming all the same, as Lily filled in Death on all the months he had missed. On Hermione’s incident with the troll, Neville, Ron’s bizarre behavior, Snape, and many more besides and at some he nodded and others he acted a little surprised and some he even laughed at as if she had said something particularly funny.

“Well, it seems you’ve turned the place upside down in only a few months.” He said once the laughter had died down, “I’m sure the staff is at their wits end, Albus Dumbledore included…”

At the mention of the staff her mood darkened again as she remembered Quirrell and the fact that nothing had still been done about him. On the other end of the table Wizard Lenin stiffened slightly and then abruptly stood, leaving the table, and walking off into the distance.

“Lenin!” She called after him but he didn’t turn back, just kept walking, as if he didn’t even want to look at her.

“And he’s as charming and dramatic as ever.” Death commented as they watched Wizard Lenin’s retreating figure.

“I went to visit Dumbledore today.” Lily explained.

“And that caused this?”
“He didn’t think I had a reason to talk to Dumbledore… But I can’t just leave things…” She trailed off and let the sentence linger in the air between them.

Death was looking at her, his green eyes locked with her, knowing that there was something she needed to ask him that she had put off for too long. “Uncle Death, do you know what’s wrong with Quirrell?”

And without hesitation, without blinking, without any hesitation at all he replied, “He’s a host for the Dark Lord Voldemort’s spirit.”

(And there it was, as if they were merely words that could be said.)

She felt as if something should have shattered then but there was nothing, only the clinking of china as she set down her tea onto its plate, “What?”

“Quirinus Quirrell did indeed visit Albania in the summer of 1991 but it wasn’t vampires he found. Instead he stumbled across Voldemort’s undying spirit and it infected his mind, eating away at the back of his head like a parasite, and used him to infiltrate Hogwarts defenses and gain access to the philosopher’s stone.” Death explained, again as if these were facts no more or less important than any other fact he might give.

“Of course, that was how it occurred in my reality, it could be quite different in yours.” He added with a musing expression.

The undying spirit of Voldemort, of Wizard Lenin…

That would explain why Wizard Lenin had been so moot on the point of Quirrell, on her going to Dumbledore to take action against him, or else even discussing what in particular was wrong with Quirrell. If Quirrell was another Wizard Lenin…

She rarely considered the other fragments of Wizard Lenin’s soul, Wizard Lenin had stated that his existence meant that another part of him was still floating around out there, but she’d never really thought about it. He’d been gone for ten years now, there’d been no point, and then she’d always thought of Wizard Lenin as the real Wizard Lenin.
But then she remembered the words from when she had first introduced Death and Wizard Lenin, something Death had said…

“You said Wizard Lenin isn’t the original; that he’s a copy or…”

“A horcrux, the term is a horcrux.” Death said and then at Lily’s blank look explained further, “A horcrux is a fragment of someone’s soul attached to something physical; used to keep the wizard’s spirit from leaving this plane of reality on death. It’s a cheap way to cheat death, and it almost always has severe and unexpected consequences.”

“And Wizard Lenin is…”

“Is a horcrux, yes, and the thing in Quirrell is not.”

She sat back in her chair. So then the other Wizard Lenin, Hindenburg, Voldemort, whoever he was would also be after the philosopher’s stone. Maybe he had more right to it, even, if he was the original Wizard Lenin.

But did that make her Wizard Lenin less real, less important, simply because he was not the one who had once had a body?

Wizard Lenin had known, had guessed, and was probably thinking on it now but never once had he suggested that Lily just hand over all the magic tea to Quirrell. He’d never said that they should give him the stone instead.

That said quite a bit.

“It doesn’t matter; Wizard Lenin isn’t a replication, not after ten years.” Lily concluded.

Death didn’t say anything to that, simply took in the words with a pensive expression, as if that was a puzzle that required more thought than could be given in a minute or two.

She stood, pushing her chair away from the table, “I’m sorry, I have to go, there’s something we need to take care of. But I’ll be back, later.”
She grabbed Rabbit, pulling him out of his own chair, and took off in the direction where Wizard Lenin went, “Lenin!”

She ran past the shops, past the ruins from Wizard Lenin’s fit of rage five years before, past the edge of the train station and into uncharted territory keeping an eye out for a man in black and red.

“Lenin!”

And then she found him, sitting outside on the Hogwarts grounds, staring out at the lake on a late spring morning with a dull expression. She slowed, wondering if this was his representation of Hogwarts or else hers, and eventually walked up beside him.

“If I wanted to be found I would have returned to your little tea party.” He said, without even looking her in the eye.

“There’s no tea party today.”

She sat down on the grass behind him leaving Rabbit to stand dazed and confused as always; each of them staring out at the lake.

“Death said Quirrell is a mask for you; the other you.”

He made some affirmative noise, not a true yes or a true no, and left the full response to her imagination.

“I knew you were a horcrux, Death said as much when I first introduced you, but I didn’t know what it meant.”

Here a smile twitched on his lips and he turned to look at her, “The funny thing is I didn’t either.”

He sighed and looked out towards the lake once again, “There are three of us now, him, me, and the original horcrux we made. I never gave him much thought at the time, I never realized he would be
capable of thought. I’ve been trapped in your head for ten years, he’s been inside there for fifty…”

He stopped and trailed off, his eyes distant and lost in thought, and it was so odd to see him this way.

“What do you think we should do about him, then?” Lily asked, meaning Quirrell.

“By rights he would expect me to aid him, to hand over the stone to him but… But I do not wish to be trapped here, to become nothing more than something to anchor him to reality. If he realizes what I am, what he created that night, then he will lock me… Us… In the highest tower he can find and swallow the key. I will walk the world again, I have waited too long, and come too far to throw that all away for nothing.”

Somehow, she felt, she had known before asking that this was the answer he was always going to give to that question.

“Well, then, what do you think we should do?”

His eyes met her and the lost expression was gone, the fire returned, and in them was all the revolutionary spirit he had held in his proletariat heart.

“For now, find a way to get rid of Quirrell, or at the very least get him outside of Hogwarts.”

“That’s a fairly vague plan.” Lily commented and she could almost feel the irritation coming off of him in waves.

“It will be less vague when I have time to think, if he is me, if he hasn’t gone insane from the stuttering; then he will not be easily outwitted or else defeated. Give me a little bit of time and we will get him out of this castle.”

And with that he grabbed her hand, signaling for her that it was time to roll out, and together Lily, Wizard Lenin, and Rabbit walked back into the land of the living.

It was to be her last night at Hogwarts for a very long time.
The Play

In which Lily and Quirrell engage in a high stakes battle of wits and celebrate Christmas in the only way they know how.

“Happy Christmas, Professor Squirrel, I come bearing gifts! Take them!”

It was only a few hours until Christmas, and despite the fact that it was long past curfew Professor Quirrell was still in his office and the hallway was still decorated with sparkling golden light.

She looked like the end of a Christmas special, like “How the Grinch Stole Christmas”, surrounded by light and holding out the true meaning of the holidays in her hands as if there was nothing else at all to look at. However, that was only to the naked eye, beyond that things ran much deeper.

Draped over her was a shroud of wards that prevented attention or intervention from outside parties and in her hands was only a box wrapped in red shining paper with a green bow placed on top.

And though there was a cheery grin on her face, and her eyes were carefully blank, her mind was whirling as she waited for the door to open and the final round to commence.

A few hours before it had been her alone in her dorm room pacing in thought as she and Wizard Lenin devised a plan that would allow them to keep the stone and get Quirrell out of the way.

“The cleanest ending to this situation is if he leaves of his own volition and he will only do that if he believes he has the stone.” Wizard Lenin began his words in rhythm to the sound of her moving feet.

Lily had created a false stone once before, a damn good one from Wizard Lenin’s perspective, and even Dumbledore wouldn’t have let her steal the philosopher’s stone if he had noticed she had stolen it. So it had worked once before and it was conceivable that the same trick might work again.

But there were complications.
And she would have to use the strategies he didn’t expect her to use.

So late Christmas Eve, only a few hours before Quirrell’s Christmas deadline, she stood with a box in her hands and a smile on her face waiting for his door to open.

The door opened in a manner that was neither slow nor fast, but something in between, an unhurried movement. And then there he was, Quirrell, in the flesh.

He didn’t look like Wizard Lenin, not yet, but he was heading in the general direction now that she knew what the endpoint truly was. He was almost as tall now, only a few more inches to go, and his face had almost adjusted into its natural shape, but his eyes were still very dark. They held all his expressions but none of the color, not yet.

“Eleanor Potter and Lepur Rabbitson,” He said looking down at her and Rabbit standing alone in the middle of the hallway, and then he paused, his mouth opened slightly as if the word he needed had gotten lost somewhere on his tongue, and after too long a moment he said, “I was hoping you would stop by.”

There were many things she could have said to that even a few hours before but she said nothing and continued to hold the box in front of her with that cheery Christmas grin on her face.

His eyebrows raised at her lack of reaction, (an expression so familiar it was almost painful), but he made no comment and instead muttered, “You are welcome to come inside of course, unless you were planning on standing there like an idiot in which case don’t let me interrupt.”

She stepped into his office, pulling Rabbit in behind her, and listened as the door closed shut behind them.

“I assume the present is for me.” He said as he took a seat behind his desk, eyeing the box casually, as if it wasn’t something he had been actively searching for.

Lily took a seat as well, the one before his desk, sitting carefully on its edge and leaving Rabbit to stand witness to the scene.

Inside her head Wizard Lenin was silent.
(And there she was again, thinking of only a few hours before, and everything that had gone into planning this moment.

“We can’t wait, he’s working on an extremely limited time frame and I am not willing to give him the upper hand. So we need to somehow prompt him to take it from us.” Arousing Dumbledore or Snape’s suspicions was out, she had already tried with Dumbledore and Snape was ultimately Dumbledore’s puppet and wouldn’t move against Quirrell without his orders. So then, Lily’s only piece on the board was Lily and somehow that would have to be enough for Quirrell to believe he had won. )

“Miss Potter?” A voice cut into her thoughts and she almost startled.

“Oh, um, yes, the box is for you. You know, since you’re my favorite professor and all.” Lily said and again his eyebrows raised again; that dubious expression that she had always associated only with Wizard Lenin.

And again she felt something inside her stiffen at the sight of it; at the thought that this truly was another, different, not quite, Wizard Lenin.

“You’ve spent the last semester referring to me as Squirrel, interrupting my classes (even the ones you aren’t enrolled in), and having no respect for me whatsoever.” He summarized in an almost dull tone, as if reading out of one of the ministry issued text books he used in classes.

He’d never pointed that out before in their little detentions and she wondered why he was bothering to bring it up now. It was as if he knew that tonight was different, that this wasn’t like any other detention they’d had, and wasn’t that an alarming thought to have?

“True, but you’re still miles ahead of Snape. You’re just annoying and incompetent, he’s a genuine bastard.” Lily said wondering if placing her feet on his desk would be too casual for this confrontation; she settled for crossing her legs and leaning forward slightly, giving off the air of confidence, “Besides, you and I practically live together after all these detentions.”

He did smile at that, a small quick smile, so fast you could almost miss it, “Yes, I suppose we do. Will I be surprised?”

Both of their eyes flicked to the box, to the red glittering paper, and the shining green bow.
Wizard Lenin had concluded, as she’d paced back and forth all over the floor of her dorm room, and in it there was a sense of bewilderment as well as defeat at the thought that he could not see a conceivable way to outwit himself.

“If you handed it to me, if I had to find it in your belongings, perhaps even if I had to kill you for it… I’d never believe it would be that easy. Instead I would turn to legillimancy or perhaps even cruder methods of torture… I would have to find a way to make you talk.” With that he’d stopped talking his mind drifting elsewhere to places he didn’t want to go.

Wizard Lenin was and had been an efficient man. This did not mean that he was kind or that he was nice merely that he went from Point A to Point B in the manner he felt best. In his revolutionary days he hadn’t been the most creative when it came to torture, he easily admitted that Bellatrix Lestrange on crack had been much more of an artist of pain than him, but he was efficient and he knew how to get what he wanted.

Lily had a very high pain tolerance; they both knew that. But they had never tested her tolerance to extreme pain, pain beyond imagination, and they had never tested her resistance to insanity.

If she left Quirrell to his own devices, if she approached him in the wrong way, then there was a chance that she could fail and hand over the real stone to him.)

“Well, I don’t know about surprised but there is a story that goes along with that box.” Lily replied, her eyes meeting Quirrell’s.

“Hogwarts is a funny place, isn’t it?” She started, a rhetorical question that he didn’t seem to see the need to respond to, “My old school was nowhere near as… interesting, as this place. The most exciting thing I did there was avoid being beaten up by my morbidly obese cousin; that was always fun. Regardless, even on the first day my interest was piqued. You remember Dumbledore’s little speech about a corridor forbidden under pain of death.”

He remembered, his eyes widened slightly, as he realized that, yes, she was going to come right out and say it and that the stakes had just been raised.

She continued, “Well, naturally, I thought I should check it out. After all, I’d never been to a place so terrible that to enter it is to die a gruesome death. And I did, and I didn’t die, but I found something pretty neat all the same.”
Here she ended giving Quirrell a significant look but his eyes had drifted back to the box. There was a look of such longing in them, of anticipation, but also of hesitation as he tried to decide if this was the final step.

If it really was this easy.

He placed his hand softly on the gift, his fingers long thin and pale against the wrapping, and for a moment he closed his eyes and seemed to resign himself to something.

“And you decided to give it to me.” He finished for her.

She shrugged, “Well, as cool as shiny red rocks are I didn’t really need it. And you did like that tea so much.”

For a few seconds there was silence, if there was a clock in the room it would be ticking, a slow painful tick that ate away at the space between words. Her eyes never left his face.

And then he failed to take the bait.

(“We’ll just give it to him, the fake I mean.” Lily had said, the fog clearing in her head for just a moment, as if she could see everything.

“I just told you, that’s not going to work.” Wizard Lenin responded harshly his own thoughts still spinning trying to see the one thing that he would never see coming. But he was standing too close, he was playing a chess game with himself.

“No, probably not, it might…” It didn’t need to, though, it just had to get her through the door.

“And just waltz in there with the true philosopher’s stone in your pocket?” Wizard Lenin had cut her off with a bitter laugh.

But she wasn’t listening, instead she was going through the other paths that were closed to them,
“And then what?” He asked as if to point out that there was some glaring large hole in her plan in that it only had one step.

“And then it’s his turn.”

Quirrell laughed, the laughter of a man driven to the edge, where he couldn’t even believe what he was seeing anymore and he shook his head. “No, no, we’re done with this. There’s no point if we both know we’re making it all up.”

“This isn’t the philosopher’s stone.” He said with a small smile.

“It looks like a rock, it feels like a rock, it’s read and shiny. What more could you possibly ask for?” Lily asked as he opened the box, discarding the paper, and then reaching inside to pull out the second stone she had created.

“You made this…” He said slowly, looking at it this way and that, moving it in the light, “It’s incredible, flawless…” His tone of wonderment faded though as he looked back over to her, “But unfortunately not enough, despite being a Slytherin you really know nothing about subtlety.”

Lily smiled thinly and placed her hands in her lap and waited for him to continue.

“Do you know who I am?” He asked setting the stone onto the desk where it looked like a too large paper weight.

When she didn’t answer he answered his own question for her, “I think you do… Strange, that it should be you who puts two and two together when Albus Dumbledore, Severus Snape, Minerva McGonagall, all people who knew me and had met me failed. And, perhaps even stranger, I was almost hoping that you would.”

He smiled again, looking a little lost, almost relieved as if some great burden had been taken from him. He no longer had to put on the show, the act of Quirrell, in any capacity at all. He was free to
play himself and judging by the growing elation of his expression it had been a very long time since he’d felt that way.

And she kept waiting, her eyes watching his hand, which was lazily twirling his wand as he stared into space and contemplated what he wanted to do next.

“You realize I could simply kill you and search all your belongings.”

“You could.” She responded, she was hoping he wouldn’t but it was certainly an option he could choose to take.

“Or I could torture you, and remember that I have broken grown men who were much more experienced and willful than you, Eleanor Potter.”

“You could do that too.” She said when it seemed as if he was waiting for a response.

He leaned against the back of his chair, that wand still twirling expertly in his hands, and those dark eyes never leaving her face.

“Of course, we’re working with a very limited time frame.”

She was enough of a presence at the breakfast table that she would be missed if she didn’t show up the next morning. Ron certainly would let everyone know if she wasn’t spotted at his table. That wasn’t much time to produce, search, and destroy a corpse or else spirit her away, torture her into insanity, and somehow sneak back into the castle if the stone was hidden there.

He only had a few hours left and some of those would be allotted to getting the hell out of England while he still could.

(“Have faith, Lenin.” She’d said, “I’ve been playing at these games for too many years to lose so easily as that.”)

He stood abruptly, Lily tensed her hands reaching for the glitches that would slow him down and erect a shield around her, but he turned from her and instead moved towards another door in the
office, a closet door.

“I didn’t know what I’d think of you, teaching here this year, your first year attending Hogwarts. I thought that I might hate you, that I might despise you for what you did to me. I’d thought that Dumbledore would have molded into his perfect vision of a savior, a noble Gryffindor until the very end, and it was so easy to picture.” He said, looking at her, his hand on the doorknob.

She just waited.

“You’re not what anyone imagined you’d be. And strangely enough I find that infinitely preferable.”

He opened the door and dragged something out.

Well, she hadn’t expected him to do that.

Lily watched as a magically bound and silenced Hermione Granger was dragged out of the closet into the middle of the room.

“That, is hardly fair.” Lily commented, her eyes glued to Hermione as Hermione’s head swiveled to meet her gaze her eyes wide with fear and looking at Lily as if she was begging her to do something, anything at all.

“I was originally going to get Neville Longbottom, when I realized you might need some extra motivation. But as the heir of a noble and ancient house, as well as other reasons, it was easier for me if I just went for the mudblood instead.” He tapped Hermione with a foot watching as she jolted at the touch trying to inch away from it.

“You see, I didn’t think that you’d necessarily come to me, but I thought I might as well wrap everything up tonight all the same. I thought about killing you, but then I will admit that in your own way you are clever, clever enough to make it very inconvenient to search for it. That and, well, we all remember what happened the last time I tried to kill you. I thought about torturing you, but I can’t picture you as someone who breaks easily, somehow I think that it would be very hard to get you to say anything you didn’t wish to. But then I remembered that we once had a conversation about the merits of friendship and being close enough.”

He bent down, a fluid quick movement, and gripped Hermione’s chin turning her head so that she
was staring directly at Lily with wild and desperate eyes.

“Well, Eleanor Potter, are you close enough?”

And then it was her turn.

She folded her hands together and leaned against them, her eyes not leaving Hermione’s, taking in the sight of her sweat, the dried blood matting her hair, and her pale desperation as the girl tried to think of anything but the fact that she might very well die here tonight for reasons she didn’t understand.

“He plays a very hard game, harder than I expected, I didn’t realize there were other pieces in play.”

She did like Hermione, that was the trouble, she liked her more than she liked most people. She’d grown accustomed to Hermione, to her intellectual rants, to her perseverance, her insistence on making the world turn in the fashion she believed it should.

But Hermione was not Wizard Lenin.

“People will look for her too, you know, when they realize she’s missing.” Lily said.

“Her parents are muggles, Eleanor Potter, and are very easily dealt with. They don’t remember that there’s a daughter to miss; but they can, if you’re willing to give me the real philosopher’s stone.” He said with a smile, he enjoyed giving smiles that weren’t really smiles, “Do try to come to a decision quickly, as I said before, we’re somewhat limited on time.”

She reached into her pocket but he interrupted the motion, “Not too quickly, of course, because I don’t think you realize the gravity of the situation that your friend Miss Granger is really in.”

He grabbed one of Hermione’s hands, ignoring the way she flinched away from him, her attempts to struggle and the silenced screaming. He reached towards her fingers, looking at them almost musingly, “You’ve mentioned once or twice that a wizard who stutters is equivalent to a blind man. He is no longer a wizard, incapable of the correct pronunciation of spells he is limited at best to rune work, and in any true life or death situation he will die. Stuttering, lisps, speech impediments are not the worst thing that can happen to a wizard. Tell, me, Eleanor, what happens to a wizard who has
only broken fingers.”

He twisted one of Hermione’s fingers back with incredible force, such that even Lily could hear it crack as it broke, and again there was soundless screaming and sobbing from Hermione.

He reached for the next finger, “And what happens, Eleanor, to a wizard who has no hands?”

Lily dug into her pocket and pulled out a single red stone, identical to the one she had already given to Quirrell.

He took it, dropping Hermione’s hand for the moment, turning it this way and that in the light once again and looking almost awed as he inspected it.

“He doesn’t…” Wizard Lenin started to say.

“I know.” Lily concluded, cutting him off before he could say it.

He was distracted though, Quirrell hadn’t decided for himself yet, and so Lily took the time to look at Hermione.

Lily had never considered her age that much, eleven years old, but it struck her in that moment that it was very young. An older Hermione might have been able to realize that these things, these moments, could occur but the eleven year old Hermione hadn’t been prepared at all. She was unprepared and even if she made it through the night she’d never think of Defense professors in the same manner.

Hermione’s eyes were trained on the carpet, still trapped by whatever magical bindings Quirrell had used on her, and she couldn’t even bring herself to turn her head and look at Lily.

If left there, on that floor, she would probably end the night dead or in the best of circumstances alive sans hands and her sanity. Quirrell probably imagined that this would take a few hours, that they’d go through each finger, and then there’d be a bit of conversation about the nature of nobility and sacrifice, and that finally after watching Hermione Granger break Lily would be emotionally traumatized to hand over the real stone.
Lily grinned, and while Quirrell’s back was turned, removed Hermione from the game board.

(“Have faith.” She’d said to Wizard Lenin.

And she had meant it and in that moment where he had turned from his own plans and half-baked schemes he believed in it as well.)

She wasn’t entirely sure where she placed Hermione, somewhere only just out of time, a place that you could only glimpse out of the corner of your eye. Wherever it was she was only just visible, clutching at her hand and looking wildly around her, somehow knowing that she was in the office and yet not in the office at the same time. With a nod of her head she motioned for Rabbit to follow and he did, leaving her to join Hermione in that forgotten corner, and thus with her audience left alone for the time being Lily turned her attention back to Quirrell.

He was still looking at the stone, inspecting it more critically, as if realizing he really wasn’t satisfied with yet another rock. Slowly he placed in the table and turned back to her only to have his expression quickly turned into one of frantic confusion as he searched for not only his missing captive but also the missing Rabbit.

“Where…”

She cut him off, “Yeah, so that wasn’t cool, that whole crippling Hermione thing. I mean I guess I could sit here for a couple hours and watch as you destroy Hermione Granger, but I didn’t want to.”

He blinked and then slowly but surely whatever geniality there had been in his eyes fell away and was replaced by cold and dark fury.

“You, are playing a very dangerous game.” He said.

She wondered what game he’d thought they were playing to begin with; it had always been dangerous and it had always been high stakes.

There were two stones now on the table, both deemed fake by Quirrell, and it was his turn once again as the clock slowly but surely ticked on.
“Where is she? And where is your friend the Albanian?” He asked, and she wondered if another person would honestly answer that question as it was Lily just shrugged.

“Irrelevant, at this point, wouldn’t you say?” Lily said and then added, “Besides, I could have given you the stone already, you know. You’re the one insisting that I keep giving you fakes.”

“Because you are giving me fakes.” He responded almost with exasperation, “The philosopher’s stone is a treasure beyond value; no sane being would part from it unless in the most dire of circumstances.”

Again, Lily shrugged, “I have no real interest in what it does.”

And that was true enough, she didn’t really need limitless gold or escape from death, it was Wizard Lenin who required these things.

“And somehow I find that excuse lacking.” He commented sharply, his eyes like daggers.

In the corner, outside of time and the bounds of Quirrell’s detection, Hermione and Rabbit were both watching the scene unfold as if they had never seen anything more riveting in their lives; well maybe not Rabbit but he seemed more interested than usual.

Quirrell seemed to reach a decision, resolve entered his expression once again, and he stepped towards her. It seemed as if he was willing to do something that he hadn’t really wanted to; but then, Wizard Lenin had always been able to do that.

“I’ve tried passive legilimency against you before; you have a very… interesting head. We’ll see if I can find anything more substantial now.”

“Don’t look him in the eye!” Came a panicked command from Wizard Lenin but by then it was too late, Quirrell was only inches from and his eyes were so very dark.

It was something cold and sharp, something that fit between her eyes, and all of the sudden she wasn’t one or even two minds anymore but rather three.
They were late for the start of the play, it was already in progress, but they had good seats and they were nearing a very good part in the story.

“Of course, it’s not a very interesting play.” She commented to her companion, the man she almost knew but didn’t quite, she wasn’t sure how he had managed to get a seat.

“What?” He asked, looking around (suddenly he had a neck to twist and eyes to see with), and seeming overall very confused.

“The chosen one, the girl who lived, it has more than a few names.” She explained thinking of the actors.

There were two on the stage, a young girl wearing a pale mask with a single red scar painted onto the forehead, and a taller man draped in purple robes who wore a mask that was secretly another mask. They seemed to be stuck though, broken, because they were frozen still as statues each waiting for the other to move.

“What is this?” Her companion asked, almost breathlessly.

“Well,” She started, “Eleanor Potter, the protagonist, is only now having her final confrontation with the nameless villain. Only, she’s only pretending to be Eleanor Potter, she doesn’t do it very well. She fulfills the requirements, saves the maidens, refuses to give in, but she’s wearing a mask too. That’s the trouble with these plays.”

“No, I mean, what is this?” He asked again, more insistent, struggling to take form adding hands here and a mouth there and trying to fit it all together in something resembling humanity.

Well if he wasn’t going to understand it, if he wasn’t capable of understanding it, he shouldn’t have asked in the first place. She gave him a particularly unamused look, creating form to do it, spinning her own version of Eleanor Potter into the seat.

“If you would stop asking stupid questions they might start moving again.” She said motioning towards the stage, “I for one, want to see how it all turns out, don’t you?”

At the sight of her, the girl in the seat, something seemed to strike at him and he grabbed her, “Where is the stone? I know you have it! Where are you hiding it?”
The form of the girl didn’t answer, instead it fell limp, like a discarded doll in the man’s arms. She answered all the same, “If you’re after one of the props we’re never going to get anywhere; the play will never finish then.”

He dropped the girl as if struck, watching as she dissolved back into her seat, as if she had never been there in the first place. He stood, finding his legs, and began searching first in the row he was sitting in and slowly the rest of the theater; ignoring the two lifeless actors on the stage.

“Sit down, they want to get this over with just as much as you do.” She said creating a hand to motion to the actors who were beginning to sweat beneath the harsh lighting.

He turned around wildly, searching for the source of the noise but finding none, he then abandoned his search in the seats and moved towards the stage.

“This isn’t avant garde; you can’t just interrupt the performance because you don’t like the way it’s going! Believe me, if you could do that then would I be sitting out here?”

He didn’t listen, instead reached for the girl, for her mask, and tore it from her face. Only to drop it when he realized there was nothing behind it; a dream dreamt by no one.

He took a step back, then another, and bumped into the villain of the piece. The actor came to life then, and grabbed him, and then there was a voice that was hers and not hers, Wizard Lenin’s, “Get out.”

They were back then, him sweating and looking wide eyed at her, almost afraid and her staring straight back trying to get her bearings once again.

“That was weird.” She summarized not sure quite how she should feel about the whole experience.

“Try living there.” Wizard Lenin responded, almost as if he found her readjustment period funny.

She’d never realized her brain was such a weird place to be, before, but she supposed only visiting it while she was sleeping had given her a pretty limited view. Suddenly many of Wizard Lenin’s comments on the nature of her subconscious made a lot more sense.
Quirrell seemed to be having a difficult time getting over it.

He moved his wand, muttering something, and when nothing happened he tried again looking more insistent, “Tempus.”

A few numbers flashed before him and disappeared rapidly, leaving him dazed in their wake.

It must have taken longer than he’d thought it would.

“Look, I’ll say it again if I have to, but it’s one of those rocks cluttering your desk so you might as well leave.” Lily said when he made no move from where he was standing; no indication of further action.

And from that hidden corner Rabbit and Hermione were still watching.

His smile was a broken thing, he had a whole range of them, but this one was particularly bitter, “Yes, I’m sure you will. But even if I did believe you, that you had already given it to me, you can’t imagine that I would let you, the girl who lived, walk out of this unscathed.”

But these were more or less empty words, he probably knew it too, they didn’t have time to fight about her being the girl who lived and blowing him up that night. That could wait until later, when he was back at full power and not pretending to be Squirrel the professor.

It was neither the time nor the place for that; and she expected that he knew that.

He looked at her slowly, almost flinching when he met her eyes, but not quite, “I hadn’t realized you were actually mad.”

She didn’t think that he thought that though, not the way he was looking at her, but it was the closest word he had for how unnerved he seemed to be.

“You will tell me where that stone is, Eleanor Potter.” He said in a tone that left no room for
disagreement and he pointed his wand towards her. With a move of her hand Lily knocked it away, sending it spinning across the room.’

“Just take your damn stones, Quirrell.” She said as he looked towards where his wand had landed.

There was a moment where they just looked at each other, where every possibility Wizard Lenin had seen played out before her.

He could force Veritiserum down her throat, but Lily was an expert at telling the truth without telling the truth, and the truth was that the stone was beyond his reach or else on the desk. He could torture her to the brink of insanity but he’d wasted most of his time roaming around in her brain and he’d have to get his wand back to do it or else do it by hand. And they all remembered what happened the last time he tried to kill her.

So for a moment they just looked at each other and then he lunged.

He knocked her chair back onto the floor trapping her beneath him and with a single pale hand he struck her face. His hand burned and her scar was on fire.

“Where is it?!”

She flailed, pushing him back with magic, and flung him against his desk but just as quickly he tackled her again and knocked her head against the corner of the chair so that everything seemed to be spinning. Suddenly it was much harder to think and move.

“Where is it?!”

Her head smashed against the corner of the chair again; her scar somehow still burning in spite of the new pain in the back of her head. Her eyes drifted to the corner where she could see Hermione, still silently screaming, calling out some name in desperation.

She felt something vital going out of her, a slow and familiar sensation, as if she was drifting from herself.

She had been down this path many times before.
“Lily? Lily?! Stay awake, this is no time to die.”

Distantly there was another blow to her head and more shouted questions.

“Lily? Lily!”

And then she wasn’t anymore and was instead standing in the train station staring ahead at nothing.

“Lily, are you alright?” Wizard Lenin turned her to look at him, he was looking at her insistently, appearing more disheveled than usual his eyes almost dazed.

“I… He killed me.” She said, “He killed me…”

“Lily?” Death called in the distance quickly walking towards them, “What happened? Is she alright?”

Lily didn’t look over at him, she just continued to stare forward, “That son of a bitch bashed my head on a chair until it killed me.”

It wouldn’t help him find his stone, he probably knew that, that thing was so deep in a temporal fold in her pocket that it would take a bona fide miracle to get it out. He’d gone and done it anyway.

She and Wizard Lenin hadn’t discussed killing Quirrell, killing the not quite Wizard Lenin, and neither of them had meant to. It was not an option, neither of them particularly wanted him hanging around, but killing him... Disposing of him, of Wizard Lenin (but not Wizard Lenin), as if he was nothing more than garbage was not to be contemplated. She just wanted him out of Hogwarts, that was it.

And he’d gone and killed her anyway.

“Who?”
“Quirrell, who else?” Wizard Lenin responded to Death’s question dully but she still kept staring straight ahead at Wizard Lenin.

He looked tired, as tired as she felt, there were deep shadows beneath his eyes and his hands were shaking even as they held her in place. He’d been fairly quiet, he’d left most of it to her, but even now he didn’t seem to have anything to say.

His hands tightened on her arms and a grim look of determination replaced the anxiety.

“Let’s go back, Lily, and see how he likes dying.”

Neither mentioned that in some ways Wizard Lenin was killing himself in that moment; they both knew it but weren’t willing to say it.

“Sorry to bother you, but we have to go now.” Lily said turning to Death finally, he looked so human in that moment, so terrified. As if small things like death could really reach her.

“I’ll tell you how it all ends up, later.”

She opened her eyes, her head wound healed, and in her hand transfigured empty air into a single pale knife. He was staring down at her still, had probably killed her only a few seconds before, and he was too close to avoid the knife as it slit his throat.

Quirrell fell backwards, a look of dazed horror on his face, he reached for his wand still halfway across the room but with a glitch Lily threw it further away. As he sank to the floor she stood so that in spite of her small stature she was towering over him.

“You should have taken the rock.”

And then before he could move again she reached down and plunged the knife into the left side of his chest, where his heart should be.

So there she was, covered in blood, in Squirrel’s office with Quirrell’s empty corpse leaking all over the carpet.
For a moment all she could do was stare at him, at it, at those almost familiar features and now glassy eyes. She’d wondered if the stone would revive him, would heal the wounds, but it seemed like whatever elixir was left in his body just wasn’t cutting it because he wasn’t breathing or blinking anymore.

She licked her lips, thinking of something to say, to sum up the moment, and the words tumbled out almost without meaning, “I… I know what you’re thinking. ‘Did he fire six shots or only five?’ Well to tell you the truth in all this excitement I kinda lost track myself. But being this is a .44 Magnum, the most powerful handgun in the world and would blow your head clean off, you’ve got to ask yourself one question: ‘Do I feel lucky?’ Well, do ya, punk?”

He didn’t answer, didn’t move, didn’t breathe.

“You should have taken the rock.”

With a deep breath she turned to her audience members and pulled them back into the room, removing the silencing spell from Hermione as well as the bindings.

“Ellie… I… Ellie…” Hermione was incoherent, wincing in pain every time she tried to move her fingers, walking steadily towards Lily.

Lily took her hands and began to knit the bones back into place ignoring Hermione’s small cries as she did so. After it was done Hermione looked at her hands, flexing her now unbroken finger in disbelief.

She was still trying to speak through the sobbing, “Ellie, I…”

“You should erase her memory.” Wizard Lenin said.

It would probably be for the best, this night was fairly traumatic, even Lily herself felt empty and drained from it. Hermione loved to talk, to worry, and she could barely get out any words at all.

They would also need to get rid of the corpse, to frame Quirrell’s disappearance, to make it look as if something, anything else, had gone wrong. And then when the break was over they would go back
to school and she would take classes again and…

And it would be like none of it had ever happened.

Instead, wordlessly, Lily began to walk Hermione out of the castle. Ignoring her fragmented sentences that said they should go find Dumbledore, find McGonagall, find Snape even, and walked her all the way out past the front gate.

Then, wordlessly, she apparated along with Hermione and Rabbit back into London. To the Leaky Cauldron and said, “Tom the bartender will see that you get home.”

“Ellie, wait, please are you… I… What happened?!”

She liked Hermione, even in the worst of circumstances, and Lily gave her a bitter smile.

“I’m sorry.”

And then Lily apparated again, like she was never there in the first place.
Intermission

In which Lily takes over the nation of Albania with what she considers to be far too little effort, several parties offer Lily guidance, and Lily realizes that in spite of everything that has happened nothing has really changed.

There was a single tower comprised of small blocks and though it stood still it was only for a moment as each block removed at its base caused it to wobble just a little bit more freely; always teetering on the edge of destruction…

“Lily, as much as I enjoy watching you and Death the Destroyer of Worlds play Jenga we have much better uses of our time.” And at the sound of Wizard Lenin’s voice the tower collapsed on Lily’s turn and all that remained was the rubble.

She and Death looked at one another for a moment and then they both turned to face Wizard Lenin who was sitting at a nearby table with Rabbit, dutifully ignoring his comrade and instead glaring while calmly drinking tea.

Rabbit, for his own part, simply stared blankly into space as he perfected the art of thumb twiddling, a trait he had only recently picked up.

“It’s my birthday, Lenin, not yours.” Lily pointed out although she didn’t really know when Wizard Lenin’s birthday was; or if horcruxes celebrated birthdays at all. It was on the list of the many things she never intended to ask him but that she probably should; if only to clarify exactly what horcrux meant at the end of things.

But it was her birthday, and as far as she knew it wasn’t his, and one’s twelfth birthday only happened once. And already it was proving to be very different from any other birthday she’d had.

For one she was many miles away from the Dursleys.

It was weird, when she really stopped to consider it, but it had been a very long time since she’d seen any of them; almost a year. And other than Dumbledore’s last chat with her she had no idea how or what they were doing; like they didn’t exist at all when she didn’t look at them.
As it was she thought more often about Dumbledore’s words, his insistence that they loved her, more than she did about them. Maybe, that’s why he had said it, to remind her that they existed or else to insist upon their existence.

Her thoughts were interrupted by Wizard Lenin.

“Of course, how could I forget?” He asked, but in a way that implied that he hadn’t forgotten merely that he didn’t care.

He still looked tired, his clothing and expression worn at the edges, as if his thoughts and circumstances had laid him bare. It wasn’t as extreme as that night with Quirrell but it was still there, in the shadow of his eyes, and everything in between.

But he did have a point.

“What would you rather be doing?” She asked.

After leaving Hogwarts she had gone directly to Riddle Inc. and said she was changing her mind. That they were ramping up the A.L.F. movement right then and there and were headed off to Albania to get started. There must have been something in her eyes because no one argued not even when they had yet to find a figurehead or else make use of propaganda.

She’d almost expected someone to show up then, just before she left, for Neville, Hermione, or perhaps even Dumbledore to show up out of nowhere and say, “No, stop, you can’t simply leave…”

But no one prevented her from grabbing that portkey, no one shouted her name, and so she left and she’d been in Albania ever since.

Wizard Lenin gave her a look, as if what he wanted should be obvious to one and to all.

And she supposed it was, obvious enough.
It had been a long time since that confrontation with stone and he still had no body to show for it, but then, it all boiled down to the stone.

But it was her birthday, and there was no place for that, or for the memories of Quirrell that came with it.

She turned from him, back to Death, and began once again to set up the tower. Death watched, unspoken feelings flickering in his eyes, steadily gaining solidity as the silent minutes ticked past.

“Lily…” Death started quietly only to be interrupted by Wizard Lenin.

“And how long do you intend to run from reality?”

Her hand hovered over the tower, a block between her fingertips, and once again she turned back to Wizard Lenin. She met his eyes with a steady expression; she was not running.

Drifting, yes, but not running.

“There was no reason to stay.” She said, placing the block on the stack.

He knew that, he had made no argument against her leaving Hogwarts, the country even.

And perhaps that wasn’t quite what he meant, because there was no easy way back. She had left the dead and bleeding carcass of Quirinus Quirrell in his office and she had allowed Hermione Granger to keep her memories of a night best left not remembered. Not to mention the fact that Dumbledore seemed to be unnaturally focused on her relationship with the Dursleys, which couldn’t mean anything good, and that she hadn’t even liked Hogwarts that much to begin with.

Quirrell wasn’t wrong when he had said that there was no reason for her to attend Hogwarts.

There was a scraping of metal against the pavement as Wizard Lenin stood and made his way over to her. He placed a hand on her shoulder, she didn’t flinch, merely continued to place blocks on the tower.
“That doesn’t mean you leave, either.” His hand tightened slightly as he searched for the words, words that usually weren’t his to give, Wizard Lenin was never the provider of direction or else guidance and he seemed to be struggling a bit in finding the right words to say, “Why are we here in Albania, Lily?”

She finished the tower and began to straighten it so that it was a single, deceptively sturdy, structure, “To provide assistance and guidance to A.L.F.”

“And why do you feel that it’s necessary to do this?” He followed up, in that same light questioning tone, as if this question was not leading her down some narrow path.

“To combat the oppression of the Albanian vampires.”

“And yet,” Wizard Lenin said with a sigh, taking up the third chair at her and Death’s table, watching as Lily pushed out the first block, “I can’t help but notice that not only are you not a vampire you are also not Albanian; your interest in this matter is completely superficial at best.”

“So?” Lily asked before nodding to Death, “Your turn, Uncle Death.”

“So, you have even less reason to destroy the wizarding Albanian political system than you have to attend Hogwarts.” Wizard Lenin concluded with a thin smile and a rather pointed look.

She just looked at him for a moment and then said, “That’s probably true.”

And then proceeded to take her turn in Jenga.

Without a word he stood from the table, the chair scraping again, and it was to the sound of his angered footsteps that Death delicately removed his own block from the tower. And then it was only her, Death, and Rabbit sitting outside the café by the train.

“Lily…” Death started but she cut him off before he could finish.
“I don’t want to talk about it.”

He smiled at her, his eyes softening around the edges, “Do you know why I like Jenga better than chess?”

She didn’t, she’d never thought on it too carefully, she’d only remembered his mentioning of the game after leaving England. Before that she’d never thought to ask him to play.

She shook her head.

“Chess is a game of strategy, of warfare, of two people placed together attempting to outwit one another until there is a clear victor. It’s a metaphor that speaks to wizards and non-wizards alike, one that pervades through time, until it is used even when chess itself no longer exists. But life is not like chess.”

There was something lurking in that last statement, something old and ancient, something cold. And even though he was smiling at her, that smile only Death seemed to know how to wear, his eyes held too many years inside them for comfort. She wondered then if her own eyes ever looked like that, they were the same color, and yet she could not picture his eyes in place of her own.

“Life is not so easy as winning or losing; as being the black or the white. We lose too many pieces along the way, or we lose them only partially, because they are still visible but they are out of reach. Chess does not account for the things we almost have or the things we have almost lost.”

He moved his own piece, carefully, as the now unstable tower wobbled on its inadequate base.

“Jenga has no end. There is only the tower, and the attempt to build it out of the pieces you already possess. You try to take the safer route but then sometimes you are forced to remove the pieces you do not wish to touch. And sometimes it falls, as you fear it must, but sometimes it doesn’t.”

“I’m not going back.” Lily said, beating Death to his own conclusion.

“Perhaps not,” Death said musingly before adding, “But then, you have left so very many things undone.”
Hermione Granger, Dumbledore’s weird manipulations of her life and his interest in the Dursleys, Quirrell’s corpse, Neville, even her feud with Snape. She had only taken the clothes on her back and the assorted magical items in her pocket, that’s all she assumed she needed.

She liked to think these things didn’t belong to her though, she was not tied to them, perhaps as Eleanor Potter but if she chose not to be Eleanor Potter then it was all moot point.

“Have, I ever told you that I had a wife?” Death asked seemingly out of the blue.

She blinked, looking at him, she supposed it was possible but she just couldn’t picture it. Aunt Death, Mrs. Death, what exactly did that look like?

“Yes,” He said laughing slightly at her expression, “It was a very long time ago and I was very young. It was when I thought I was human, or rather, when I was beginning to doubt I was human.”

“Was she…” Lily trailed off trying to think of an adjective.

“She was pretty, kind, and she had a phenomenal temper… She deserved better than what she had with me and she realized that soon enough into our marriage, but that’s not the point.” He said waving his hand as if to shake off lingering memories.

“It’s not?”

“I have been down this path you’re on Lily, I have run from myself, from my past, and from every doubt I had until I couldn’t run any further. And when I finally stopped, when I forced myself to stop and turn and look at where I’d been, I realized that I hadn’t gone anywhere at all. We are tied to ourselves, Lily, and we cannot run from that.”

The Jenga tower fell once again, pieces clattering to the floor beneath the table, and Lily could only stare at them wondering if she should bother placing it together again.

“I’m not running.” Lily stated in words so plain that they couldn’t be argued against.

“Perhaps not.” He said again, his eyes twinkling, as if the words were some sort of joke, “But I’m
sure the Albanians would appreciate it if you gave them a little time to think over the consequences of your conquest.”

Well, they might. They should, Lily’s revolution had been a little too short and lackluster to be considered glorious. It had turned out, despite Lily’s complete disbelief that it was even possible, that the Albanian Ministry was even more incompetent and terrible than the British.

Part of it had to do with Grindlewald’s invasion in the 40’s, Grindlewald had never made it inside Britain but he had in Albania, he hadn’t spent too much time there more focused on defeating the French wizards but he’d left a nice little dent. After that the Soviets had taken over the muggle half of the population and the ministry had spent most of its time doing damage control for the muggle born student population.

Not to mention that Albania was refuge to many dark creatures including various tribes of vampires who had been chased out of almost all of the Eastern Bloc until there was nowhere left to run.

They’d practically been waiting for Lily Riddle to show up and start funding a revolution.

“Yeah, you know, I think they’ll be just fine. It’s the first magical vampire run government, you know.”

“Considering magical states in themselves are few and far between I can imagine.” Death said with raised eyebrows.

Death wasn’t really sure how to take the whole Albanian revolution, on the one hand he seemed to disapprove of war on the whole, but on the other hand he wasn’t there and he did say that most wizarding governments were doomed to failure anyway. He’d seemed to decide, after the first few months, that he was just going to let it go and wait and see what happened from Lily’s descriptions.

As far as A.L.F. was concerned it was out of his jurisdiction.

“And what exactly is your role, in this government you’ve set up?” Death asked.

“Supreme Advisor.” She wasn’t exactly sure what a Supreme Advisor did, only that she was still permitted to fund the fledgling government, give advice, and just hang around the government building.
“Ah, I see.” Death said, but managing to say it in a way that implied that he really didn’t see anything at all.

“Right, Well then, I’d probably best be heading back… I’ll drop by again later, soon, and…” Lily trailed off searching for the words but finding nothing, it didn’t seem to matter though, because Death’s expression didn’t change.

“Well, bye, Uncle Death.”

And only a little while later, after rounding up both Rabbit and Wizard Lenin, she was back in the office she had just left overlooking the square in the heart of Tirana’s, the capital’s, magical district. It was a little less glamorous than Britain’s ministry, certainly after the revolution to get inside, but none the less it was the government building.

Her desk was free of paperwork, she’d loaded all of that onto Frank, and she as was left staring the empty space where the door was just waiting for someone to come through and make her day a little more interesting.

It turned out revolutions were only distracting while they were still revolutions.

Hogwarts loomed like a great shadow in her mind then, something she couldn’t help but think on, simply because there was nothing bright enough to distract her from it.

She wasn’t running, she was drifting, as she’d always drifted.

“…Reality, is that which, when you stop believing in it doesn’t go away.” She almost jolted at the observation, a very uncharacteristic thing for Wizard Lenin to say, and she tried not to think on the fact that he had taken those words from her.

She needed something new to happen, something exciting, or else there would be more truth to what Wizard Lenin and Death had said than she was willing to admit.

She could always work on the stone, she had done that, and to her great relief it’d seemed only to be weird with Quirrell. On normal dying humans it worked just fine, restored physical symptoms it
didn’t make them… Well, it didn’t make them Quirrell.

It still wasn’t enough though, they still weren’t anywhere close, and each time they tried to think of it she couldn’t help but think of that last night she’d fought for it. It was something neither of them wanted to linger on for various reasons; and so progress was slow; too slow to be distracting.

They’d figure it out, eventually, there was no rush. But Lily was beginning to realize, now that the ministry belonged to A.L.F. that she had needed there to be a rush. She needed there to be something.

“Right…” Lily said to herself, and to Rabbit, “Well, maybe something interesting will be happening somewhere else…”

She stood out of her chair dramatically ready to face the world and all it had to offer, “Come on Rabbit, let’s go tour the building.”

“Yes.”

And she continued to stand there her head slowly but surely turning to Rabbit, who had stopped twiddling his thumbs, and was now staring straight back at her with more awareness in his eyes than she would have liked.

Even Wizard Lenin, who hadn’t been thinking of Rabbit at all, stilled in that moment and turned his attention to the white haired youth.

“What?” She asked.

“Yes.”

Rabbit’s voice was very human, considering that he was… not human, it was perhaps a little more clear than the average twelve or eleven year old boy’s, a little more ethereal, but it wasn’t a voice whose humanity one could doubt.

“Oh dear God, it learned to talk.” Was Wizard Lenin’s emotionless and stunned response.
Rabbit had been picking things up, since coming to Albania and even before that when Hermione had insisted Lily teach him English. He’d had that nod then and things had happened in between but she’d sort of put it aside. Between Hogwarts, Quirrell, and leaving Hogwarts she hadn’t had time to focus on Rabbit or Rabbit related issues. She’d noticed things, but they’d just been small thoughts in her head, she hadn’t realized that they were building on one another.

He learned how to fidget, so that he wasn’t just sitting still and staring at nothing for hours on end, he’d learned how to twiddle his thumbs, shift slightly, blink, cock his head, all sorts of human mannerisms people took for granted. He’d learned how to eat food, when to stand, when to sit, when to shake hands, when to smile, when to frown. He’d even learned how to nod and shake his head when necessary.

And now, apparently, he’d learned how to actually talk.

“This is so alarming.” Lily commented and wordlessly Wizard Lenin agreed.

(But she couldn’t help but notice that when she asked for a distraction, a rather large distraction, it had come. She supposed that some part of her should be grateful; the part that was thinking beyond the fact that Rabbit had just found words.)

“So… Rabbit… You talk.”

“Yes.” He responded again, in the same tone as before, his eyes never drifting from her face.

“Is this a new thing? Or did you always secretly talk and just chose not to?” Lily asked slowly sitting back in her desk, feeling that she wasn’t actually going to leave the room anytime soon with this latest development.

“Yes.”

Lily thought about that for a moment and realized she needed clarification on his answer, “To which?”

Rabbit appeared to think about this for a moment, his body going still for a moment and his
expression relaxing, before responding, “Yes.”

He looked so pleased with his response, well Rabbit pleased, which equated to a slight flash of a smile that was there one moment and gone the next.

“Yes, is the only word you can actually say, isn’t it?” She finally asked when it seemed there was nothing else to say.

Here the smile grew and stayed, a charming smile that had nothing true in it, that was only its superficiality and he said, “No.”

Apparently Rabbit only spoke Binary English, a language comprised completely of yes, no, true, false answers. That or Rabbit had developed a sense of humor somewhere along the way and was enjoying watching her fidget, which was an even more alarming thought than him learning to speak fragmented English.

“Does anyone else know you speak English now?” Lily asked after a moment of thought.

“Yes.”

They were probably a little less alarmed by it, she’d tried explaining the whole Rabbit thing to other people, but even the vampires weren’t entirely on board. They knew Rabbit was odd, but they’d just assumed he was the rumored male veela and all weirdness was due to that. None of them, not even Frank, was quite ready to believe that Rabbit was an abyss monster.

“Who?”

Again, Rabbit appeared to think about this for a moment, and then responded, “Yes.”

Lily really felt she should have seen that coming, “Right, only two words…”

Still, it was a matter worth investigating, more than that a matter requiring serious contemplation. More importantly, it required action, action that had nothing to do with Hogwarts or the fact that she had no intentions of ever attending it or even thinking about it ever again.
Lily stood for a second time, more dramatically than even the first, “Right, let’s go find Frank and find out who has been encouraging your progressing sentience.”

“Yes.”

“And please stop responding to everything I say.” Lily replied almost instinctually with a small shudder.

With that she pulled Rabbit out into the far too decorative hallway and went in search of her loyal secretary. The hallway, while it’d been stripped of most of its portraits when she’d invaded, still had that gaudy ministry look to it. She’d talked to the Albanian vampires about the place, the wizards, and they hadn’t been surprised by that.

Albania wished to believe that it was on par with magical Germany, which was really the most magically powerful state in Eastern Europe, and desperately made a show to pretend that it was. Their wizards were proud but in a desperate way, constantly on the defensive with foreigners, and designing tourist attractions and buildings that would prove just how good things were. They tried to ignore the deep forests where the things that went bump in the night lay in wait, and whenever one dared to approach the city, all hell broke loose.

So even when her new vampire companions had burned the portraits and stripped the gold off of the walls somehow the place never lost that initial tone; of something desperately trying to be grand.

It was through several of these hallways that Lily and Rabbit had to travel until they found Frank’s door marked by a passive aggressive sign, “Drowning in Paper Work”. She knocked.

“Frank!”

There was a sound of rustling inside, some muttering, and then the door opened to reveal a somewhat worn for wear Frank. It was always difficult to tell when vampires were fatigued as they always were on the pale side with dark shadows beneath their eyes but Frank somehow managed to radiate and aura of exhaustion nonetheless.

“Give me a few days, boss, and I assure you the stores in Britain will be taken care of along with our foreign affairs here.” Frank said with a sigh, rubbing a hand through dark hair, before adding a desperate, “Please.”
She peered behind him to see that his sign hadn’t been as passive aggressive as she’d thought but rather more literal.

“Oh, no, this isn’t about that.” Lily said.

“Thank God.” He said before moving away from the door and ushering her and Rabbit into the room, moving papers from the couch so that they could sit down, before collapsing into a chair.

“I can’t remember the last time I was asleep before noon.” She heard him mutter, but it seemed to be more to himself than anything else.

It seemed that Frank was officially out of energy, probably used it all up in the beginning, it turned out Frank was fairly gungho about the whole revolution business and had really buried himself in it during the initial phases. She hadn’t even wanted to take him, had wanted to leave him behind, but he’d insisted and she’d been in no mood to sit around and argue about it.

He looked like he was about ready go back to London as much as Wizard Lenin was.

But she wasn’t done yet, she couldn’t be done yet, there had to be something else for her that would keep her from Hogwarts.

“So why are you here then?” Frank asked when a few silent moments had passed.

Lily motioned to Rabbit, “Have you been teaching him how to talk?”

Frank looked perplexed at the silent and blank faced Rabbit before looking back at Lily, “He talks?”

“Apparently,” Lily said turning to Rabbit and commanding, “Say something.”

Rabbit only blinked back at her, as if he couldn’t understand a word of it. The thing was, and she didn’t know how she knew it given he looked just as dazed as always, that she knew that he knew what she was saying. Rabbit was just choosing not to respond, he was choosing to make her
uncomfortable, and the fact that he was choosing to do anything was making her more uncomfortable than anything else.

“I swear he talks now, he says yes and no.” Lily assured Frank.

And they all just waited for Rabbit to say something, but he said nothing, merely twiddled his thumbs.

“I was wrong about Jenga, this is a much better use of our time.” Wizard Lenin snidely commented.

“Well, I haven’t been teaching him anything. I thought he was mute.” Frank said with a shrug, “Maybe from Aleksander or Fatmir…” Frank said listing off some of the Albanian vampires they had recruited along the way.

“Maybe.” Lily said shortly, although she’d wondered why he’d picked up English then instead of the Albanian po and jo.

“Well, was there anything else you wanted to discuss?” Frank asked.

No, Lily thought almost sadly, that was the end of it. Her grand distraction and it had ended there, with a silent Rabbit, and there seemed nothing else to say.

Wizard Lenin and Death were right, she was done here.

“Aleksander says he’s going to take over the government then?” Lily asked and Frank nodded.

“Yes, they’re setting up the new constitution now and preparing for the rebellions. We’ve negotiated funding and arms trades but it seems that our work here is done. It’s up to them now to contact vampires abroad, to see if any other dark creatures might be negotiated with. I expect we can head back to London soon.”

Yes, she expected that as well, strange how everyone seemed to bringing it up today, as if they all somehow knew it was her birthday and thus a time for coming to terms with the state of the world. She gave Frank a weak smile, “Well, then, that’s all good isn’t it?”
“We could stay, if you wanted, station someone here permanently.” Frank said with a shrug but Lily shook her head.

She was not running, she wasn’t that desperate, and she knew when she had gone too fast and too far. The summer was almost over and with the fall she would have to turn back towards Britain if only to see what would become of the saga of Eleanor Potter.

She sometimes thought back to that moment in her own head, the play, she hadn’t realized she’d thought of it that way. She’d never been taken to a play before, sometimes they aired on the television, but she’d never been in an audience. She would have expected a movie, a t.v. show, but she hadn’t thought it would be a play.

But it was true, they were in intermission, and the plot would only wait so long for the second act to begin.

“No,” Lily said with a voice that felt too empty, “No, we need to go back. If they need my help they can always send a letter.”

Frank was looking at her more intently than he had before, the tiredness shaken from his expression, and after a moment’s thought he asked, “Are you going back to Hogwarts again, as Eleanor Potter?”

She could just go back to London, go back to being Lily Riddle full time, it wasn’t that large of a hassle. And it’d been enough before Hogwarts, or if not enough, it had been distracting. All the same though, she wasn’t running.

“Probably, people would get upset if Eleanor Potter just disappeared for too long.” Lily said to which Frank offered her a somewhat bitter smile; he always liked those sorts of comments.

Frank, she felt, had a little bit of Wizard Lenin in him after all; kept under the surface, beneath the accountant’s sensibility, and the pragmatic man’s lack of insistence. The fires of determination, distaste, and revolution burned in him on slow heat; never managing to extinguish themselves with time or else despair.

Perhaps, if he hadn’t started working for Lily Riddle, he would have started his own vampire rebellion years ago. But then, there was no real use wondering on what ifs of some other time; they were here now, and soon enough they’d be headed back.
“Fair enough,” He said and then his smile dimmed slightly, “Although, to be perfectly fair, I never saw why you felt the need to go in the first place.”

She opened her mouth to answer then stopped, not quite sure how to explain it, that it hadn’t been Death’s suggestions or Wizard Lenin’s persistence that had driven her to it. Sure those things had played a part, but they hadn’t been the final push. No, it had been something far simpler and at the same time nothing anyone ever seemed to understand, that it was something that she was just supposed to do.

Eleanor Potter was supposed to go to Hogwarts.

And then she realized, even before she could answer, that it was as true now as it was then. It had been true on her eleventh birthday and it was still true on her twelfth. It would remain true for at least seven years.

Eleanor Potter was supposed to go to Hogwarts.

She was supposed to go regardless of corpses, of traumatized friends, of Dumbledores, of Snapes, of Quirrells, of whatever the school felt the need to throw at her.

Eleanor Potter had been offered a script, the role of heroine, and told that she must go to Hogwarts.

Nothing had changed, not beneath the surface, the stage was still the same regardless of the plot and changing characters. It was still the same play.

“Because Eleanor Potter is supposed to go to Hogwarts.” Lily said, standing slowly, placing her hands in her pockets and feeling a grin work on her face in spite of everything.

Inexplicably, suddenly, she had the feeling that without solving anything everything had just solved itself. It was all about perspective, “Let’s wrap up things here, Frank, I’ll need to be getting my books.”
Lily had always intended on paying France a visit, perhaps even before she had arrived at Hogwarts and found the stone in the Sorting Hat. It’d always been there, on her to do list, but somehow it had managed to become too intertwined with Hogwarts for her liking; at least for that summer.

Still, it was past time that she and Wizard Lenin went straight to the stone’s source; the mysterious Flamel.

She, Frank, and Rabbit were standing just outside the gate, shrouded in wards, as Lily analyzed the rather impressive defensive system Flamel had set up around the place. Given that he was centuries old it wasn’t all that surprising that he’d picked up some pretty nifty warding tricks but all the same as far as magic was concerned the place was burning brighter than the sun.

Rabbit for his own part was nudging the edge of Flamel’s wards with a foot with a bit more of a dubious expression than was customary for Rabbit to wear.

“Are we really breaking into Flamel’s house?” Frank asked in a tone that indicated that he’d rather not be doing that. He hadn’t put up much of an argument when she demanded they stop in France before returning to England, but then, Frank hardly ever put up a fight about anything.

It wasn’t until he realized specifically why she wanted to visit France that he started making vocal objections.

“No, Rabbit and I are breaking into Flamel’s house, you’re going to wait in town until I come back.” Lily said, she hadn’t really even wanted to take Rabbit. But there was the small fact though that Rabbit had developed the ability to speak English under Frank’s watch; so Frank clearly could not be trusted to handle Rabbit properly.

“Couldn’t you just write him a letter?” Frank asked, but in a tone that made it clear that he had already lost this argument without even having to try.
She doubted Flamel would answer a letter given the questions she wanted to ask, it was best to meet and intimidate him in person. Besides, as far as she knew Dumbledore and Flamel were supposedly pretty buddy-buddy. Dumbledore had been Flamel’s apprentice and so the less time that Flamel had to convey concerns to Albus Dumbledore regarding Lily’s interest in the stone the better.

“It won’t take long.” Lily said with a shrug, “I’ll come and pick you up when I’m done.”

For a moment Frank only stared at her in disbelief, and then slowly but surely turned and began walking down the very scenic mountainside where Flamel had placed his house. When he was about halfway down, standing in a field of wild flowers, he turned and shouted, “You do realize the nearest town is probably a five hour walk from here?”

Lily didn’t think vampires got as physically exhausted as humans so it really shouldn’t have been a problem. Certainly on the march in Albania her vampire allies had fared much better than any human would have in those conditions.

“Bye Frank.” Lily said waving him off.

Once he was out of sight she turned back to the building, shoving her hands into her pockets, and wondering just how she was going to get through without either being thrown out or tripping the alarm system.

“Well, Lily, how do you solve every problem you’ve ever faced?” Wizard Lenin’s voice cut in, but it was more of a rhetorical question than anything else.

The answer, of course, was glitch manipulation, brute force, and the overall suspension of reality.

Lily frowned, that wasn’t how she always solved her problems, sometimes she recognized that you couldn’t simply cheat and get what you wanted.

“Besides, his ward system’s almost as impressive as Hogwarts’ and I have no idea what it does. I’m not going to go around poking in that hoping I don’t set something off and accidentally burn the house down.”
Wizard Lenin seemed unconvinced by her arguments; and she had to admit that he did have something of a point. Aside from her disastrous confrontation with Quirrell and maybe even Rabbit’s transition into a human form she had usually gone for the quickest, simplest, and easiest solution.

Still, it wasn’t always her solution…

“And yet, I can’t help noticing that no better one seems to be coming to mind at the moment.” Wizard Lenin noted, almost as an aside.

Lily stared out at the wards in front of her, a blank expression on her face, and for a moment she just looked and kept looking.

Inside her head there was the image of someone starting a timer and the Jeopardy theme playing in the background.

“Goddammit!” Lily exclaimed to Wizard Lenin’s smug satisfaction; not that he really cared since he just wanted in the building but he was enjoying this moment far more than he had any right to.

He’d been in a better mood since they’d decided to leave Albania, particularly now that they were going to meet Flamel, with meeting the stone’s creator they could finally make some real progress towards creating and then stuffing him into a physical body.

So instead of his usual tried patience this was more of a familiar amusement and she wasn’t quite sure what to make of it. It wasn’t like Wizard Lenin to have good moods.

“Well, then, I guess we may as well get started.” Lily cleared her head and pictured the wards for a moment, the way they laced together, and took a breath keeping them clear in her mind and then with a single stroke she began to unravel them.

It wasn’t quite the path of destruction Wizard Lenin had pictured but none the less it was faster and easier than any other method he might have thought of; but it did require a fair amount of concentration.

When she was nearing the end of the alarms she grabbed Rabbit’s arm and started pulling him after her as they walked into the mansion sweeping up the last of the magic along the way. She wondered if Flamel had noticed yet, she was moving fairly swiftly, but if she had a magical life giving rock in
her possession and wasn’t Wizard Jesus she probably would pay very close attention to those kinds of things.

“You’re hardly Wizard Jesus.” Wizard Lenin balked as she opened the front door and stepped inside. It was a large entranceway that looked like it had been stolen from a Masterpiece Theater special on really old fancy rich people. There was a regal staircase with red carpet, a glittering chandelier, a very aged oil portrait of what probably was the young Flamel and his wife and on the whole appeared very classy.

It also was very large and she had no idea where to start looking for the man. She didn’t know what she had thought from the outside, but she’d thought the hardest part would be breaking into the place. Judging from the size of the entry way a game of hide and seek with the immortal Flamel might be more trying than that.

Luckily she had replaced his wards with her own even before setting foot in the place so it wasn’t as if he was going anywhere anytime soon.

With that thought, as she seemed to be in something of a labyrinth, she turned to the left and began walking through the house.

“I don’t know,” Lily mused in response to Wizard Lenin’s question as she took in the sight of priceless vases lining the hallways, “I kind of did do the whole rising from the dead saving a nation thing; I think that’s fairly Jesus-y.”

Again there was a sense of wry amusement from this, similar to earlier, “And yet you’re not the most altruistic…” He paused and considered his own words for a moment and then revised them, “No, that’s not the right word, because you are altruistic in your own way…”

She wasn’t quite sure what he meant by that, they’d discussed time and again how Lily didn’t really get the whole hero nobility thing, she played the part as best she understood but she didn’t really get it. Honor was a thing she understood even less than that; but she supposed these weren’t really altruism. Altruism, true altruism, was different than the qualifications to get into Gryffindor or perhaps even Hufflepuff.

Whatever Wizard Lenin meant though he wasn’t offering any clear explanation and instead went back to his original topic, “Regardless, if asked to picture their savior no wizard would come up with you.”
As she opened various doorways and peered into rooms she considered that, she supposed it was fair, in its own way. Most of her early, and even some of her later, conversations with Hermione Granger were something to that effect. Considering there was only one Eleanor Potter, that very little had been known about her, Lily felt that people should have had less of an idea in their head before they met her in person but whether Lily liked it or not that wasn’t really the case.

Wizard Jesus, Ellie Potter, was what they had wanted but not necessarily what they had gotten.

“I’m still Wizard Jesus.” She concluded none the less; Wizard Lenin didn’t even have to admit it if he didn’t want to but it was still true.

Opening a door to what appeared to be a dining room, she let out a sigh, she’d opened an awful lot of doors and she had yet to even backtrack to the other side of the house. This was going to take all day.

“Seriously, where is this guy?” Lily asked out loud, raking a hand through her hair as she looked at the very large dining room; a bit too large for just two people but she supposed rich people had lots of company.

“Yes.”

She had almost forgotten about Rabbit.

She turned slowly to look at Rabbit who was not looking at her but instead was pointing back out the door way. For a moment she just blinked at him wondering if she could just ignore all of that and return to her searching but then slowly but surely an idea crept into her head.

“You know where Flamel is, don’t you?”

That upward twitch of the lips, lightning fast, leaving her to wonder if she’d seen it at all and he said, “Yes.”

“You knew the whole time.” Lily stated, earning a nod from Rabbit.
If it had been anyone other than Rabbit she would have sworn the bastard had let her wander around the house aimlessly just for his own enjoyment. Even then, staring across at him, she swore she could see some sort of emotion dancing in his eyes; something close to amusement.

The glitches were accelerating and the world was doomed.

She and Rabbit stood there, staring at each other for a moment. He looked as dazed and distant as ever while she leaned forward wondering which of them was supposed to break first. In the end, it seemed that Rabbit was a master of watching and waiting.

“So, you want to show me where he is?” Lily asked, and received a single nod from Rabbit, and then with more action than Rabbit managed to show in any given month he set off out the door and back into the hallway.

Lily followed.

“This is a bit more active than you usually like to be, I mean, you walk but…” Lily trailed off as Rabbit glanced behind him at her not saying a single word just looking.

“I’m beginning to think he was capable of thought the entire time and that he just enjoys watching other people squirm.” Wizard Lenin theorized darkly, which, given Rabbit’s recent behavior and even some of his Rabbit behavior wasn’t a complete stretch.

Still though, she didn’t really believe that, Rabbit had not always chosen to have the capability of thought. Except, that was a bad way to put it as well.

Rabbit was in some sort of metamorphosis, perhaps a very shallow one that didn’t intrude on his true nature, but none the less he was changing his actions. Not necessarily to be more human but definitely more… material she guessed was the word she’d have to pick.

“You know,” Lily started as they wound their way to the other side of the house, passing through various doors and around corners, “When we get back to Hogwarts you’re probably going to have to do something, now that you’re capable of doing things. You’re Albanian pity card’s going to expire soon if you don’t manage to pass at least Transfiguration.”

His silence, his complete lack of reaction, somehow managed to remind her that technically she
hadn’t passed either since she had bailed long before the final exams. Lily wasn’t quite sure what to say to that or even think about it so she let the silence drip down the wallpaper.

And Rabbit just kept walking.

Well, there were a lot of things that were going to happen when they got back to Hogwarts, not just Rabbit’s possible expulsion. For one there was Dumbledore, Snape, and then Hermione and Quirrell…

She had decided on leaving Albania that these were matters that she would confront only when they confronted her; to approach them too soon was not something she intended on doing.

For now, there was the mystery of the Philosopher’s Stone, still sitting deep in her pocket that needed to be resolved.

It was at this point that Rabbit opened a door that looked just as boring as every other door but had something much different inside; this door had stairs that led down. Somehow she wasn’t surprised that she would be finding the famous Flamel in a basement.

“Good work Rabbit, lead on.” She commanded, earning a blank glance from Rabbit, before he continued his tracking.

It was a narrow staircase, one that was much more humble than the rest of the house, just plain wooden unlit stairs that led further and further into the dark. There were also some lingering wards, ones that had been nullified by Lily, but still clung like cobwebs to the walls.

She didn’t know much about Flamel, aside from his invention of the philosopher’s stone, his connection to Albus Dumbledore, and the fact that he had practically infinite wealth she couldn’t really list any other facts.

“No one knows that much about him; Flamel is a very private man.” Wizard Lenin explained, “In spite of living for 900 years and being a renowned academic he has never taught a course at a magical academy, has never vied for a political title, and has taken very few apprentices. I wasn’t alive at the time but I imagine it must have been quite a shock when Flamel took on the young Albus Dumbledore as an apprentice.”
Not because Albus Dumbledore hadn’t been brilliant back then, even Wizard Lenin conceded that Albus Dumbledore was one of the greatest wizards of the modern age, but because Flamel had accepted so few period, no matter how gifted they had been.

In the meantime Wizard Lenin continued, “*And aside from that at this point he is more a fixture of western Wizarding Europe than anything else. Flamel has always been around, since the invasion of William the Conqueror, and so to the majority of the population he’s not worth commenting on. He’s there, yes, he’s to be respected and revered, certainly, but no newspaper would bother keeping up with his personal hobbies when there are much more exciting things like girls who lived to document.*”

Lily thought about this, she didn’t get around to reading The Prophet all that much so she couldn’t say what articles they did focus on, but she supposed that was fair. No one had talked about Flamel that much, in Hogwarts they talked about Hindenburg or Dumbledore or even Ellie Potter a lot more than him.

A very private man; there wasn’t really much to go on off of that.

Rabbit stopped walking, his hand on a doorknob, and he turned so that he was facing her. Flamel was probably behind the door then and she wanted to just press forward but something about the way Rabbit was staring at her, it was like this moment was important.

“*Please stop trying to read motives behind the rabbit’s behavior.*” Wizard Lenin asked and Lily shook her head, he was probably right, second guessing Rabbit was going to get her nowhere.

“*Well, Rabbit, let’s get moving.*” She said motioning for him to open the door.

He looked at her for a moment longer and then said in a clear definitive tone, “*Yes.*”

And he opened the door.

Flamel was smaller than his reputation would lead one to believe, younger as well, appearing middle aged rather than ancient. He was hunched over his seat, his hands on his elbows, features flickering in the candle light and when she entered he straightened himself hesitantly and stiffly.

His mouth opened, as if he wished to say something, even as she walked in but it wasn’t until she
was a few feet from where he was sitting that he said, “I knew I would see you again one day.”

Well, she hadn’t been expecting that.

He didn’t even seem to be looking at Rabbit, just straight at her, at her eyes even.

Lily stopped, looking at him closer, trying to remember if she had ever met him before. Straw colored hair, bearded, humble robes that were a bit too rumpled to be fashionable; he really looked like an academic. But she had never met him before.

He meanwhile he drew his wand, transfiguring two more chairs into the room, “Please, sit, you and your friend.” He said motioning to them and the chairs.

Lily and Rabbit took the seats and she never broke eye contact with him. He had a wan smile on his face, one that was almost familiar, because it looked so very much like Death’s smiles.

“Look, Flamel, we’ve never actually met.” Lily said, failing to think of a better way to break the news to him.

“No, I’m… I’m afraid we have, but it was a very long time ago, and you looked very different then.” He said and then looked at his hands, appearing somehow both younger and older than he looked, age weighing him down but youth causing him to turn from her.

Lily racked her brains, “You haven’t met Lily Riddle, have you, because about all that…”

He shook his head before she could continue, his smile growing slightly before disappearing, “I expect you are here about the Philosopher’s Stone.”

“How’d he know that?” Lily wondered to Wizard Lenin.

Wizard Lenin felt it was a reasonable guess, Lily was recognizably Ellie Potter no matter what this guy seemed to imply before, and the stone had been at Hogwarts, also not to mention that most people who wanted to talk to Flamel usually wanted to know something about the stone.
Still, he’d gotten to the point rather quickly.

“Well, yes.” Lily said and dug it out of her pocket, showing it to him, “I mean, I have it, and I’ve gotten it to do the fancy life potion thingy and the gold thing but at the moment it’s really not much better than a mildly useful paperweight. I need to create a golem, a body, and I thought as the thing’s inventor you might have some input.”

He laughed, she hadn’t expected him to laugh, it was the laughter of someone who had just encountered a terrible joke. Lily meanwhile was wondering if Flamel somehow hadn’t gone insane from the magic Kool Aid he had been drinking, aside from Quirrell she’d never seen any long term effects in action, and it had clearly gone very wrong with Quirrell.

“I’m sorry, but I, I did not invent the stone.” He sighed then and looked at them, “I’m afraid this is a very long conversation that I am about to begin and it is not a story I have told before… But it is past time that I have told it and I have expected you for many years now.”

“What?” Was Lily’s single word response because she felt as if she had lost the ability to process information past Flamel’s confession to not having made the stone.

“Many have asked why I did not make more, why I did not create thousands so as to cure all illness, all death, all disease in the world. In the beginning they called me a miser, a tyrant, they attempted to sabotage my work and steal my secrets but they never succeeded. In time they decided that I had some unknown reason, that perhaps the price was too great to create another, or that I feared the power struggle that would ensue over such a limited resource. And then, after almost a thousand years, they stopped questioning me at all.” He began and in spite of herself Lily found herself listening, she hadn’t come here for a story, had expected some sort of struggle but this was going very differently than she had expected it to.

Flamel didn’t seem inclined to call anyone, to make any move to escape, and seemed perfectly willing to talk to her. Of course, he could be lying, after all everyone knew he was the one who invented the stone. And even if he hadn’t invented the stone then someone had, there was some original inventor somewhere, and Flamel was still the most likely person to know its secrets.

But Flamel kept talking in spite of Lily’s doubts.

“The truth is much simpler and yet far more strange; I never created the Philosopher’s Stone in the first place.” He paused here, as if to let them take in these words significance, and it did sound
significant but mostly confusing.

“This is a lot more confusing than I expected this meeting to be.” Lily commented much to Flamel’s surprise and apparent delight; he seemed to be finding a lot of her comments to be woefully funny.

She glanced at Rabbit to see how he was taking all this but as usual he was giving no indication of even thinking anything.

“Yes, I suppose it would be, there are days when I hardly believe it myself. For centuries I convinced myself that I had somehow invented the stone, but is a fantasy, at the end of things.”

Flamel had said a lot of weird things in one meeting and so far he was explaining none of them. He didn’t appear to have any cats, but that didn’t mean he wasn’t crazy, “So, how’d you get it then?”

“It is true that I tried to create the stone. It was every alchemist’s dream then, the mythical stone, the thing that had been conceived ages before but had never been realized. I was one among many and I devoted years to the research. After a while though, after too many failed experiments, it became too painful to try again so I moved on to other magic, older magic…”

He leaned forward a sudden earnestness on his face as if his next points would be particularly important, “The world was different back then, magic was different back then, or at least there was a time when we knew that it was different. The wand was a means to an end, a way to access only a fraction of true energy, and that was known in higher academic circles. I, and others, understood that there were many things that we didn’t understand.”

“Like what?” Lily asked quietly.

“Ideas take form, they can manifest physically if they so choose, magic can create an avatar of itself.” He said and he seemed so insistent, so desperate that she understand this point, his eyes burning in the half lit room.

Ideas take form, manifest physically if they so choose… That sounded like something she would say and it was weird hearing it from someone else especially Flamel who was supposed to be telling her how the stone worked.

Her eyes flickered to Rabbit, manifest physically if they so choose, it was not how she had phrased it
but perhaps…

And then there was Death, in a train station that existed between worlds, who had said many times that he was not human but instead was something more akin to the state of the universe; to an idea.

“These are children’s tales these days, they were children’s tales to many when I was researching, and with the age of rationality even among wizards they became little more than fiction. But I was at the end of my rope, and I wanted to do something that no man had done before, and so I researched old and half-forgotten magic.” He paused again, staring deeply into her eyes, and said slowly, “I did not create a Philosopher’s Stone, but I have done something that no other wizard can claim, I summoned Death.”

She hadn’t really taken him seriously up until that last word. Well, she’d been willing to listen, but she’d mostly been wondering why this conversation was going so off the rails and if he was as crazy as he sounded.

That was very close though; closer than anyone had ever managed to get before.

“You summoned what?” Lily asked but he didn’t seem to hear her.

“It was not in this room, in this country even, but then France was hardly France back in those days. It was a smaller place, but it was enough room to work, and at first I’d wondered if it had but then… He appeared first as smoke, drifting in like fog within the room, but then slowly he took the form of a cloaked man with green eyes; your eyes.” Flamel swallowed his eyes distant, far away from her, and Lily could not bring herself to interrupt.

“He said that he did not make gifts, only bargains. That with the push there is always a pull, the night the day, everything oscillates and so he would offer something in the same nature…” Flamel looked at the stone, still in Lily’s hand, and said, “I did not even have to ask, he knew what I’d been seeking, and offered me alone the Philosopher’s Stone with a few conditions.”

He held up a single finger then, for the first condition, “The first, was that he would give me only what I had asked for. He would give me the means to eternal youth and infinite wealth; but although he claimed the stone could do far more than that this would be all I would ever be capable of.”

Lily looked back down to the stone and thought about how it had seemed so easy to find those other solutions even while it was so difficult to find Lenin’s. It hadn’t been designed for that, Flamel, or
someone had said that it could be used for that but that Flamel would never figure it out. It wasn’t intuitive.

Before she could think on it further the man continued holding up a second finger, “The second, the moment I lost it that it would be lost to me forever. If it was stolen, if it slipped out of my pocket, the moment that occurred I would never be able to get it back.”

And there must have been a third condition, because he was still staring at her, at the stone, and because these things always came in threes, “The third and final condition, that you would come to me twice once to give it to me and once to take it away; and that the second time we met I would be forced to recognize you even if you could not recognize yourself.”

His hand fell back limp into his lap and they stared across at each other, candles flickering all around them, and the room far too quiet.

She had no idea what to say.

On the one hand Flamel could be bluffing, only those weren’t the eyes of a man who was bluffing, someone waiting for her to go away or someone else to arrive. He seemed content, no not content, resigned to just sit there and stare at her.

There was also the other hand where Flamel wasn’t bluffing, where past not-Lily had given him the stone, only well it didn’t really sound like Lily. Lily never remembered doing any of that, or being smoke, or a man and Flamel had seemed very clear on the point that whatever he’d talked to really wasn’t human. It sounded more like Rabbit territory than her’s.

“So… You don’t actually know how to make a body from it?” Lily asked, for clarification, and wordlessly the man shook his head.

“I tried, of course, to use it for other purposes when it was given to me. I experimented for centuries but… No, I have only ever made elixir or else gold. I even tried to summon him again but he would not come and after a while I stopped trying. But it seems you were listening for you are here now.” Flamel smiled half-heartedly at her as if he wasn’t sure how he felt about this.

“Yeah, about that…” Lily said, meaning to point out that she was the eleven year old Eleanor Potter and while she was technically Death she really wasn’t too sure she’d met him centuries earlier and just handed him the stone.
“Wait, if I made and gave you the stone, then how come I can’t get it to do what I want?” Lily asked, because the way it seemed to her if she’d made the stone in the first place she definitely would have made it be able to do what she wanted to.

“You are different than you were then, he said you might be, and that you might not remember.” Flamel shrugged and then sighed leaning into himself as if he had suddenly been hollowed out.

Lily thought that was a terrible answer.

It was at that point that she realized she hadn’t heard from Wizard Lenin in a while, in a very long time considering the weirdness of her conversation, “Lenin?”

There was no response, instead a sort of barren echoing, as if she had just shouted across a great wasteland, “Lenin?”

“I have lost all faith in humanity.” Wizard Lenin said, distantly, from somewhere far too deep inside her mind.

Well, it wasn’t exactly a new thing for him, she was fairly certain that he hadn’t had much faith in humanity to begin with if at all. She was about to point that out when she really started paying attention, he’d been hopeful, Flamel was one of the few wizards he had truly respected.

She’d expected him to start questioning Flamel, to doubt him, to say that Flamel was bluffing but somehow he believed it that easily as well. Because this explained a lot, why there was only one stone, why there was so little written on it. More than that though, was the single clear thought, that it was just the sort of thing that Lily would somehow inadvertently impossibly be responsible for.

“Well…” Lily started only to trail off, to glance at the stone in her hand again, and found she didn’t really have any argument to back that up.

“Somehow, in some impossible way, everything is always your fault.” Wizard Lenin continued, choked laughter accompanying his words, as if he didn’t dare to believe them.

“That’s not necessarily a bad thing you know; if I made it then that means I’ve probably always
been able to figure out the body problem.” This wasn’t necessarily what Flamel had said but in spite of that she believed it, she’d always believed she could make Wizard Lenin a body, it was just that she hadn’t believed she should risk it when there was a Philosopher’s Stone.

“Besides,” Lily continued, “We’ve probably been thinking about this in entirely the wrong way. You’ve wanted to use alchemy and transfiguration, to pretend to be wizards, and I don’t really think this is a wizarding problem at all.”

They’d just been looking in all the wrong directions.

This comment seemed to be Wizard Lenin’s breaking point, “Then we’ve wasted a complete year of our time! We killed Voldemort and we let you die for nothing!”

That was a fair point.

Lily stopped and thought about it for a moment and with a growing horror realized that it was more than fair. All that time getting the stone, turning Rabbit into a person, having detention with professor Quirrell, all of it had only lead to a mildly useful paperweight.

Well, at least now they wouldn’t bother looking for it. And besides, there was always the off chance that Flamel was lying, although given Lily and Wizard Lenin’s success rate with the stone so far she really was buying into Flamel’s weird story.

So it wasn’t a complete waste of time and energy.

It was at that point that she realized she was still in the room with Flamel and that neither of them had actually said anything for quite some time, “So, what was Death me like? I don’t really remember being… a man.”

“Not human, he spoke, but… It was not like how you and I talk and you could tell his physical body meant little to him. He took the form of a man because I expected the form of a man.” Flamel said as if not quite sure what to make of this particular brand of small talk; or the fact that she was still in his workshop.

There was another moment of silence, stretching the air thin, and Lily interrupted it abruptly again, “Oh, great. So… How did you recognize me again?”
He answered this immediately seeming almost confused by her need to ask, “Your eyes, they haven’t changed in nine hundred years.”

There were parts of her that ran very deep.

She felt it sometimes, she had always known this. Wizard Lenin knew it better, he lived there, he saw how deep the trenches went and that there were other things that lived down in there. Lily had not doubted Death when he had told her that she was not Eleanor Potter, that Eleanor Potter was a part she played, but that it wasn’t her essence.

Because some part of her had always known that.

Some part of her recognized this story, the story of the alchemist, the story of three brothers and a bridge, and others that had yet to be told. Some deep part of her had that moment stored away, and knew, that the red of the stone was for the red of Death’s blood.

If she went that deep though she did not know what she would find.

“Interesting, so what do you think of all this Ellie Potter business then?” Lily asked, diverting the subject.

He seemed startled by it, he probably hadn’t recognized her up until that point, had stopped at her eyes and hadn’t looked for the scar. “Ellie…”

“Eleanor Potter, infant savior of Wizarding Britain, defeater of dark lords.” Lily clarified before asking, “How do you feel, knowing that she’s really Death, and not a little girl at all?”

“You’re Eleanor Potter?” He asked in response a look of horror drawing across his features.

“When I choose to be, which is most of the time.” Lily answered with a shrug.

Judging by his expression he didn’t like the fact that they were the same person at all and also that he
thought it made a horrifying amount of sense. He also didn’t appear to have any actual comment about it.

“Well, from his perspective it is a rather alarming fact.” Wizard Lenin commented drily.

They seemed to have reached some sort of a standstill, he wasn’t making any move to take the stone back, and she didn’t know if there were any more questions to ask him. She’d expected… well not more because she’d gotten a lot more than she’d expected, but something different.

She wondered if he wanted the stone, he looked at it often enough, but somehow she thought that even if she offered he wouldn’t take it. Like the will to take it, to yearn for immortality, had been snatched from him.

Flamel must have always known he was living on borrowed time.

She stood then, his eyes flickered over to hers, and she said, “Well, if that’s all I guess I’ll be going then. I guess you really don’t know how to make that stone do anything else, do you?”

He gave no answer, was still horrified by what she’d said, his hands shaking.

“Bye, Flamel.”

She didn’t shake his hand, he didn’t look like he wanted that, but instead dropped the stone back into her pocket and made her way back up the stairs and out of the house with Rabbit in tow.

“You know, after meeting so many wizards, it’s really starting to make sense why Quirrell wasn’t ringing alarm bells everywhere.” Lily commented once they were back outside and looking at the grand house on the mountainside.

Quirrell, whatever he had been, hadn’t really been that odd of a duck.
Ellie Potter Must Not Go to Hogwarts

In which Lily’s fundamental beliefs are challenged, the universe malfunctions slightly more than usual, and she uses far more effort than reasonable to try and catch the Hogwarts Express.

It had been a long time since she’d been surprised by life, or rather, she’d learned long before she’d even met Wizard Lenin or Death that life was rarely what it seemed to be and liked to contradict itself on a daily basis.

The universe, like Wizard Lenin himself, had many different names and faces that it liked to wear. And sometimes one face spoke in an entirely different language than the other, one stated the laws of physics, while the other permitted magic to flow through every now and then.

It was this aspect that had allowed her to meet Death in a train station, had let her pull Rabbit from a hat, and had allowed her to realize that there was a man living inside her head. Lily was well acquainted with the fickle, inconstant, nature of the world she lived in.

Somewhere along the way, as she’d become consumed by Wizard Lenin’s goals, by his desperate material need to find a body and the events that had happened as they’d tried to reach this goal she’d lost sight of this.

She hadn’t forgotten, talked about it often enough with anyone who would listen, but she didn’t keep it in mind. She’d put it into a corner, pushed aside to do what needed to be done, and so she should have expected it.

The laws she’d come to accept were far from absolute.

“Ellie Potter must not go to Hogwarts!”

It was the morning she was to head out to the Hogwarts Express, she was already packed, waiting inside Riddle Incorporated for the last possible moment where she could teleport to the station and hop on board.
On her return to England she’d discovered that her disappearance hadn’t exactly been brushed under the carpet while she was in Albania. Every wall in Diagon Alley sported a picture of her face and either the words, “MISSING” or “KIDNAPPED”. According to the Prophet Quirell had allegedly kidnapped her over winter break, somehow managing to get her out of Hogwarts without anyone the wiser.

Almost completely ignored was the story of Hermione Granger’s parents, who had been attacked by unknown dark wizards, and had completely and seemingly irrevocably lost their memory of Hermione. Hermione was now reported to be staying at Neville Longbottom’s until some more permanent arrangements could be made. Lily had had to flip through many editions of the Prophet before she found the footnote like article.

Mostly what this meant was that Lily couldn’t set foot in Diagon Alley as Eleanor Potter without causing some sort of riot. She also unfortunately couldn’t set foot in Diagon Alley as Lily Riddle as that would also cause something of a riot for an entirely different reason. So instead Lily had just holed up in Riddle Incorporated for the rest of August, sending out various employees to do her shopping for her, and letting them deal with the terrified masses of the public.

(In retrospect sending vampires to do her shopping hadn’t been that much better of a decision than going herself. Friedrich supposedly had been almost staked by Gilderoy Lockhart when he’d appeared in Diagon Alley for his book signing and the crowd there had been about two seconds away from finding their pitchforks and torches.)

Now, she was eying the stone once again, looking for something of herself inside of its reflection (of the man that Flamel had met almost a thousand years ago) and wondering just how she was going to deal with all of this once she got to school. Apparently leaving in the middle of the year with your professor’s bleeding corpse left in his office had a lot of consequences.

“What did you think would happen when you left him on the carpet? Did you think that everyone would just ignore it?” Wizard Lenin asked somewhat sarcastically, he knew she didn’t think that, they’d had entire conversations about how she didn’t really think that. He just wanted to hear someone say it.

“Well... No, but I didn’t think I’d be supposedly kidnapped by Squirrel.” Lily responded with a grimace, which even the idea of it was causing her to cringe. Her reputation must be in tatters by now, kidnapped by Squirrel, there really wasn’t much lower to sink.

Of course, he hadn’t been Squirrel at the end of things, and that man he’d been at the end; the Wizard Lenin that wasn’t Wizard Lenin, well, he certainly could have attempted it if he felt the inclination. She wondered if that had been in his cards somewhere, taking her off and beating the information out of her in a more secure location, but either way they had settled things in his office.
There was no point in wondering what he might have done if he’d had just a little more time.

She didn’t know if anyone even knew that he had existed; that Quirrell had never really been what he seemed.

“You left Albus Dumbledore little choice. He’s doing you a favor, Lily.” This was said grudgingly as if the very words were like pulling teeth.

“I thought you hated Dumbledore.”

“I loathe the man.” He responded swiftly but then relented and began to explain, “He probably had little choice in the matter, when he found a traumatized Hermione Granger and then Quirrell’s corpse. If the public were to realize that you had committed murder, graphic brutal murder that only beasts and muggles pursue, that you were darker than they had ever realized the riots at finding you missing would be nothing in comparison. You are a symbol Lily, more than you are a person to them, and you must always represent their savior even if that’s a far cry from what you really are. Better to have Quirrell disappear quietly, as your assailant, and you be found and brought to the ministry than to be labelled as a killer.”

So it was a choice out of necessity, rather than protection, Britain wouldn’t be able to handle it if Eleanor Potter was sentenced to Azkaban for murdering her professor.

“It was self-defense… I mean, he was clearly trying to kill me.” Lily said taking some offense, but Wizard Lenin wasn’t defending these people, he’d been the one to suggest that final outcome after all.

If it had been an act of magic, a brilliant flash of light, then it would have been different. But she had used a knife, and she had thrust it through his heart, that kind of death was too close for any wizard’s comfort.

She might have been forgiven even if they did find out, might have been passed over, but that action would always hover over her like a guillotine just waiting to drop.

It was in the middle of that thought that the thing appeared, there was a sharp crack like a lightning bolt and she turned her head to see a small misshapen creature that looked like a five year old Dudley’s sad attempt at drawing a human.
It had the right number of limbs, a nose, ears, eyes, even soiled rags like clothes but beyond that it was about as far from human as you could get. Its eyes were far too large for its face, its ears large and pointed, its nose thin and elongated, its limbs bony and yet somehow the skin hanging from them.

And as soon as it appeared, it stared at her, and insisted in a high whistling voice, “Ellie Potter must not go to Hogwarts!”

She had forgotten just how inconsistent and fickle the universe could really be.

“Wait, what?” Ellie asked, feeling as if she somehow hadn’t heard right, as if this couldn’t really be happening because the thing hadn’t been there a moment ago.

“Ellie Potter must not go to Hogwarts! Great danger awaits her there if she goes, terrible danger!” It stepped forward, insistent, its thin too long fingers reaching out as if to grab her.

It had been a long time, almost too long, that the universe had appeared this unhinged. When was the last time? Was it that first moment of sentience in the cupboard, was it her first visit with Death, with Wizard Lenin, was it pulling Rabbit from nothingness itself, or was it further than that?

Wizard Lenin himself seemed in something of a state of shock and wasn’t being any help at all, “Is that a house elf?”

Ellie didn’t care if it was a house elf or not because clearly whatever it was it was a major inconsistent moment in reality.

“Ellie Potter… must not go to Hogwarts.” Ellie repeated dully looking down at the thing, at its fierce insistence, as if this above all other things must be heeded.

That Ellie Potter was not to go to Hogwarts.

She looked over at Rabbit who had been lurking in a corner the whole time, she’d almost sent Rabbit to get her school supplied since he’d been acting so human recently but an unsupervised Rabbit was still a terrible idea, that and he’d probably be mobbed by school girls as soon as he was spotted in the streets.
Rabbit was staring at them both, blinking slightly, but offering no sign that this was out of the ordinary. Then again Rabbit was from the outer bounds of the universe so he was probably very familiar with the failing circuitry of reality.

The thing seemed enthused by Ellie’s easy understanding, a smile appearing on its face, it hopped up and down eagerly, “Yes, yes, of course Ellie Potter is a wise and great witch. Of course she understand the terrible danger, Ellie Potter truly is a great witch.”

But she didn’t understand because Eleanor Potter was supposed to go to Hogwarts, that had been evident from the beginning, everything was aligned so that she had to go to Hogwarts. If she set one foot out the door she’d probably be carted their right now with journalists as her guide.

Eleanor Potter had murdered her professor, had traumatized her friend, and neither of these had prevented her from somehow returning to Hogwarts.

And yet now…

“Ellie Potter must not go to Hogwarts.” She repeated more firmly this time, looking at the thing, waiting for it to contradict her. But it didn’t if anything it seemed even more thrilled, more relieved, that she was agreeing that she couldn’t attend Hogwarts.

“Lily, I hate to stop your philosophical ramblings but the house elf is clearly insane.” Wizard Lenin said with a resigned sigh, as if this was just the sort of ridiculousness that she would get into the moment they were back in England, “Try asking it why you can’t go back to Hogwarts.”

But there might not be a reason, perhaps it simply was, as most things simply were. There wasn’t a reason that Ellie Potter had to attend Hogwarts after all so why would she have a reason for not attending Hogwarts.

Lily could build Wizard Lenin’s body outside of Hogwarts, if she had to, it wasn’t physically impossible. And yet, Death had said this in as many words, there were so many things left undone…

The small photograph of Hermione Granger, sitting by herself before The Prophet’s camera, lingered in her mind more than she cared to admit.
“Why can’t I go back to Hogwarts?” Lily asked, taking Wizard Lenin’s question.

The thing’s, the house elf’s, smile dropped abruptly and it became panicked again, “Oh, Ellie Potter must not, a terrible danger awaits her.”

A terrible danger, but there had been terrible danger the year before and she had been fine, more or less. There had been trolls, trapdoors to certain death, and finally there was even Quirrell; Hogwarts was all about terrible danger.

“What kind of terrible danger?” Lily asked and the thing looked panicked for a moment.

“Dobby must not tell, Dobby cannot tell, his master forbids it. Oh Dobby is a bad elf!” And then it started hitting itself, picking up one of Lily’s school books to whack itself in the face repeatedly.

She, Rabbit, and Wizard Lenin just watched in dull fascination wondering just how far it would go.

“I always found house elves a little odd but I don’t think I’ve ever seen one this mad before.”

“So you can’t tell me exactly then, just that it’s terrible, and it’s dangerous.” Lily concluded after finally having enough of watching it hit itself.

The house elf nodded eagerly, relieved to be excused from hitting itself.

“Oh Ellie Potter is a very perceptive witch!”

Hadn’t Quirrell said something like that once, that she was unusually perceptive for an eleven year old girl? The memory brought a sour feeling to her stomach and the bitter taste of tea to her mouth.

A terrible danger, perhaps the house elf wasn’t a malfunction of the universe, perhaps it was simply misinformed. It was easy to have contradicting signs after all, but terrible dangers should attract Eleanor Potter to Hogwarts rather than drive her away, it was her purpose to battle demons after all.

Without monsters Eleanor Potter had no reason to exist.
“I’ve handled terrible dangers before, you know.” She said, and the elf nodded probably thinking of her most recent kidnapping and October 31, 1981. She wondered how it had found her anyway, especially at Lily Riddle’s, no one besides Dumbledore would know to look there for her and so far he hadn’t appeared.

It didn’t even seem mildly concerned that her hair was black instead of red, and that she was dressed as a muggle, as if it somehow knew exactly who she was even with the disguise.

“House elves have different magic than we do.” Wizard Lenin said with the mental equivalent of a shrug, as if he’d never really put that much thought into house elves before, and judging by how weird this one was she could see why.

House elves were more insane than wizards.

“Some might say I myself am a terrible danger.” She added, eyeing it carefully, it wasn’t a threat merely a statement but those words from Lily Riddle could send a grown man to his knees. The house elf just looked mildly confused.

She sighed then, “I’m afraid I have to go to Hogwarts, even if there is terrible danger, especially if there’s terrible danger. There are some things I… There are some things I need to take care of.”

“Ellie Potter is truly a great witch.” The house elf stated slowly, its eyes never leaving her face, “But she must not return to Hogwarts.”

It seemed they were at something of an impasse, the house elf wasn’t backing down and Lily wasn’t either, and both of them wanted completely the opposite thing. Wizard Lenin was lurking somewhere else in her brain stating that this was all just too ridiculous to even handle and that she could come and get him once it was all over and the bloody elf had left.

“Well, then, good sir, it appears we have a small predicament. Because you see, I must go to Hogwarts, and I will go to Hogwarts.” She broke the staring match with the elf, turning to Rabbit, “Alright comrade Rabbitson, let’s catch our ride.”

And for the second time that day something went wrong or rather, for the first time, something went right. She wasn’t teleporting, she was holding onto Rabbit’s hand, her stuff, but she couldn’t teleport out of the building. It was like something was blocking her somehow, like she kept hitting her head
against the ceiling.

She turned slowly to look at the elf who was grinning across at her like it had just won some great victory.

Almost without thinking Lily shrunk her trunk and supplies and stuffed into her pocket, pulling Rabbit along with her, and pushed her way out the window floating her way down to the pavement below and then booking it through the streets to find King’s Cross Station.

“Wait, Lily, are you seriously running through the streets as Lily Riddle pulling a supposed Albanian war refugee behind you?” But there was no time for Wizard Lenin’s logic because every few steps she’d hear a harsh crack and some obstacle would fall in her path and some person would catch sight of her black hair and green eyes and take a wild guess screaming in terror.

“Oh Merlin, it’s Riddle! It’s Riddle!”

As she ran she kept attempting to teleport and the ceiling was getting higher but it was still there, the house elf was fast enough to somehow stop her teleporting even while she was on the move. She’d be impressed, if it wasn’t so damn inconvenient.

Just before she was about to turn a corner she ran into a wizard, an auror by the look of his uniform with steel in his eyes, “Riddle, I never thought I’d see the day you’d be running around Diagon Alley in broad daylight.”

“Oh hell, look, I don’t have time for this.” Lily said making to push past him but he stood his ground, his eyes sharpening, and he drew his wand so it was pointed right at her head.

Meanwhile in the streets people were starting to crowd around, to create a large circle around them, to watch the duel that was sure to occur. They were whispering among themselves, fearful, but also hopeful looks in their eyes that this might go well. No one had directly confronted Lily Riddle in decades, they’d all learned their lesson, and this time might be it.

At least that’s what they thought, he probably was a fairly decent auror whoever he was, he didn’t waste time chit-chatting or not taking her seriously but instead immediately set up a low level shield and raised his wand to fight her.
Unfortunately for him she was too short on time to take him seriously, she batted him away into the crowd, knocking over a rather large woman and sprinted through the hole they made pulling Rabbit behind.

She hadn’t expected to have to run to the train station, at this rate she was going to miss the train, suddenly she wondered if it had been worth avoiding being mobbed because it struck her that without running from Dudley on a daily basis she’d lost a lot of her endurance for long distance sprinting.

And every few steps there was a crack and something in her way again.

“That thing is more persistent than the Terminator, what the hell is its problem?” Lily asked as she felt herself becoming winded.

“I… I honestly have no idea, but he really doesn’t want you to go to Hogwarts.” Wizard Lenin said, still not entirely sure what to make of this whole situation. He’d been sort of out of it since Flamel had revealed that Lily had secretly created the stone and given it to him thousands of years ago.

It was like Wizard Lenin didn’t know what to think about anything anymore, which was all well and good, except when it came to her being chased by a house elf through magical London while trying to make her way to King’s Cross station.

“Yes, thank you Lenin, is there any other obvious observation you’d like to throw out there.” Lily snapped back and she felt a sharp pain in her scar, clearly he was feeling a bit touchy, but then he should have thought of a better answer.

“Lily, if you haven’t noticed, this sort of thing only ever happens to you and it’s usually somehow your fault.”

Without thinking twice Lily bounded through the Leaky Cauldron, making her way into muggle London and turning in the direction of King’s Cross. She kept sprinting through the streets, weaving her way through businessmen on their lunch break, each of them giving her an odd look as she passed.

The tube would take too long, and plus given everything else she was sure the House Elf could break it down before she’d catch a ride to the station, her best bet was to keep running even if she was cutting it very close.
According to the schedule the train was already in the station it’d only be there another ten or twenty minutes before it left for Hogsmede.

“My fault?! How is this… Oh this is still about Flamel isn’t it? Look, you have to get over that whole stone thing.”

“The Philosopher’s Stone is arguably the greatest creation of any wizard aside from the time machine! And I found out, very recently, that it’s a complete fraud created by you! No, Ellie, I’m not getting over it.” He was seething, actually livid, but all the same he should be pinning this on her because it certainly wasn’t her fault that Flamel had taken credit for it.

“I don’t see how that’s your problem, you hate everyone anyways.” She stalled at a cross walk, watching as the cars zoomed past, too fast for her to try to sprint through. She tried catching her breath, bending over and staring at the ground, it had been too long since she’d done this.

“I didn’t hate Flamel and I didn’t hate what wizards have managed to accomplish.”

He sounded as if he was going to hit an emotional low again if she didn’t do something, not that she knew what to do or say about this, because he was kind of right. It did take the whole glamour out of Flamel knowing that he hadn’t really made the stone. Sure, he was still a great alchemist and researcher, but he hadn’t made the Philosopher’s Stone.

It was at that point that Lily realized the light wasn’t turning and that it hadn’t turned in quite some time, she regarded the intersection dubiously, and realized that only a short while before she had heard a sharp crack.

“Oh hell…” Lily straightened herself, set up a brief ward to deflect attention, and moved into the sprinter’s position.

She was going to get to Hogwarts, she was going to make it to that damned school, and she would laugh in that elf’s face when she got there.

With that thought she sprinted to the edge of the cross walk and took a giant glitch assisted leap over the traffic. For a moment she was floating, far too high over the traffic and the street lights, and it was as if she didn’t belong to that world at all and then she was landing harshly on the other side and pulling Rabbit along with her as she continued her mad dash to the train station.
It was with only five minutes to spare that Ellie pushed her way through the station, keeping her eyes glued for the column between platforms nine and ten. Finally she spotted it, and without hesitation, without any room for doubt charged straight ahead into it.

And the column remained a column, knocking her back onto the concrete, and everything feeling fuzzier than usual.

Distantly she felt warmth in her head and liquid dripping down her face. For a moment she wondered if she was going to die again, but she only seemed to be drifting, a concussion.

Quirrell had had to bash in her head more than once to kill her.

She didn’t know how many minutes she was lying there, only it was enough for someone to notice and for a crowd to form around her, someone holding her hand and telling everyone to keep back and call the ambulance.

“Lily…” Wizard Lenin’s voice was closer than it usually was, as if she was in his domain now rather than her own. She could almost make out his face, it was slightly blurred, but his eyes seemed anxious and he was gripping her arm gently trying to guide her somewhere.

“Lily, you have to focus, you need to heal your head wound.”

She kept staring at the ceiling, and up there she could see the house elf staring down at her in horror, as if it hadn’t realized that this could happen. She felt as if she was drifting slowly from herself, almost gone but not quite, and all the lights far too bright.

Had it been like this, in those few seconds before she’d been in the station with Death? It was becoming harder to remember.

And there she was, also in her own head at the same time, Wizard Lenin shaking her gently and his words too clear for broad daylight.

“Lily, they’ll take you to the hospital if you don’t move now. You need to focus.”
Her fingers twitched, but nothing came to mind, and her head still felt too fuzzy.

“Lily!”

There was a sharp burning in her scar and with that she managed to find the thought she needed and to the amazement of the crowd they watched as her gaping head wound stitched itself up and she sat upright as if she’d never been hurt in the first place.

She took the memories from them and sent them on their way, back to wherever they had been only a few minutes before, as if they’d never seen her in the first place.

She pressed against the column, still solid, and she looked up to find the house elf there and she grimaced, “Touché, you’re more tenacious than I thought.”

“Ellie Potter is… Ellie Potter is wounded oh Dobby never meant…” It started and it made its way down to her, looking on the verge of horrified tears or else a frenzied bout of self-beatings.

“Ellie Potter is fine.” Lily responded drily pointing to her healed head she looked towards the column once again, she’d just missed the train, she could still try to catch it if she ran along the tracks but…

“You’re really not letting me go to Hogwarts are you?” Lily said looking down at the creature and it shook its head, even now, it wasn’t about to let her go.

“And you’ll prevent me from teleporting there even if I try, is that right?” Lily asked and it nodded.

“Well, then, you’ll have to follow me all the way to Scotland because I’m still going.” With that Lily stopped trying to make her way through the column and instead exited the station and made her way towards the highway that would eventually lead her to Scotland and from there to Hogsmede.

“Ellie Potter is going to walk to Hogwarts?” The house elf asked, incredulous, as if he’d though that this would somehow all stop her.
“It does have a point, Lily, you don’t simply walk to Scotland.” But Wizard Lenin was less serious, he knew, without even asking that she would walk there if she had to.

“You’re not exactly letting me teleport are you? And I bet if I tried the floo I’d get the same reaction, isn’t that right? So I might as well start walking, and who knows, maybe you’ll get careless on the way and I’ll get my chance. Either way, I’m going.”

It desperately kept up with her, shielding itself from muggle’s view, its eyes trained on her half in awe and half in confusion as if not sure why she would go so far to just attend a school. She wasn’t sure either but now it was about the principle of the matter; not so much about Hogwarts itself.

“What’s your name anyway? Or do you not have one?” Lily asked looking down at him.

“It’s Dobby, Dobby is its name.” It said with more of a jig in its step than was probably warranted. They walked in silence for a few moments, neither saying anything to the other, him constantly looking at her face as if trying to see if she was serious.

If she really was going to walk all the way to Scotland.

She supposed she could let herself be caught in Diagon Alley as Ellie Potter instead, let one of them take her to Hogwarts, but she was betting that they’d face similar difficulties in trying to get her there. That and she had no desire to meet the press and be hounded for exactly what she’d been doing and where she’d been.

So it was better to just be late.

“You could probably overpower the elf if you tried.” Wizard Lenin suggested, but that was saved for truly desperate measures, so instead she’d try walking first.

The elf was persistent but it didn’t seem like he had all that much time to waste, because each minute they went further he became a little more anxious; his eyes darted all around, he started wringing his knobby hands.

Finally, about an hour in, he stopped, “Dobby must return to his master now. Dobby has... Ellie Potter must not go to Hogwarts.”
It stared at her, repeating this phrase, trying to convey so much more in it than simple words. She stopped to look down at him, not quite sure what to make of him or of this day. He’d run out of time, whatever he’d intended to do, and she doubted he could maintain wards above her while in his master’s house.

Abruptly, seemingly on impulse, she created one of her own usual sweaters and handed it to him, “Your shirt looks like its falling apart.”

“Oh… Oh Dobby can’t… Ellie Potter is a truly kind witch… Ellie Potter is…”

And with that she turned and continued walking, waiting for one final crack, but it took several minutes to occur. She turned around one last time, after he was gone, staring at the spot where he’d been only moments before; as if he hadn’t been there at all.

“A great and terrible danger, huh?” Lily asked, glancing over at Rabbit.

“Yes.”

“At least it won’t be boring then.” She said, and with that they teleported onto the train they had missed as it barreled its way through the countryside. With a sigh she collapsed into the empty seat, turning her hair color red, and made to look out the window but her eyes caught something else instead.

Sitting across from her silent, pale, and dark eyed was a thinner and more tired looking Hermione Jean Granger whose expression was slowly turning into one of awe, disbelief, grief, and relief beyond words.

“…Ellie…”
Reveling in and Revealing Great Secrets

In which Lily manages to have several awkward conversations in the span of one train ride, Hermione Granger makes a few mysterious and somewhat alarming comments, and emotions seem to become both tangible and ineffable.

Hermione Granger had changed in the time Lily had left her behind.

Lily remembered the last time she’d seen her, her eyes still red, her hands shaking only just having been stitched back together, and the desperation in her expression as she’d called after Lily one final time.

She’d been there, standing in that bar, and there’d been nothing that Lily could think to say to her or even do.

Only that something deep, something integral to her own being, would not erase those memories as she had done so many times before in so many different places. Somehow, that night was different, deeper, and she would not touch it even if Hermione Granger had asked.

And now here they were, almost half a year later, sitting in the train that was a replica of the true train staring across at each other as if they had never moved from this place. As if somehow neither of them had managed to leave Hogwarts at all.

“Hermione…” Lily started and failed to continue the words suddenly gone. All of the sudden she felt like Neville Longbottom making a potion, where you thought you knew what to add when, but as soon as you saw it in front of you it just dribbled out of your ears and left a horrifying nothing behind only the certainty that within the hour it was going to explode.

It was like they were both still standing in that Leaky Cauldron, staring at each other, where Lily’s only thought was a cold realization that she needed to go while the going was good.

To be anywhere else but there.
(Why had she felt such a need to catch the Hogwarts Express? Maybe the crazy house elf had secretly been doing her a favor after all…)

“Lenin, help.”

Wizard Lenin, her faithful and reliable guru on humanity, her tireless translator of human sentiment and thought processes surely he knew what to do. For years he had explained the innerworkings of the Dursleys, Mrs. Figg, and even Big Brother when they were only a far off idea. With only a glance he could see the core of a person and assimilate them into a greater pattern. There was no better man for this task than Wizard Lenin.

“Try to say something sincere.”

She felt the compartment grow cold as all her hopes were dashed with rocks thrown at their heads. It seemed that Wizard Lenin was just as useless as comforting and or greeting traumatized little girls as she was.

Say something sincere, she was always sincere, she was too sincere according to Wizard Lenin. People didn’t always like sincerity, or blunt sincerity, so be sincere wasn’t really all that good of advice.

“I never said to say something with your characteristic lack of tact.” Wizard Lenin bristled having had what he felt was good and earnest advice cast aside. Not to mention it seemed like he was still caught up in the whole Flamel business and the cupcake of faith he’d had in humanity had crumbled leaving only sad little morsels behind; as far as he was concerned he didn’t know how anyone worked anymore.

“Not helping!”

Small talk, she normally avoided it, didn’t see the point in it. She wasn’t usually in favor of lengthening conversations but instead wanted to see them swiftly reach their conclusion. She was an artist in efficiency when it came to conversations, had spent years perfecting the craft, until sometimes the conversations were so short it was as if they never even started.

Say what you mean to say and don’t bother to say anything else, years in the cupboard had taught her that. It was almost painful to go against that instinct but the silence was becoming deafening.
What did you do over the summer? That seemed like a good place to start.

“Albania.” Lily said and at the sound of an actual topic Hermione’s hands started to shake, her eyes growing wide, but never the less Lily continued, “I was in Albania.”

“There’s a war in Albania, I read about it at Neville’s, it was in the Prophet. A vampire revolution, they took over the capital and now a vampire warlord is in charge of the ministry…” Hermione responded, and it was as if she truly was an encyclopedia, reciting some known fact out of an inability to say anything else.

The words sounded dead and they fell flat in the compartment.

Once again Lily felt the urge to ask Wizard Lenin what precisely she was supposed to say but she could feel him retreating further and further away from the scene. As far as he was concerned he’d given the only advice he could because the shallow comfort he’d pretended to give as a child had never been in this sort of situation.

He’d never had to confront anyone who’d witness him murdering his professor after having his head bashed in and then rising from the dead. It was new territory for everyone involved.

“Yes.” Rabbit answered for Lily, Hermione’s eyes moved to him, looking like she hadn’t even realized he was there until he’d spoken, and for a moment it looked like she’d comment on Rabbit’s new found ability to speak English but she said nothing. And that was... Well, it was something bitter.

Only a few months ago Hermione Granger would have been unbearably obnoxious in her overwhelming pride at Lepur Rabbitson’s recovery.

And there was more silence, such that Rabbit was the only one unaffected by the atmosphere, perfectly oblivious to the memories coursing unsaid in the air. Oh what bliss, to be an extra-dimensional reality devouring monster.

“Neville’s also sitting in this compartment, he lost Trevor earlier, but he’ll be back soon.” Hermione said, again as if it was just a dull fact she was rattling off, “He’s a good friend, one of my only friends, but he doesn’t understand.”
Here Hermione’s eyes seemed to grow clearer, darker, the emotions practically draining out of them and Lily couldn’t help but wonder if that was how she looked sometimes, “He doesn’t know you.”

“What are you?” Hermione asked, what, not who. Yet she didn’t ask it as if she meant to be degrading, insulting, her tone wasn’t cold but was instead hesitant and so terribly afraid as if Lily might disappear at one wrong word.

What are you?

Lily had answered Hermione’s questions before, many different times, and Hermione had never once liked the answers she was given. But now…When was the last time she had told someone what she really was, Flamel didn’t count because he had already known, was it Wizard Lenin?

She felt bare, barer than she’d ever been before, that someone that existed in the world; not inside her head or in a train station in another world could see her as something beyond Eleanor Potter. No, not just that, but Eleanor Potter, Lily, and everything in between.

Someone who’d caught a glimpse of everything she was, and asked, what are you?

“I am Eleanor Potter, or rather, I’m the only one who uses her name. But Eleanor Potter, it’s more like a part in a play, like Hamlet. She’s real, she has her lines and her place in the world, but if you dig into her only a little bit you discover that she’s fairly hollow. The world revolves around Eleanor Potter, or Hogwarts does, but I’m not always Eleanor Potter.”

Hermione was waiting for her to finish, not saying anything, just thinking and waiting for the pieces to fall together.

“In the end I’m just Lily, if I’m even that… I am the death of this universe; or so I’ve been told.”

“The death of this… Is that why when Quirrell tried… When You Know Who tried…” Hermione said the image of Lily’s bleeding corpse lingering in her eyes and for a moment Hermione was that twelve year old girl in Quirrell’s office again watching a play she’d never realized she’d been invited to. Perhaps this wasn’t a story she really wanted to hear but felt she must or had convinced herself that she must; but that didn’t mean that she truly wished to understand.

But she was the only one who could and that was why Lily had come back; because this was a
conversation that had needed having.

“Yes, but no one calls me that, it’s Lily.” She closed her eyes, picturing Death in the train station, that name would always belong to him and Flamel could call her that all he wanted but it was easier to sit in this compartment as Lily than it was as Death.

“Lily…” Hermione started but Lily interrupted her before she could go further.

“Well, here it’s Ellie, you know because of Hogwarts and plays and expectations…” Despite her somewhat lackluster explanation of why calling her Lily in public was a bad idea Hermione nodded slowly, looking more dazed than comprehending, but she still nodded.

“So then… That’s the reason you’re the girl who lived and…”

“And that I routinely impersonate Jesus, sure.” Lily finished for Hermione, which judging by Hermione’s briefly irritated expression wasn’t really what she’d wanted to say but it was what she’d been getting at.

It was strange, Lily had always expected this conversation to be a little more stilted or perhaps a little more weighted. She hadn’t pictured telling anyone but if she did it wasn’t supposed to take place on the Hogwarts Express… Except, perhaps that was the only place it could take place. The train that echoed the train in purgatory forever waiting for either her or Death to board; where else could she explain the way the world worked?

A fire seemed to light in Hermione’s eyes all of the sudden, her face became hardened, and she looked very determined for an almost thirteen year old.

“Does anyone else know?” She asked.

“Flamel.” Lily said with a shrug, of course even Flamel didn’t really know, Flamel was… weird. Neither she nor Wizard Lenin knew what to make of that conversation but he was the first person on the physical plane who had recognized her as something beyond Eleanor Potter, as Death, and that was worthy of consideration.

Then she caught Rabbit’s eye and saw a very un-Rabbit like expression on his face, as if he was expecting something from her, “And Lepur Rabbitson?” She added hesitantly, Rabbit didn’t really
count, but he seemed satisfied by the answer at any rate.

She and Rabbit really did need to have a talk about his budding personality.

“Flamel?! As in Nicolas Flamel!” How was it that Hermione was more put out by Lily knowing Flamel than she was by Lily being Death? Clearly Hermione’s priorities were out of order but at least it was a sign of the original Hermione, she would have been very upset at the idea of Lily budding up with Nicolas Flamel the world’s greatest alchemist and oldest wizard.

“Apparently a thousand years ago I cross-dressed as a very intimidating man and gave him the philosopher’s stone.” Lily said and then added, “It was a weird conversation for everyone involved.”

For a moment Hermione looked as if she was on the verge of asking if she was serious and was flushing a vivid red, usually a sign of irritation and mounting anger, and the old Hermione would have been sure to say something to contradict this but this Hermione seemed willing to move past her disbelief.

She swallowed whatever annoyed retort she had and the flush disappeared from her cheeks and she looked as she was creating a forced distance from the situation. As if this was not the time to be caught up in trivial things like feelings.

She’d become pragmatic in the time since Lily had left her.

“So then…” Hermione started, probably about to breech some other topic, but whatever she was about to say was interrupted by the compartment door opening to reveal a somewhat haggard looking Neville Longbottom holding the infamous Trevor.

“Found him… Eventually…”

Both Hermione and Lily leaned back from each other, as if they hadn’t been gossiping about Lily’s true origins, and returned to staring awkwardly out the window as Rabbit stared blankly ahead.

Neville’s eyes caught Lily’s and widened and he almost dropped Trevor in his shock, “Ellie! Ellie you’re back! Ellie you’re…”
He immediately was hugging her, and to her embarrassment she thought she could see tears gathering in the corner of his eyes. She’d almost forgotten that she’d been supposedly kidnapped by Quirrell and probably kept as his sex slave for months on end.

“Yeah, I thought I should at least try to make the train… You know, which was actually more difficult than I thought it’d be.” Before she could add in that house elves were not only crazy but unusually persistent and powerful Neville was squeezing all the air out of her lungs in a too tight hug.

“Thank Merlin, people were saying you were dead.”

As Lily spluttered she caught Hermione’s dubious expression, as if she now found the prospect of a dead Lily to be somewhat ironic, which it was but seeing that knowledge in someone else’s expression was disconcerting at best.

With far too much difficulty Lily managed to push Neville off of her, “Please, Neville, it was Squirrel.”

Except not really, not when it had mattered, squirrel had died long before people even knew he existed. That was another dark secret that Hermione Granger was privy to.

Neville flushed sitting next to Hermione, searching for the words to say and finding none. He looked pleased, happier than she expected, and at a complete loss for words.

She hadn’t really considered Neville in all of this.

He looked, well, almost the same as when she’d left him. Still a little soft, a little too unathletic, still uncertain, and afraid but he also was a little more haggard than when she’d seen him before. It wasn’t like the total transformation that had occurred in Hermione, where only traces of the girl she’d been were left behind, but there were small differences in the way he was looking at her.

He was looking at her like she wasn’t real, like any moment from now she might disappear, like she was a dream.

“They care about you.”
Lily almost flinched, she’d thought Wizard Lenin had completely abandoned the conversation for deep sea diving in her subconscious.

There was a brief grumble that this was a bad analogy but Wizard Lenin let it slide and instead let his strangely affectionate words echo in their shared consciousness. Or perhaps it was approaching affection, there was familiarity in it, fondness, but there was also the usual irritation and perhaps a smidge of pity and sorrow.

Because even Wizard Lenin could understand sentiment even if he chose not to believe in it.

“When you disappear out of a person’s life you do not simply cease to exist.” He expanded.

“I never really thought about it that way.” Well, she had, but not really. She’d been thinking about the actions, the things left undone, and the fact that Hogwarts in its own bizarre way needed an Ellie Potter just as much as it needed an Albus Dumbledore.

No matter what house elves might insist Ellie Potter was required to serve her term at Hogwarts.

Suddenly Dumbledore’s conversation with her was brought to mind, his words about the Dursleys, perhaps the Dursleys had simply been a metaphor for everything else. For everything that really was important.

What had he insisted again, that the Dursleys cared, and she’d disregarded it but maybe he wasn’t talking about them. Maybe he was talking about the general idea of abandonment, of the idea of caring without even truly knowing, the world was capable of missing Eleanor Potter even if they never saw Lily beneath.

“Don’t be daft.” And whatever sense of pity there was vanished and Wizard Lenin’s irritation returned in full force.

And whatever moment of enlightenment she’d almost reached was gone as she felt the fiery migraine of death building up in her scar. She’d just have to consider it more later.

“So… Ellie… How was… I mean… Are you alright?”
Lily looked over to see Neville staring at her with a concerned expression, ringing his hands, and looking as if he was desperately trying to come up with the right thing to say. It sort of reminded her of Mrs. Figg actually, back in the days before Hogwarts, where she was always asking the questions she never really wanted to ask. It was almost nostalgic.

“Well, it’s been a weird day, but on the whole I’d say I’m doing well.” Lily said with a shrug.

“Oh that’s… that’s good I guess.”

And there was that too heavy silence again.

How was it that she was having so many terrible conversations in one day? Normally she preferred short conversations but somehow in spite of the lengthy gaps of silence these weren’t short talks. It was like the silence was incorporated into the dialogue, so that you just had to wait through the heaviness to get to the end.

“I didn’t know you were back, I thought it’d be in the Prophet or something since everyone’s been looking for you. Was Lepur with you the whole time then, we thought Quirrell might have… Well I mean… We thought he might have been with you…” Neville said, tripping over his words in an effort to be as vague and polite as possible, and she couldn’t help but stare in him in fascination as he just kept trying.

Something had to be done.

Lily refused to repeat this same conversation fifty times or more with all the concerned glances and hesitation. Hogwarts was already tedious at times, she wasn’t about to let it get ten times worse. This was not the reason she had returned and she would see that Hogwarts would follow her lead this year. She did not have to accept this.

She stood dramatically, everyone staring at her, Hermione with vaguely raised eyebrows, Neville with alarm, and Rabbit with complete indifference.

“There’s an announcement I need to make.”
“An announcement?” Neville asked slowly but she paid him no mind instead closed her eyes to picture an intercom system, driven by magic, that would project into every compartment. And with a wave of her hand she made it a reality.

“All the way please, students of Hogwarts.” She said and in the compartment her voice echoed slightly as it was broadcast across the train.

“Ellie… what are you doing?” Neville asked looking almost panicked, holding out his hands as if to stop her, but she waved him off with a look patented by Wizard Lenin that meant ‘do not get in the way or you will be run over’.

“As you may or may not know I’m Ellie Potter and this summer I was kidnapped by Quirrell. It was about as much fun as you can expect. And after a series of wild and horrific adventures in Albania with comrade Lepur Rabbitson we have returned to this fine establishment sans Quirrell. If you have any questions I won’t answer them.” Lily thought for a moment, briefly looking at Rabbit, and then asked, “You got anything to add, comrade Rabbitson?”

“No.” Rabbit responded shortly, and she swore it wasn’t her imagination but she thought she saw his lips quirk upwards slightly, as if he was smiling. She couldn’t help but shudder slightly at the implications but wasn’t willing to comment on it.

“Lepur… Hermione… Lepur just talked!” Neville was saying in a horrified whisper to Hermione Granger but she didn’t seem as if she was paying any attention.

“Right, then, that’s all I have to say about that.” And with that Lily switching off and dismantling the system with a wave of her hand and sat back in her seat staring in expectation across at a rather stunned looking Neville Longbottom and Hermione Granger.

For a moment it seemed like they’d gone too far for any sort of conversation and then Hermione started breaking into hysterics. She leaned back in her seat and giggled madly, her eyes squeezed shut, and shaking with the force of her own laughter.

And in her place Lily couldn’t help but picture one of Dudley’s old toys, a broken wind up doll, that just kept shivering and shaking like a junky never managing to stop that mechanical twitching until Dudders got too tired of it and threw it in the trash.

“Hermione…” Neville started when Hermione’s mad laughter began dying down but Hermione
shook her head as if to cut him off.

“It’s just… It’s so Ellie, isn’t it?” She smiled over at Lily, almost affectionately, but there was a deep grief in her eyes, “You haven’t changed at all, Ellie.”

Lily sat there, having no idea what Hermione meant by those words, only that it was something deeper than a factual statement. That it was something more than those words, just as she now suspected Dumbledore had been talking about more than just the Dursleys, but whatever its true meaning was she wasn’t catching it.

“I’m glad.” Hermione finally added with a smile.

And the train just kept rolling onwards.
When Lily Met Luna

In which Hermione and Lily develop the art of recreational bickering, Lepur Rabbitson is elected prefect by default, and once again Wizard Lenin finds himself nostalgic for a Hogwarts that was untouched by Lily’s almost daily antics.

The announcement hadn’t worked at all.

As soon as she’d stepped out of the compartment she’d been swarmed, first by the Weasley doppelgangers, shortly followed by Ron Weasley, Malfoy, Greengrass and Zabini, a slew of Rabbit fangirls who were more interested in his wellbeing than hers, and quite a few people she’d never even realized existed.

It seemed that everyone wanted something a little more personal and specific about just what Eleanor Potter had been up to during the holidays and no one had been satisfied with her extremely satisfactory announcement.

It was only through her ability to run very fast, and then avoid the carriages drawn by the most terrifying horses she’d ever seen by sprinting across the top of the lake, that Lily managed to make it to the castle unmolested.

Unfortunately she wasn’t going to be so lucky inside the castle.

Every eye in Hogwarts, from the staff down to the Hufflepuff table, was on her just waiting for the moment when they could stop listening to the singing hat and pounce. Not all of them were staring in a benign manner either.

Dumbledore hadn’t seemed surprised to see her but he hadn’t seemed overjoyed either, he made no announcement of her presence as she entered but instead watched her with a cool and steady gaze that clashed only slightly with the bright magenta robes he was wearing. She imagined they’d be having a very long and weird conversation fairly soon possibly weird enough to rival Flamel’s if the last conversations she had with Dumbledore were anything to go by.

Snape looked as if he’d just seen a ghost at Macbeth’s dinner party. She didn’t know what he’d thought of the whole thing, given that it was Snape she’d thought he’d be in the know as far as
Quirrell’s actual involvement in her disappearance but maybe he wasn’t. Either way it looked as if he wasn’t sure if he should be relieved, horrified, or angered beyond all reason that she was alive and well and inside Hogwarts.

It was nice to know that at least some things never changed.

And then there was Squirrel’s replacement, Gilderoy Lockhart, whose required books were astronomical in number and ridiculous in title. Lockhart was staring at her as well, with shock, but also with excitement as if he had been presented a grand and irreplaceable opportunity.

She thought back to illustrations of Prince Charming in children’s books and most of them in some way resembled the good Mr. Lockhart. His hair was the color of gold that seemed to glitter even in artificial lighting, his eyes a steady and deep blue, and he had high cheek bones and a dazzling grin. He looked like someone you might see on television selling shampoo or toothpaste, someone who smiled and grinned and looked so happy that he must be made of cardboard.

(Almost in the back of her head, back where she kept all the non-important things, she made a small note to keep an eye out for Gilderoy Lockhart and watch her step around him. A great and terrible danger, the house elf had warned…)

Meanwhile at the Gryffindor table she’d placed Rabbit, Hermione, and Neville strategically around her but people were slowly creeping towards her just waiting for their chance.

And just as she’d thought on the train, something needed to be done.

“Nothing needs to be done. We don’t have time for your ridiculous shenanigans. You just focus on getting me a body and ignoring everything else.” Wizard Lenin said with a sigh, as if he was getting a headache from all of this as well.

But that was exactly why something needed to be done, because if she was spending all her time deflecting questions then she wouldn’t have any time to deal with Wizard Lenin’s little problem. And she knew that he knew it too, he was just too proud and depressed to admit it, but he would once the hat stopped shouting out names and they were swarmed.

“No, because every time you try to deal with a situation it becomes ten times worse than it was to begin with.” Wizard Lenin cut in.
“No it doesn’t…”

“Well, let’s take a look back shall we. ‘I need to visit Dumbledore’s office so I’ll just turn my pet rabbit into a person and then claim he’s an Albanian refugee.’ Because that didn’t have unforeseen consequences, did it? ‘I need to have money so I’ll impersonate a drug lord, take over her headquarters, and start a war in Albania.’ Wizard Lenin stopped, a mocking sort of laugh escaping him, “Have I missed anything?”

“…You seriously need to get over this stone thing.” She commented, because it was getting out of hand, she understood where he was coming from but he was being prickly even for Wizard Lenin.

“This is not about Flamel!” He sighed, seeming to come to some internal decision, “Just… humor me, and ignore it.”

She considered it momentarily, living with it, but a glance at her audience again reminded her that she really didn’t want to no matter what Wizard Lenin thought about it. He would see, in the end, that she was right.

A plan, she needed a plan, some way to separate her from the masses of Hogwarts. Gryffindor got her away from the Slytherins but didn’t get her away from the Gryffindors, leaving Hogwarts wasn’t an option since she’d only just gotten back…

Nothing was really coming to mind.

Almost unwillingly she turned to look at Rabbit. He was smiling, a blank smile that had nothing in it, only the imitation of emotion that failed to even reach the corners of his eyes black eyes. Yet somehow, beyond the lack of true feeling, the artificial flavor of his intelligence, there was some spark of confidence as if he knew exactly why she was looking at him. He looked like he was just waiting for her to come out and say it.

Lily decided she wasn’t quite desperate enough for extreme measures yet.

But that didn’t mean she had any other plan in mind. As the names ticked by and she came closer and closer to the end of the sorting ceremony she felt as if the future was solidifying. Months of denying what happened in Albania multiple times to the same people, the same conversation over and over again, and there was nothing she could do to stop it.
Just then the universe extended to the now somewhat panicking Lily a sign of good faith.

“DEFAULT!”

No one clapped, they all simply stared forward, at the eleven year old girl sitting on the stool and kicking her legs back and forth as if the universe had not just crashed upon her unwitting head. After the announcement the girl stood, placed the hat on the stool, and looked out towards the audience.

She was small, her hair a pale gold, only a shade or two darker than Rabbit’s white, and she had a peculiar dazed expression as if everything reached her a second or two late. She stared at the room, a small smile on her face, and looked over the audience finally turning to the dumbfounded McGonagall (who was probably preparing herself to send the girl over to Hufflepuff), “Where’s the Default table?”

And it was as if there was golden light hanging around this unknown girl and a choir of angels as well.

“No, you can’t seriously be thinking...” Wizard Lenin was beginning but he was ignored completely as the plan was already underway.

Before McGonagall or anyone could interject that there was no Default table Lily stood and with a wave of her hand expanded the room and added a fifth, empty and neglected, table with a gray and undecorated banner hanging above it, “Here is the Default table!”

“Ellie what are you doing?” Neville asked but she paid him no mind, instead grabbed Rabbit, and made her way across the floor to the Default table. After finding her seat somewhere in the middle she pounded on the table, “Right here, table Default at your service.”

The girl’s smile became a grin and she meandered her way over, hopping over two steps at a time, as if there was nothing at all disconcerting with being sorted into Default or being invited to the new table by the recently kidnapped then found Eleanor Potter. Finally she sat across from Lily and Rabbit, smiling at them both, and asked, “Are you the prefects then?”

Lily looked around at the empty table, it seemed that by default she would have to serve as Default’s girl prefect and Rabbit the boy’s, but before she could there was a voice behind her, “That would be me.”
Hermione Granger was standing there, untying her Gryffindor tie and placing it into the pocket of her robes, and looking very nonchalant for Hermione Granger. She didn’t seem to mind the shock and horror of the student body, particularly from the Gryffindor table, or McGongall’s almost betrayed expression.

It was one thing for Lily to abandon Slytherin and take up residency in Default, quite another for Hermione Granger to do it.

Hermione took the seat on the other side of Lily, a very serious expression on her face, “I would sooner get an acceptable on an assignment than see Eleanor Lily Potter as prefect.”

“I think I would do a fine job.” Lily said somewhat insulted.

“You would burn down the school.” Wizard Lenin said but with a curious fondness in it, as if he’d want nothing less from her, but underneath that was the warning that he still thought she was going far out of her way to solve a very easy problem.

“You would burn down the school.” Hermione said at the same time as Wizard Lenin, folding her hands together and looking at the girl in front of them with a smile, “Welcome to Default.”

“I didn’t burn down the school last year!” Lily pointed out.

“No, but when you were five you did burn down your house.”

“No, but you tried very hard in Potions.”

“If I wanted the school on fire, Hermione, then the school would be on fire.” Lily said with little enthusiasm, it was very hard to bicker with both Wizard Lenin and Hermione at the same time and she was having a little difficulty keeping track. Regardless, Hogwarts would be fine, as long as she didn’t try to get Dudley to cook bacon.

“Oh, I don’t doubt that.” Hermione said quickly, as if to placate Lily’s wounded pride, “It’s just, Ellie, you’re something of a catalyst for disaster.”
Well, that wasn’t uninformed, she’d been called that before but mostly by Wizard Lenin. Speaking of Wizard Lenin he seemed to be trying and failing to come to terms with Default’s existence.

“Default, of everything that could possibly come out of your head it was Default. Of course, this is your solution to the problem... I can’t believe you’re actually doing this. If I was actually a student right now I think I would be horribly insulted at the fact that you’re trying to make Default a legitimate house.” Considering this had nothing to do with Wizard Lenin’s body she had no idea why he cared just what she did to Hogwarts. Also she disagreed with the word trying, trying was last year, this year they already had members and a table.

“Default is a legitimate house, we have prefects.” Lily said in response and judging by her headache that was not the point Wizard Lenin had been trying to make.

“Keep in mind that I actually like Hogwarts.”

“Why?” Lily asked, now that she had been there for half of a year she really didn’t understand that. Just what was it about this place that drew both Wizard Lenin and Death in? Was it the almost constant threat of death, the house points, quidditch? She really couldn’t see the appeal.

“It was not the bloody quidditch… You know, perhaps you’re simply not capable of understanding.” Wizard Lenin finally admitted with a sigh before adding in a more annoyed tone, “But that’s no reason to be making up your own bloody houses!”

Meanwhile the room had erupted into loud whispering, glances over at the newly minted Default table and then towards the staff table, and it seemed like everyone was waiting for someone to make the first move.

“I always wanted to be sorted into Default. Delilah Default truly was the most default-like of the founders.” The girl confessed to Hermione, Rabbit, and Lily seemingly perfectly oblivious to the horrified stares they were all still receiving.

Here Hermione’s composure finally broke somewhat, her eyebrows raised, and she got that irritated and somewhat confused look that usually meant someone was questioning her worldview, “Delilah who?”

“Delilah Default, Hogwarts’ fifth founder.”
“Hogwarts only had four founders.” Hermione said slowly, “Default is something… Well, it’s something else.”

“That’s what they want you to believe and what they like to believe but sometimes liking and wanting isn’t the same as being. It’s all a conspiracy by the ministry and the founders themselves to pretend that she never existed but when trees fall unattended I like to think that the moon listens. But really, they did remember, it’s the reason Slytherin left Hogwarts after all.”

“No,” Hermione insisted slowly again this time looking more angry than irritated, “Salazar Slytherin left because he was racist and didn’t approve of Hogwarts accepting of muggleborn students.”

“Then why did he store all her belongings in the secret chamber underneath the school?” The girl asked.

“He didn’t.”

The girl gave Hermione something akin to a questioning look, although she was doing a pretty good Rabbit impersonation in that it was difficult to decipher if any of her expressions really differed from the other, and then turned back to the sorting ceremony. Not that there was any sorting happening; where before there had been hushed whispers there was now a dull roar and wild gesturing from Slytherins, Gryffindors, Ravenclaws, and offended Hufflepuffs alike.

Snape had placed his head into his hands, as if by somehow avoiding looking at all of it the scene might disappear, McGonagall was standing with the scroll still in her hands too in shock to call on the next student, and the rest of the staff seemed to be at a loss for words.

And then Dumbledore stood and the hall was instantly silent, all eyes turned towards him, and for a moment Lily couldn’t help but see the man who had faced Grindlewald and won. There were so many different edges to him, how was it that each time she looked at him she saw a different face? Would this be the face she’d see when he asked to see her?

“Students, staff, I’m afraid we will never eat if we never finish.” He offered a slight smile to the puzzled expressions of his audience, who were waiting for him to condemn or christen Default, and then he turned to McGonagall, “If you would please continue, Minerva?”

“Albus! Surely you aren’t serious?!” McGonagall started only to cut herself off as she realized that this was neither the time nor the place to challenge Ellie Potter’s authority as that would open a
whole can of worms that they had no business getting into in front of the whole school.

So it was with a deep breath that McGonagall continued on with the list and everyone reluctantly turned their eyes back to the hat and the students beneath it.

Hermione watched silently along with the girl both tracking the movements of this student and the next, to Slytherin, Gryffindor, Hufflepuff, Ravenclaw, but never Default after the first. Lily caught herself watching them as well and couldn’t help but notice how small they seemed, and it was strange that only a year ago she had been smaller than most of them. It was hard to picture herself from the outside looking in, what was it that others saw when they looked at her, did they see Death (ancient eyes with the desert in his pupils) in her shadow, or did they see only the blinding glory that was Eleanor Potter, or was it neither?

Was it only a too small girl with red hair and eyes a shade of green that made you stare a little too long?

Somehow she doubted she looked like these incoming students though, all eager smiles, and nervous anticipation.

“That’s Ron’s little sister.” Hermione commented when Ginny Weasley reached the stool, and she looked a bit like Ron, the same shade of red hair (a bit darker than Lily’s) with freckles dotting her nose and cheeks.

She was the last student to be sorted that night and then the real year would start rolling in.

The girl sat down under the hat for a few moments, and Lily almost asked where Hermione thought she might go, but the hat beat them to the conclusion, “GRYFFINDOR”

Ginny Weasley stood, looking pleased, and yet also strangely disappointed casting a glance over towards Lily, Rabbit, Hermione, and the new Default girl. She hesitated for a few moments and then was drawn by the sound of Gryffindor, and her brothers, ecstatically cheering and welcoming her into their fold.

And then they were all clapping and waiting for Dumbledore’s speech. And this time there was a little more expectation, more so than the year before, and they were all looking at him wondering if he had anything more to say than warning them about certain death.
For a moment Dumbledore simply stood, staring out at them with an expression that was a little more somber than he liked to wear to these occasions, and then a smile cracked across his lips and there was a twinkle in his eyes. But it didn’t dim that sense of solemnity that pervaded through the air.

“As you may have noticed Eleanor Potter has returned and Professor Quirrell has not. Alas I cannot comment on this anymore than you yourselves can, as I was just informed of her return myself. As you may have also noticed Eleanor Potter has pointedly refused to answer any questions thus far and will most likely continue to do so.” Here Dumbledore paused, the entire room turning to stare at Lily, and she felt as if the very air itself was too heavy with their gazes but she did not move or say a word. Dumbledore offered her a polite, if somewhat strained, smile, and in it was the promise of a conversation that neither of them really wished to have, “House Default appears to have made a more permanent return and I’m afraid that unlike my good colleague Severus Snape, I know which battles are to be fought and won against Eleanor Potter. I only stipulate that Gilderoy Lockhart is not to be Default’s Head of House.”

“Well, he certainly doesn’t mince words, does he?” Wizard Lenin commented, stuck on the idea that Dumbledore had spoken of picking and choosing battles to all of Hogwarts.

Most of the students laughed at the words, as if it was some sort of a joke, but Lily didn’t see the humor. Instead, like Wizard Lenin, she felt an echo of the house elf’s terrible danger inside that promise of battles to be fought and won against her.

Best not to think of that until they got there though. Her eyes flicked to the very handsome Lockhart, “No Lockhart, huh.”

Well they were agreed on that, Lily didn’t want Squirrel 2.0 as her replacement head of house either, but it looked like the newest member of the faculty might have had that idea in mind because he seemed a little too disappointed by Dumbledore’s words.

She wasn’t really sure who else to pick though.

“Well if you’re set on making a mockery of Hogwarts why not pick Hagrid? Or better, why not pick Sybil Trelawny?” Lily turned her head to see the woman who looked as if she’d just crawled out of Woodstock. It was hard to tell where her gaze was directed with her coke bottle glasses, but it didn’t even look like she had any idea what was going on.

“What about professor Trelawny?” Lily shouted over to Dumbledore who blinked at her interruption of his speech. He turned to look at Trelawny, who still didn’t seem to have any idea what was going, and then back to Lily.
The rest of his audience was captivated, holding its breath, waiting for the acknowledgement that Eleanor Potter was well and truly alive after all this time. He refused to take the bait though.

“Perhaps this would be best decided at another time, Miss Potter.” Dumbledore said, which wasn’t a yes or a no, and then continued his speech, “As always the forbidden forest is extremely forbidden and magic is forbidden in corridors. And without much further ado nitwick, blubber, tweek, DEFAULT!”

The room exploded into noise as the food appeared and the gossip began to spread, meanwhile at the Default table, the new Defaults were sitting and contemplating their future. Well, Hermione probably was, Lily was silently congratulating herself on a successful plan because as of yet no one since Neville had been able to ask her about her summer vacation.

“See, my plans do work.” She commented to Wizard Lenin, who grudgingly admitted that usually she did manage to get what she wanted even if her methods lacked subtlety and finesse.

“I wonder who he’ll put as our head of house.” Hermione said following Lily’s gaze to the staff table and startling Lily out of her thoughts.

“All the good ones are taken already, I’m telling you, flower power lady with the glasses is where it’s at.” Lily said, because when you thought about it if Dumbledore had been desperate enough to place Snape in charge of children then he’d clearly been running out of options back then too.

“Flower power lady with the glasses?” Hermione asked, her eyebrows raised, “Ellie, you knew her name five minutes ago. You know, I think you secretly know everyone’s name and just do this to be obnoxious.”

“I actually don’t.” Which was true, well there were some she actually knew like Malfoy, and Wizard Lenin’s real name but Robot Minion One and Two as well as the Weasley Doppelgangers were sort of nameless entities to her.

Hermione frowned slightly at that, as if she neither believed nor approved of that statement, and then said, “Well I don’t think it will be professor Trelawny.”

“Why not?” Lily asked.
Hermione only stared at Trelawny, who was now staring at the ceiling, captivated by the enchanted stars with her mouth hanging slightly open. Then Hermione looked back to Ellie, “Are you serious?”

“Perfectly serious.” Lily responded, and she was, very serious.

“Ellie, she’s… Surely anyone would be better.” Hermione finally finished lamely motioning towards Trelawny.

“I thought you had faith in professors and their general authority. Why do you assume she’ll be so terrible?”

“That was last year.” Hermione said darkly before looking down at her plate of food with a sigh, “If I still thought like that I’d be sitting at the Gryffindor table right now.”

Lily fell silent for a few moments, the tone becoming unexpectedly more sober, and she wondered just how much faith Hermione had lost in the establishment to willingly follow Lily into the depths of Default.

“Perhaps we should elect our head of house or pretend to elect an official and then pick the professor that none of us selected, that way it’s fair and unbiased. Too much autocracy is bad for the stomach and is food for the nargles.” The new girl said suddenly, with that same cheery expression she’d been wearing under the hat, her eyes a dazed robin’s egg blue that didn’t seem capable of focusing on any particular object.

Lily had never really thought of democratizing Hogwarts, rather she’d considered making it into a feudal warzone where she rivalled Snape and they did constant battle. To actually have elections, to appoint prefects and officials through honest campaigning and ballot box stuffing, she’d never even considered it.

“That’s brilliant.” Lily declared pounding her hand dramatically on the table grinning over at the girl who grinned back, “I completely agree, we’ll have an election for our head of house, make a case for each and elect the most qualified official who will undoubtedly be flower power glasses lady.”

The girl clapped her hands together looking delighted that her idea was being taken into consideration and Rabbit, who was nothing if not a thoughtless mimic, clapped as well leaving Hermione as the only non-participant.
“…What… what just happened?” Hermione asked and then turned towards the girl, “Wait, no, no that’s not…”

“Hermione, this is a democracy now and you’re the minority so I’m afraid you get no representation. But rest assured your voice was heard and then disregarded.” Lily said brushing off Hermione’s complaint with a wave of her hand before returning to the rest of her house.

“Now, first, we should probably introduce each other before we begin the election process. I’m Eleanor Potter, also known as messiah of the British Wizards.” Lily said motioning to herself and then moved to introduce Rabbit who was still staring blankly into space, “The silent and almost terrifyingly good looking boy to my left is Lepur Rabbitson, who really isn’t a boy or Albanian at all but rather is a nameless cosmic horror from another dimension who will one day devour Scotland.”

“Really?” The girl asked, “Does he get tired of being a person sometimes? I would think it’d be hard to be a person all the time if you weren’t used to it. Sometimes I get tired of being a person and imagine trying to be a crumple-horned snorkack but I’ve never really managed it.”

Lily considered Rabbit with a critical eye, “You know, I don’t know, he used to be a rabbit. I’d think if he got tired of being Lepur Rabbitson he’d just go back to being a rabbit or something. Besides, he’s really taking this person thing further than he needs to, so he must want… If he is capable of wanting…”

Rabbit turned his head to meet her eyes, his that familiar dark black that held almost nothing in them, almost nothing except a small spark that acted as a window to the soul that wasn’t there. He said nothing, merely inclined his head for a moment, and then turned back to stare blankly at the wall.

She really needed to stop reading into Rabbit’s actions.

“What does Scotland taste like?” The girl asked drawing Lily’s attention away from cosmic horrors for the moment.

“I imagine it tastes very green and wet.”

“Would England taste similar? Being on the same island?”
“I’d think it’d be more gray tasting, London seems like it’d be pretty oily and bland.” Not that London was bad, way more exciting than Little Whinging, but she wouldn’t necessarily want to eat it. Not that she knew what things were good to eat and what weren’t, Rabbit had eaten all the ghosts after all and she would have thought things that were dead that long would taste terrible.

Regardless this was a much better conversation than the ones she’d been imagining on the train, constantly rehashing Albania, or what she refused to tell about Albania. Besides it wasn’t really their business anyway, it wasn’t like she went around asking people things like what they did over summer, no one had even asked her things like that before Hogwarts. One of the benefits of being known as “crazy freak” at school was that people went out of their way not to talk to you.

As far as Lily was concerned Luna Lovegood was a plus and probably could even help out Rabbit sitting, since she appeared to be the only other person in this plane of existence who understood the gravity of the situation.

And as if to summarize that Hermione said in a quiet, fascinated, and somewhat horrified voice, “Oh my god, there’s two of you.”
Dumbledore didn’t waste time.

As soon as the feast was over, the prefects calling for students to follow them to the dormitories, the staff leaving for their own quarters, Dumbledore made his way to them until he was standing directly behind Lily casting a long shadow over the table. When she turned to look up at him she couldn’t help but feel that he had somehow grown taller than when she’d last seen him.

Not as tall as Death or Wizard Lenin but taller than she had ever realized before.

“Miss Potter.”

“Your excellency.”

For a moment it seemed as if there was no one else in the hall, even as students left, as Rabbit, Luna Lovegood, and Hermione Granger sat around her. There was only her and Dumbledore and the weighted silence that spoke a thousand words.

Murder, Quirrell, disappearance, memory, blood, knives, Albania, rabbits, all these things somehow transferred between them without a single word of it slipping from their lips.

Then he offered one of his trademark smiles, one that was resigned, grim, but attempted to be paternal and soft. As if he wanted to feel paternal and soft towards her but couldn’t quite bring himself to do it.

She wondered if Wizard Lenin, or even Hermione who now knew more than anyone else in the world, would find it ironic that Death was the only one who had managed to smile at her in the way that Dumbledore was attempting.
When Dumbledore spoke it was in a tone to match his face, “I’m afraid, as I mentioned in my speech, that Default is in a rather precarious position. If you would all come to my office with me we’ll discuss it further.”

So there they were in transfigured chairs only a few short minutes later, Lepur Rabbitson staring blankly forward, Luna Lovegood only managing to blink slightly more than Rabbit, Hermione Granger refusing to look at anything but Dumbledore with a sharp and accusing gaze, and Lily herself right in the middle.

It felt a little bit like The Breakfast Club, which was all well and good, but when it came to John Hughes films she’d always preferred Ferris Bueller’s Day Off or else Home Alone. Not that The Breakfast Club wasn’t a good movie, she’d just never really understood it, after all her memories of detention were either of Quirrell or Snape which didn’t really fit the theme of the film. And, aside from Neville, detention had never helped her to understand others or else form the mysterious bonds of friendship.

It was Hermione Granger, without waiting for introductions, who spoke first, “I’m not going back to Gryffindor.”

They all turned to look at her and for a moment Lily could almost see a younger Wizard Lenin in her place, staring ahead with fire in his eyes, nothing soft or young inside them. It wasn’t too difficult, was surprisingly not difficult, to superimpose Hermione’s image onto the young Wizard Lenin in that dull gray orphanage where a wardrobe had been set on fire.

What was even more surprising was that Wizard Lenin wasn’t offended by that and didn’t entirely disagree.

“It makes you wonder exactly what happened when you were away… I’m sure Hermione Granger has had more than enough quality time with Albus Dumbledore in these past months.” Wizard Lenin commented and it seemed like there was a lot unsaid as Hermione and Dumbledore stared across at each other, something that really stoked the fire in Hermione’s eyes.

Lily thought over what she had read in the papers and seen and heard from Hermione Granger herself. Hermione remembered what had happened, clearly remembered what had happened that night. The Hermione Lily had left behind would have told Dumbledore everything (or at least the parts she could explain) but the Hermione Lily had met on the train seemed to have no faith in Dumbledore whatsoever, moreover seemed convinced that Dumbledore was actively working against her.
In the months of Lily’s absence Eleanor Potter hadn’t been found but had instead decided to return on her own, Hermione’s parents hadn’t been cured of their memory loss effectively rendering Hermione Granger a mudblood orphan, and the story of Quirrell kidnapping Lily had been concocted and spread throughout the country.

There were some details Lily didn’t know. Whose idea had the kidnapping been? Had Hermione told Dumbledore the true story; with every small impossible to believe detail (including resurrection, time stopping, and more)? All the small little things that Lily wasn’t entirely certain she wanted Dumbledore knowing.

(Although he could theoretically call up Flamel any time and have a really weird conversation about how Lily used to be a man and was secretly Death, and how the philosopher’s stone was actually a gift… On second thought she doubted Flamel would ever be having that conversation with anyone.)

Lily didn’t necessarily see these answers to those questions in this moment but it became clear that whatever had forged this new Hermione had Dumbledore right in its center. And, more so, if Dumbledore wasn’t careful then it wouldn’t be Lily he should be worrying about; because Wizard Lenin had once looked at Dumbledore exactly like that.

“Miss Granger, I did not call you here to disband Default House so early after its conception, merely to discuss logistics.” He said specifically to Hermione, making it clear that at least the first part of this talk wouldn’t be centered on Eleanor Potter, which was a bit refreshing considering she’d thought she was doomed to a bizarre and headache filled conversation.

Which just went to show that Dumbledore really was picking and choosing his battles; just like he’d said in the speech. Which made her think that he had to have something up his sleeve because there was no way he’d simply let her walk out without at least discussing something; like Quirrell’s very dead body.

Before Lily could get into a debate with Wizard Lenin over just what Albus Dumbledore was thinking Hermione was talking again.

“Lepur Rabbitson and I are the prefects.” Hermione said shortly, as if this meant Dumbledore was no longer needed, that the newly minted Default was a well-functioning and oiled machine.

“I see… Good choices, but in the future I would leave such decisions to your head of house.”
“Who’s going to be Trelawney, we had a vote.” Lily interjected, because while she was fine letting Hermione take the reins for the majority of the meeting she did need to put this out there.

Of course it wasn’t technically true, Trelawney had won but only because Luna Lovegood’s vote of Blibbering Humdingers weren’t a viable source of authority according to Hermione, Rabbit’s trademark yes was in favor of all authorities, and Hermione refused to make a decision as she’d come to realize that all the good professors really were taken and even if she had made a decision all her decisions were inferior to the Divination professor. She’d also been interrupted by Dumbledore appearing at their table; but that was irrelevant.

Hermione made something of a face at this but seemed too in favor of solidarity in front of adversity to say anything out loud. Dumbledore simply took the words in, his own face impossible to read, even as his eyes glittered and then he said, “I believe that, given the present circumstances, it is best that I serve as your head of house.”

And Lily could almost imagine hearing a pin drop.

“He can’t do that.” Lily couldn’t help but think, but he could, because she had already pushed them past the bounds of things that couldn’t be done. There were no rules out here where Default existed, they were in uncharted territory, and Dumbledore had made his first move.

“Well, isn’t that convenient?” Wizard Lenin commented but even he couldn’t help but be impressed at how Dumbledore had turned something like Default to his favor. If this was chess then that truly was a masterful play.

Luna Lovegood appeared to be the only one capable of taking this in stride as she smiled over at Dumbledore and asked, “Oh, are you going to tell us our house colors then? I’ve always been partial to blue and yellow; but sometimes its confining to only have one or two colors. But what is the default, sorry Default, color? What is the color that all colors are born as before they make up their minds?”

“White.” Hermione said, her eyebrows lowering dangerously as she stared forward at Dumbledore and Lily tried to process what had just happened.

“Really?” Luna asked sounding a bit surprised.
“White reflects all colors, black absorbs them.” Hermione explained dully before adding, “It’s a muggle science thing.”

Luna looked down at herself with a thoughtful frown, “I don’t know if I’d look very good in white or black. It also seems so... sad for school colors. Like all the colors have faded or else haven’t chosen what they want to be yet; forever endless possibility.”

Hermione, Luna, and even Rabbit considered this statement for a moment thinking on the nature of colors while Dumbledore patiently waited for their attention to turn back to him.

Lily meanwhile had finally been able to parse the fact that Dumbledore had declared himself the de facto authority figure for Default and cut off whatever rambling conversation about colors was going on to bring up a few objections.

“Aren’t you a bit busy for that sort of thing, head of house I mean?” Lily asked trying to think of the responsibilities a head of house would have, “After all, you’d have to discipline us, give us our schedules, meet with the prefects, not to mention coaching the quidditch team… And the house points, we can’t forget about the house points.” Besides if she remembered right from Wizard Lenin’s rants Dumbledore had fingers in many pies outside of Hogwarts even; Dumbledore did not have time for all the bullshit that Snape had to deal with on a daily basis.

Not that anyone did have time for the bullshit Snape dealt with on a daily basis but that was why he was a miserable middle aged ex cultist who made it his mission in life to make as many children cry as possible.

“I think I’ll manage, Miss Potter.” Dumbledore said with that too cheery grandfather-esq smile he liked to wear, “And I have been a head of house before, Gryffindor’s in fact, and it’s always good to return to old things every once in a while.”

For a moment she could only stare at him as she realized he was perfectly serious and more he had the means and will to go through with it. Dumbledore really was going to place himself as the head of Default and she couldn’t think of a good enough reason here and now to get him to pick someone else. He was going to coach their quidditch team, talk to them about their behavioral problems, oversee detentions, he was willing to do all of it and there was nothing she could say right now to stop him.

But that did mean she had lost the war.
“Are you sure you want to do that?” She asked, coldly, because certainly Snape had realized by the end that he had taken on more than he could chew. Inserting himself in a position of authority did not mean Dumbledore had control over her or her actions; on the contrary it meant he’d placed himself in the front lines. And as many in Albania would attest, you did not want to be in the front lines.

“Yes, Miss Potter, I’m quite certain.”

Well then, she’d see him eat those words.

Before Lily could contemplate this too much further Hermione interrupted with a rather impatient tone of voice, “Great, now that this is settled, would you mind giving us our schedules and a dormitory?”

“In a moment, Miss Granger, but before we go through with this I would like to make something clear.” He paused, looked them each in the eye, the twinkle in his own dimming slightly with the sobriety of the topic. His next words he said carefully, slowly, seeing that they sunk in deep into their hearts.

“None of you have to choose Default as your house, not you Miss Potter who was sorted into Slytherin, you Miss Granger who was sorted into Gryffindor, you Mister Rabbitson who also was in Slytherin, or even you Miss Lovegood who was sorted into Default. Between the four houses there are virtues and paths aplenty, and you will find your path inside…”

“If that was true would I be sitting here?” Hermione asked and before he or anyone else could say anything to that she stood and made her way to the door, “If you’re not going to give us our schedules or find us a dormitory we’ll do it ourselves, sir.”

Hermione’s knuckles were white as she held the door handle, her eyes hard, and Lily found herself torn. On the one hand this Hermione was much more to the point and efficient in conversations and meetings than she had been the year before but on the other hand… On the other hand a lot had been lost.

But this was irrelevant, because Hermione was now the new Hermione, and there was no point in looking back on the Hermiones that could have or would have been.

Lily stood, agreeing that the conversation was essentially over, and Rabbit being the thoughtless mimic that he was stood as well leaving Luna Lovegood as the only one still sitting.
“Default has always been a true house, even if no one believes in it or wishes to believe in it, that’s how you know when things are true. If they persist even when you wish your hardest that they aren’t there, then you know that they’re real.” Luna insisted looking somewhat dismayed by Dumbledore’s dismissal of her new house, leaving the rest of them to stare at her in mild confusion.

“It’s like she’s an infinitely more poetic version of you.” Wizard Lenin said with little to no inflection in his voice, only the accompanying thought that there must be something very wrong with Luna Lovegood for her to sound so much like Lily.

“I have no idea what you’re talking about.” Lily replied, which she didn’t, Luna just happened to have the correct idea about things which put her in a very lonely boat with Lily and sometimes the odd duck like Flamel.

But, as shown by her insistence on explaining herself to Dumbledore, Luna Lovegood still had a long way to go.

“...And I have no idea how to respond to that.”

No one else did either. Hermione was still standing by the door looking back with a blank look on her face, Lily standing blinking down at Luna, Dumbledore watching them all with a perplexed expression, and Rabbit gazing at absolutely nothing.

Finally, Dumbledore said in a tone that seemed almost defeated, “I will distribute your schedules tomorrow, with the rest of your classmates. As for your dormitory, there is a door on the seventh floor by the portrait of a troll, should you pass that wall three times and think of your dormitory it will appear.”

And with that Hermione was out the door slamming it behind her so loudly that all of Dumbledore’s silver instruments rattled; leaving the rest of them behind.

“Oh, that son of a bitch!” Meanwhile Wizard Lenin was very upset about something Dumbledore had just said, but was quickly retreating into her subconscious muttering all the while, and making it clear that he possibly hated Dumbledore more than he’d hated him even before.

“Lenin?”
There was no response, not even an echo, and it seemed that Wizard Lenin was officially done for the day. After crazy house elves, Default, and now Dumbledore it looked like Wizard Lenin had reached his limit and would not be coming out for a very long time.

It was probably for the best anyway, Wizard Lenin was almost never helpful when it came to Dumbledore, and usually only managed to give her giant migraines that lasted days.

“Are we done, then?” Lily asked when it seemed that none of them had anything else to say.

“Almost, I’m sure you’re eager to see your new quarters.” Here Dumbledore hesitated and looked at Luna, “I’d like one final word with Miss Potter, before the evening is out, and of course you, Miss Lovegood and Mister Rabbitson, are free to take as many lemon drops as you like while you’re leaving.”

Luna and Rabbit said nothing, just looked at the pile of lemon drops, cautiously they both stood and Luna took a handful of the yellow balls and placed them into her pockets before giving Lily and Dumbledore one final somewhat worried glance.

“Make sure he doesn’t eat anything important.” Lily said, referring to Rabbit, and Luna nodded slowly before pulling Rabbit along

And then she and Dumbledore were alone once again.

Immediately it became clear that the last conversation, the one that others had been present for, had been ultimately meaningless. That helpful grandfather persona that he had been wearing, rather ineffectually, dripped from sober and tired old man in its place.

Lily said nothing.

They waited in the silence, listening to Dumbledore’s instruments (always measuring unknown and ineffable quantities with silver needles and whirling dials), neither apparently willing to branch out from banalities like who would serve as the head of Default.

Perhaps they wouldn’t say anything to each other after all, Lily found herself thinking, because they
just seemed stuck waiting for the other one to summarize everything first.

Finally, Dumbledore said, “I’m afraid I’m at a loss for words.”

Before she could ask why he would say anything at all, if he had nothing to say, he continued, “The night Miss Granger told me the events surrounding last Christmas and later when you remained missing and Albania burned; I thought of a thousand ways I might confront you but I’m afraid… I’m afraid they’ve all slipped my mind.”

And just what had Hermione Granger told Albus Dumbledore? Surely it wasn’t everything, because if Dumbledore thought in the same manner as Flamel, they wouldn’t be having this conversation.

They would be having a conversation about Death instead.

He sighed and leaned back in his chair, eyeing her speculatively, and then asked, “Are you aware that the young Voldemort was once a student in this castle?”

She shook her head dumbly, an instinct reaction as Wizard Lenin’s presence raced to the front of her mind telling her that Eleanor Potter (the Eleanor Potter Dumbledore had crafted) wouldn’t have looked that far back into the past, perhaps wouldn’t have put two and two together that if one is an English wizard of any caliber then one must attend Hogwarts.

Dumbledore didn’t seem to believe her answer, or at least, didn’t contemplate it but instead continued, “He was a very brilliant student but even back then he showed violent and dark tendencies in his interests and his magic. I alone out of the faculty found myself wary of him and what he might become when he stepped foot out of Hogwarts… I confronted him on a number of occasions when he was a child; seemingly to no effect in retrospect but I didn’t hesitate to do or say what I felt needed to be done. And yet, I have no idea what to say to you, because you have done what he could not have even dared at the time.”

Inside her mind Wizard Lenin was on the verge of telling her to erase his memories, change his perceptions, but it had been too many months and there would be too many consequences now. Erasing Dumbledore’s memories would mean rewriting Snape’s, possibly Hermione’s, and so on until she’d altered everything in Hogwarts to suit her purpose.

Lily for her own part, wasn’t sure how to take what Dumbledore was saying, because in her own way she had done what Dumbledore did all those years ago. She had done what needed to be done
when no one would step in for her and Dumbledore was very hypocritical for having noticed her actions only to disregard them.

“You wouldn’t get rid of Quirrell.” Lily noted, as if this one sentence alone refuted everything Dumbledore was implying. And it did, because if Dumbledore had listened to her warning then Quirrell might not be dead, certainly Hermione Granger wouldn’t have been involved, and Lily probably would have held back on A.L.F.

She wondered if he’d told Hermione that, that Lily had actually discussed Quirrell with Dumbledore and that Dumbledore had disregarded it, essentially condemning Hermione to be an orphan.

“You are correct, and in that I failed you and Hogwarts.” Dumbledore said for a moment appearing contrite before adding, “It is a sad fact of life that sometimes, when you offer warnings or advice, you will be disregarded. But it is the actions you take afterwards that prove your worth as a human being. Surely, Miss Potter, you could have found a means beyond murder.”

So that’s what it was, he hadn’t even been there and he’d already made the verdict.

But was it so different from what he’d done to Grindelwald? Sure, Grindelwald was still alive, but if he’d killed him off sooner then there’d be a lot more ancient and noble houses still alive in France today. And instead of simply dying Grindelwald had rotted in prison for almost half a century… Not to mention that at the end of things Squirrel probably hadn’t even existed anymore; the other Wizard Lenin had taken the wheel long before their confrontation.

But these were things that Dumbledore wouldn’t hear, not from her, not in this conversation. It was clear that he’d already made up his mind and had no idea what to say.

Lily stood slowly, feeling the room grow cold, and decided that enough was enough and that she really didn’t have to have this private little chat with Dumbledore. There would be other times and other places, especially if he was going to be her head of house, and really she had better things to think about than placating Dumbledore; especially when he knew next to nothing.

So she offered him a thin, somewhat strained smile, and said, “If that’s what you like to think then go ahead and think it.”

With that she turned on her heel and made her way to the door giving Dumbledore a parting glance, “I suppose I’ll see you tomorrow, then, with the schedules.”
And like Hermione before her Lily slammed the door shut and made her way down the narrow spiral stair case.

She was beginning to understand just why Dumbledore always got on Wizard Lenin’s nerves.
The Merits of Tea and Not-Tea

In which Luna Lovegood and Lily discuss the merits of tea and not-tea, Wizard Lenin decides that ultimately Dumbledore’s schemes are irrelevant, and in 1981 Gilderoy Lockhart once had oysters for dinner with a fabulous woman.

Lily ended her second first day of Hogwarts in a dark and empty room observing the red stone she had placed on the floor in front of her. It was the size of Wizard Lenin’s hand, jagged and dark in the center, as if there was some unbeat heart within the stone that could only be glimpsed in the correct lighting. It was unpolished, untamed, and looked the same as it had when she’d first found it in Dumbledore’s hat and she imagined that it looked the same as when it had first been given to Flamel by Death a thousand years ago.

Still, even though it commanded attention, had been the catalyst of so many events, it seemed so very material and insignificant. Like it could be any stone, every stone, and that it didn’t have the power to change what seemed like natural and unforgiving laws even to wizards.

A stone that wasn’t really a stone, that did only what it was advertised to do, that had mislead her and Wizard Lenin and probably even Flamel for more time than any of them had expected. The stone, Lily had realized that morning, wasn’t the answer and would never be the answer, it was only something that hinted at the answer and deflected from the truth.

The answer was tea.

She’d returned from her meeting with Dumbledore in a somewhat sourer mood than when she’d started. Not that this was new after meeting with Dumbledore, almost to be expected, but still a little disheartening. Especially since she had the nagging suspicion that if Squirrel had died by spontaneous combustion, by uncontrollable bursts of light, by anything grand and magical she and Dumbledore probably wouldn’t have had that conversation.

Wizard Lenin was right, it was the stabbing, wizards didn’t like stabbing. They didn’t like physical attacks, blood, anything that reminded them that they weren’t that different from the muggles after all. The killing curse might be unforgivable but that was only because wizards were too efficient or else too classy to beat someone to death with a frying pan.

“No, at this point Dumbledore would probably be wary of you no matter what actions you took to
deal with Quirrell.” Wizard Lenin mused, thinking that at this point it was already far too late. The fault wasn’t in the method, Wizard Lenin felt, but in the fact that she had meant it.

“Did Dumbledore want him to get the stone?” Lily asked, because really that had been the only other outcome and even then Hermione still probably would have ended up dead or else traumatized and handless.

“I imagine he had some tedious and infuriating task set up in the third floor corridor but never the less he did want you involved. He advertised its existence to the entire school after all.” According to Wizard Lenin, Dumbledore was all about those tedious trials where you learned something about yourself. The majority of their conversations, which had taken place when Wizard Lenin was still in school, turned into ridiculous mind games designed to make Wizard Lenin feel bad for not having any real friends and having no strong moral convictions. That or they turned into cryptic warnings and even more cryptic threats about the path Wizard Lenin was traveling down.

“So he wanted me to be killed by Quirrell then?” Lily clarified, because if she wasn’t supposed to do something about Quirrell, but she was supposed to look into the stone, then there weren’t too many other options on what could have happened.

“I doubt it… Most likely it was a test.” Wizard Lenin said as if just realizing this himself.

“A test? For Quirrell?” She asked.

“No, a test for you, for both of you,” Wizard Lenin paused for a moment and the events of that night replayed in her mind in grainy quality as if being shown by an old projector, “He wanted to see just what was after the stone and if it had a familiar face but more he wanted to see what you would do with it.”

For a moment she paused in the hallway, as everything sunk in, it had been a social experiment. More intricate and more risky than Skinner’s House but a social behavioral experiment all the same; where she and Quirrell had been placed in a closed and controlled environment with an irresistible piece of bait was placed between them.

They had been lab rats pulling levers and Wizard Lenin couldn’t bring himself to disagree with that analogy.

She started walking again, finally reaching the top of the seventh stair case and making her way to
the wall Dumbledore had mentioned. She’d been in Dumbledore’s game for a while and it’d never really bothered her before, the Dursleys and the cupboards, but somehow this was different. Despite Dumbledore being the headmaster she hadn’t realized that she was moving into the heart of his territory, that Hogwarts belonged to him, and not to her or even to Wizard Lenin.

“It doesn’t matter.” Wizard Lenin interrupted before she could think on it further.

Wasn’t that her line?

“It doesn’t matter because you are only on the board, that doesn’t mean you are his piece in the game, even if he moves all the pieces around you that does not make you his.” Wizard Lenin explained and the chessboard expanded inside her mind, his pale fingers toying with the bishop, and pale eyes meeting Dumbledore’s without hesitation, “Regardless of what he believes he can control, of what he believes he can observe, nothing changes the fact that the stone fell into our hands at the end of the year and not back into his. There is nothing he can do to prevent me from regaining a body and that more than anything else proves that he has failed.”

She hadn’t thought about it in those terms before. Somehow, despite getting what she had ultimately wanted, last year had not felt like something she could be proud of. It hadn’t felt like a victory, it’d been more like a victory against Dudley, where she still got a black eye out of the whole thing and the only satisfaction she had was that knowing for the next week or so Dudders would have an even worse one (even though she usually would end up in the cupboard and wouldn’t actually be able to see it in person).

It wasn’t satisfying, it still wasn’t satisfying, probably because they still didn’t have a body and the stone was only mildly useful at best. It still seemed like a lot of wasted effort for a rock that didn’t even work right and she probably had never even needed in the first place.

With that she rounded the corner and found herself face to face with an elaborate door next to a troll painting, one she didn’t think had been there earlier, and the very sight of it immediately deflated any of Wizard Lenin’s determination and brought back his irritation and her migraine.

“For someone who doesn’t even know I exist, or at the very least only suspects it, he goes out of his way to make my life hellish.” Wizard Lenin muttered, as if this was a personal insult to him specifically rather than just a room.

Lily just opened the doors and stepped inside.
The room was decorated in every color imaginable, apparently not quite sure what the Default color was either, and looked like the exact opposite of the Slytherin Dormitory. It was a room, there was furniture in it, a fireplace even but that was about where the similarities stopped.

For one thing it was one room, the living room and bedrooms had all been thrown together so that four beds were scattered haphazardly throughout the space looking like dandelion seeds that had caught a stray breeze. Each bed, instead of sporting the same covers or even general colors, looked completely different and recognizably belonged to each Default.

Rabbit’s looked like it had been stolen from a hospital, consisting of nothing but a white blanket, a single white pillow, and a black metal frame. Luna Lovegood’s, at least Lily assumed it was Luna’s because it wasn’t Hermione’s and it sure as hell wasn’t Lily’s, wasn’t even a bed so much as it was a mattress overwhelmed by pillows and bizarre plush creatures that sported wings, horns, spots, stripes, and basically anything Lily had and hadn’t seen on any animal. Hermione’s was right next to the bookshelf for easy access, and was probably the most dignified looking of the pack of beds, with dark covers and ornate pillows. And Lily’s… it must be Lily’s because it couldn’t be anyone else’s, she didn’t know what to make of it.

It was a bed, which was more than a cupboard, but she couldn’t really place the decorating. There were hints of Lenin’s Communism in the blacks and the reds but beyond that… She didn’t know where it had come from.

Walking over to it she saw that underneath it, almost out of sight, was a handle and a square set of grooves in the floor, as if there was a trap door.

She reached down to trace the outline but was interrupted by Hermione’s voice.

“It looks… It looks like he decorated it himself.” Hermione said slowly, stunned, sitting an oversized purple chair by the fireplace. Luna was sitting in the other chair (a polka dotted turquoise monstrosity of a chair), nodding sympathetically over tea cup filled with lemon drops taken from Dumbledore. Rabbit meanwhile perched on the back of Luna’s chair like some demented frighteningly balanced bird and nodded as well, albeit with less sympathy.

Every once in a while Luna would pop a lemon drop into her mouth and look as if she was in severe pain and then would refill Hermione’s own overflowing tea cup of lemon drops.

“Like that portrait, what even is it?” Hermione said motioning to a large, blinking, portrait of John J. Rambo astride a unicorn like creature with a slew of bodies at his feet. At Hermione’s question the man in the portrait cried, “First blood! They drew first blood!” and the unicorn creature reared up in
Luna examined the portrait carefully and said, “That’s the unimegalodon, an ancient and rare unicorn that now lives in burrows underground. That man must be quite the zoologist if he managed to find one and coax it from hiding.”

Hermione just stared back at Luna as if she had no idea what Luna had just said and Luna in returned offered a charming smile and a few lemon drops.

Finally Hermione said, “Luna, I don’t think that’s a zoologist.”

They both turned back to Rambo then, Luna cocking her head and taking in the sight of the camouflage clothing, the knife, the multiple guns, and the large amount of blood in the portrait. Now that Lily looked closely it looked a bit like Albania, she might even be able to name the nearby wizarding village if she tried.

“So?” Luna asked and Hermione just blandly responded, “Really.”

“You know, he does seem a bit violent.” Luna noted, somewhat puzzled by this as if she wasn’t sure how this and the unimegalodon fit together.

“…It’s even worse than I imagined.” Was all that Wizard Lenin could think to say to any of it as if his greatest nightmare had just begun to unfurl and that even worse was yet to come.

Wizard Lenin never did appreciate Rambo, or any action film really, which was a bit weird because you’d think the great revolutionary wouldn’t shy away from bloodshed but there was something he just didn’t like about gratuitous violence. He never had, that wasn’t to say he’d shy away from violence, just that he didn’t spend any time on it or wanted to spend any time on it. He’d do it to prove a point, if he felt it had to be done, but that didn’t mean he liked it or wanted to spend any free time on it. He usually left that sort of thing to his underlings and presented it like it was a personal favor letting them torture his victims. If she had to put it in a word she’d say violence, excess of blood, made him uncomfortable.

“That’s not my problem with the portrait.”

“Is it the unicorn thing?” Which she had to admit, combined with the bloodshed, the unicorn thing
did look a bit unsettling.

“… It’s the combination and the thought that this is what will happen if you and the Lovegood girl put your heads together.” He said ominously, his feeling that there must be something horrifically wrong with Luna Lovegood only growing stronger.

Lily, personally, thought it was a much more interesting portrait than any of the other ones in the castle and had no idea what Wizard Lenin was talking about.

“Well, it is John J. Rambo.” Lily offered as means of explanation and the other three turned to her, apparently not having heard her enter.

“You’re late.” Hermione commented with narrowed eyes, probably wondering just what it was that Lily and Dumbledore were talking about up there, not that it was any of her business.

Just because Hermione was now in the know didn’t mean she would be told everything, Lily wondered if Hermione had realized that, or if she had thought that she had a right to everything after the train and Quirrell.

Perhaps she did, but Lily didn’t feel too sympathetic after that last little talk with Dumbledore, being in the wrong place at the wrong time didn’t excuse whatever Hermione herself might have told the old man.

So Lily just shrugged, leaning over the tea cups of lemon drops, before summoning her own cup and filling it instead with tea, “Well, you know Dumbledore.”

Wizard Lenin understood perfectly well what she meant by that, only time would tell if Hermione Granger did too.

But neither Hermione nor Luna responded to this but instead stared at the tea as if it was the most miraculous thing they’d ever seen since the invention of sliced bread. Lily looked down at the tea, it was tea, not anything special; a normal blend without cream, sugar, or even biscuits to accompany it.

“You… Did you just create tea?” Hermione asked slowly.
Lily took a drink of said tea, “It’s a lot better, and less likely to be poisoned, than the lemon drops.”

“No that’s not…” Hermione stopped, frustration mounting over her features for a moment, and started again, “How did you make tea?”

“With great concentration and force of will.” Lily responded, which wasn’t necessarily true but sounded good, it actually didn’t take all that much concentration to make tea. It was much harder to unravel wards without destroying them completely or even to battle trolls with a giant broadsword than it was to make tea.

“But I read…” Hermione started, looking almost panicked, her mind wandering back to whatever she’d read, “I read that you can’t do that, no one can.”

Lily looked down at the tea speculatively and offered it over to Hermione, “Would you like to try?”

Hermione made no move to take it, but Luna did, almost reverently looking over at Lily then at the tea then back at Lily before taking a sip. Hermione still appeared to be in shock, then she appeared to remember all she’d seen, what they’d discussed on the train and the knowledge fell into her eyes that Lily wasn’t like Hermione.

The rules weren’t the same for Lily.

“I’m done.” Hermione finally said, standing from her seat, throwing her hands in the air and wandering over towards the door that presumably lead to the bathroom (mostly because written in very large letters on it was the word bathroom), “I officially can’t handle anything else. No more portraits, no more dormitories, and no more Ellie Potter.” Here she fixed her eyes on Lily as if warning Lily about the dangers of being Lily, “Unless the room is on fire pretend I’m not even here until morning.”

She slammed the door forcefully shut leaving Lily, Luna, and Rabbit behind.

Lily took the seat Hermione had vacated with a sigh, wondering if she should make another cup since Luna didn’t seem like she’d be handing the original cup back anytime soon.

“Is it some kind of not-tea?” Luna asked still staring into the depths of the cup she’d been offered, eyeing the leaves at the bottom critically as if they might spell out the secrets of the universe.
“No, it’s just tea.” Lily said, not sure what not-tea would even taste like, probably like coffee. Luna seemed somewhat confused by this even glancing up at Rabbit perched above her with a small frown.

“But Lepur Rabbitson is a not-person and a not-rabbit, you said.” Luna pointed out to which Rabbit offered a nod of approval at her understanding.

“That’s right, but that’s Rabbit, Rabbit isn’t tea.” Lily said, as if this made all the difference, which it sort of did because she’d had to dig deeper to find Rabbit when she’d summoned him into the universe. Since then she’d been careful on how much she stretched reality, just how many strings at a time she could pull, and fortunately tea didn’t require nearly as many strings.

Luna looked, if anything, more confused and eventually handed the tea back to Lily.

“What separates a thing from a not?” Luna asked, staring across at Lily without blinking, as if by staring long enough she could find the answer written on Lily’s face.

Lily opened her mouth to answer then closed it realizing she didn’t really know, only that Rabbit sat dead center in the latter category and that the tea didn’t. She’d never really thought about it that much before, mostly just attempted to describe to people why Rabbit was dangerous and couldn’t be left unsupervised, which no one had ever listened to.

“Is Default a not-house because even the headmaster doesn’t believe in it?” Luna prompted her robin’s egg eyes staring at her unblinking, “Are nargles, wrackspurts, and even crumple horned snorcklacks not-creatures because people don’t know they’re real?”

“No, that’s not it, if that was the case then Rabbit would just be a rabbit because everyone says he is. Not being is a state of being, just in the negative direction, the tea clearly is tea.” Nobody had ever asked about it this much and she was finding it difficult to describe usually people believed her or they didn’t and most fell into the latter category so having someone ask why, how, or in this case what, was a new experience.

Luna nodded slowly, as if attempting to understand but not quite grasping it, still staring over at the tea cup as if it held all the answers to every unanswered question. Finally she said, “I’ve never seen a not-something in my life before, I’m glad I got the chance, maybe someday I’ll see more, perhaps the crumpled horned snorcklack is a not as well and that’s why it’s so hard to find.”
She then stood, patting Rabbit on the head, and wandered over to her own bed and then like the unimegalodon buried herself deep within the pillows until only a few strands of blonde hair and a single striped sock were visible.

Lily glanced down at the tea as well but it was still only tea.

“Don’t you dare ask me for advice on this.” Wizard Lenin cut in before she could pursue the thought further.

“If you have time to worry about the existential circumstances of tea then you have time to get me a body.” He added, which was a fair point.

That idea stuck with her though on until the next day when she’d find it again and think about it for what it was. At the time though she’d just sighed, glad the day was finally over, and made her way to her own mysterious bed.

“Good morning students!” The next morning featured Dumbledore dressed to match the Default dormitory bright yellow striped robes with a hat that looked like a mushroom tripping on mushrooms.

It also featured the still mostly empty Default table with its white mascot-less banner overhead and the rest of Hogwarts staring at her, Rabbit, and Hermione Granger for a variety of reasons. If stares could stab then they would all be well and truly impaled by now, but Rabbit was completely indifferent and the new traumatized Hermione was too stoic to give into the staring, only Luna and Lily took to people watching.

There was the Slytherin table featuring all her favorite first year friends like Pansy Parkinson, Tracey Davis, Draco Malfoy, and so many others whose names she didn’t even bother to remember while in Albania. Then there was the Gryffindor table featuring a concerned and sheepish looking Neville, looking almost as uncomfortable as her, the Weasley doppelgangers who also seemed uncomfortable as if deciding whether they liked the new situation or not, a somewhat irritated looking Ron Weasley, and everyone else she’d never even meant. Once again even Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw had taken to staring at her, when she wasn’t even sure she actually knew the name of a single person in either of those houses.

(“Do I have wrackspurts on my head?” Luna had asked Lily when they first sat down, and when Lily glanced at Luna’s head the girl added, “They’re quite small and hard to see and make you very worried about all sorts of things.”
“We all have wrackspurts on our heads.” It was the only thing she could think of to say. Truth be told she was distracted by the thought that all her work had been for nothing because with mob intent like that she would still be swarmed at the first opportunity.

“Good morning, headmaster.” Luna responded while the rest of them sort of stared at Dumbledore blankly making the entire situation more than a little awkward. Before Dumbledore could say anything Luna continued, “Headmaster, I ate some of your lemon drops, I think you should invest in some new flavors because the lemon kind are quite terrible.”

“Really?” Dumbledore asked looking mildly surprised, “I’ve always fancied them myself and no one’s ever said anything before.”

“It’s too early in the morning to be speaking with Albus Dumbledore.” Wizard Lenin grumbled beginning to realize that they would probably see Dumbledore on a daily basis now that he was their head of house.

“Don’t you have schedules to distribute?” Hermione interjected before Luna could say something more about the lemon drops.

“Ah, yes of course Miss Granger, these are yours.” Carefully Dumbledore handed a schedule to each of them and before anyone could say anything Hermione was gone headed off to whatever the first class of the day was without a glance behind.

It was beginning to dawn on Lily that Dumbledore really wasn’t all that good with children.

Lily glanced down at her schedule and once again Mondays proved to be terrible featuring Defense as the first class then Potions. She made a face, she was hoping she’d avoid Lockhart and Snape for a while longer, but she supposed there was no helping it particularly if Dumbledore was in charge of scheduling.

The other courses looked roughly the same, nothing new and exciting had been added, and even History of Magic was still once a week.

“Professor, there’s a mistake, my schedule and Lepur’s schedules are different from Ellie Potter’s.” Luna said comparing her schedule to Lily’s and Rabbit’s at the same time, Lily glanced over and saw that this was right, Luna and Rabbit didn’t have Defense first.
“That is because Miss Potter is in her second year of Hogwarts along with Miss Granger while you have just begun your education.” Dumbledore explained with a somewhat softer look in his eyes as if he understood Luna Lovegood’s concern but would not budge because of it, as if this was the price of Default.

“No, no Rabbit’s not a first year, Rabbit’s a second year in my second year classes.” Lily said, the last thing she needed was Rabbit wandering around by himself without any supervision.

“Mr. Rabbitson did not pass a single homework assignment or exam and I’m afraid that no professor felt he was ready to attend second year courses. There were mitigating circumstances, of course, but never the less he must understand the basics before he can progress to the next year.” Dumbledore said with a sigh, not meeting Lily or Rabbit’s gaze.

“But I didn’t even take any of my finals!” Lily pointed out, both she and Rabbit had been gone for half of the year.

“And every single professor, Miss Potter, agreed that there was no doubt that you would pass whatever exam they provided you no matter the difficulty. Many, in fact, feel that they are holding you back by only progressing you to your second year along with your peers.” Dumbledore added with a strange glint in his eyes as if he was trying to be proud of this but was also wary and a little sad, as if she could have been so much more if she tried and hadn’t stabbed Quirrell.

Lily didn’t care about what people said in staff meetings though, she cared about Rabbit not eating things, and if anyone was in their right minds they would too, “Rabbit can’t be left alone or there will be dire consequences!”

Dumbledore looked over at Rabbit, uncomprehending, looking worn all of the sudden as if he too was tired of having to interact with her. As if this was a two way street they were on where both of them would be exhausted by each other’s presence.

“Miss Potter, Mr. Rabbitson will be fine and if not fine he will improve. His professors will work with him on what he missed, his classmates will support him, you his housemates will support him, and I too will always be available…”

He went on but Lily stopped listening because he just didn’t get it. He saw, or at least was pretending to see, the beautiful and silent Albanian refugee. She couldn’t let this happen, she’d have to bring Rabbit with her anyway, or they’d have to leave Hogwarts because being at Hogwarts was not
worth letting Rabbit loose. Before she could think on it any further though Luna tugged at her sleeve.

“I can look after Lepur Rabbitson.” Luna said with a soft, dazed, and somewhat regretful smile. Lily felt her anger and panic drip from her as once again here was her answer, just like the night before, Luna Lovegood had provided a way out by understanding what no one had ever bothered to listen to.

It was not the most anyone had ever offered to do for her, but still, still it felt…

“Thank you, Luna.” Lily said slowly, not quite tasting the words as they left her mouth, then she spared one final glance at Dumbledore, “Until later then, your excellency.”

She wouldn’t have been so eager to leave if she had realized that the classroom would be filled with Gryffindors and Slytherins.

“Oh goddammit, what are they all doing here?” Lily asked when they stepped in, all her favorite familiar faces staring back at her just like they had at breakfast, only this time there was no Default table to dissuade them.

“Lily there’s only four of you in total, if he split by house then that’d be half as many students in a class. He’s just going to tack you on to other classes that already exist.” Wizard Lenin said, more exasperated and irritated than angry, but he should be because this meant she had to deal with Ron and Pansy Parkinson in the same class. That meant that he had to deal with Pansy Parkinson and Ron in the same class and she didn’t think he realized what that meant.

“I was here last year, I know what that means.” He said, still only vaguely exasperated and irritated and still not grasping the severity of the situation.

By then though it was too late and what she’d been avoiding since the train ride occurred.

Immediately Lily was swarmed, surrounded by shoving Gryffindors and Slytherins alike, feeling as if all personal space she once had was now being devoured.

“Potter!”
“Ellie!”

“What happened this summer, Potter? Half the nation looked for you!”

“Potter!”

“How’d you escape from Quirrell?”

“Did Quirrell really kidnap you?”

“Why’d you join Default?!”

“Potter you blockhead, you can’t leave Slytherin!”

“If you were going to leave Slytherin why didn’t you just join Gryffindor?!”

None of these questions Lily actually wanted to answer and she didn’t know why half the people asking them even cared. She couldn’t even see Neville in the mob, he’d probably been pushed out early on, and instead she found herself surrounded by people who she was either entirely indifferent to or didn’t even really like.

Didn’t they have better things to worry about?

“No, they don’t.” Wizard Lenin answered, thinking something along the lines of them being twelve years old and this being all the explanation necessary.

No one even seemed to notice the man who had stepped in through the door, that sparkling, golden, prince charming with a beaming smile ready to teach the younger generation all they needed to know about defending themselves against the blackest of arts.

“Students,” Gilderoy Lockhart started and then his grin dropped slightly as none of the students turned to face him, well from what she could see over Millicent’s boulder like shoulder Hermione was looking at him, but it was more with distant curiosity than actual respect. New Hermione seemed
wary of giving any adult her complete trust and adulation which was so very different from how she had been only a few months ago.

“You will get back to Slytherin right now, Eleanor Potter, or I will tell my father…” Malfoy was screaming in her ear, which, she had no idea why Lucius Malfoy of all people would care whether she was in Slytherin or not.

“He doesn’t.”

“Students,” Gilderoy Lockhart started again, a little more flatly this time, his smile dripping painfully from his face.

“No, she’ll go into Gryffindor, where she was supposed to be the whole time!” Ron stated for her, also loudly into her ear.

“Like bloody hell is Ellie Potter a Gryffindor.” Zabini cut in before Lily could say anything for or against the idea of her going into Gryffindor.

“Students!” Lockhart finally shouted, managing to grab everyone’s attention, “Take your seats, class has started!”

They all looked at each other for a moment and scattered to their various seats leaving Lily free to find the nearest open seat which was nowhere near Hermione or even Neville but instead was next to Daphne Greengrass who looked more than a little alarmed to be sitting next to Eleanor Potter.

When they’d all settled into their seats Lockhart restarted, with that same charming grin that he’d initially had, as if it’d never left his face, “Students, I am proud and honored to be your new Defense professor. Of course, I feel that I am worthy of this role after years of heroic deeds and acts to shake the ages, it is not any man who can teach Defense Against the Dark Arts at Hogwarts.”

He began leaning against his desk, head tilted as if he was basking in heavenly light, which looked a bit odd in the classroom as there wasn’t any divine light coming in from the ceiling. In the audience there were a few dubious faces but for the most part people seemed to be taking him seriously.

Gilderoy Lockhart was a little after Wizard Lenin’s time, so Wizard Lenin didn’t know of him, but it seemed like he was pretty well known and pretty famous for hunting down dark creatures and
occasionally dark wizards. Beyond that she didn’t know too many of the specifics, just what she’d heard around Riddle Incorporated after they’d had to pick up the books, vampires weren’t exactly fans of him or his work.

Of course, Lily hadn’t actually read the books, she’d just bought them and when she found there were about fourteen of them she’d started building forts with them in Riddle Incorporated’s back office.

Besides if it was anything close to as useless as the last Defense text book was then there really was no point.

She also figured she knew far more about not dying and facing dark lords and creatures than anyone in this room. Having a final showdown with not Wizard Lenin in the guise of Squirrel gave her a lot of experience.

Still, looking back now, perhaps she should have done some of that reading if only to find out who Lockhart really was.

“There was of course the hag incident, that tussle with the vampires, and so many others… It’s hard protecting the world, our own local celebrity Eleanor Potter can attest to that, but it’s not a thankless job, not at all.” He grinned over at all of them but specifically at her as he mentioned her name, his smile dazzling and bright, and his hair so very golden.

“Saving the world is its own reward, that’s what I want everyone in my class to learn, and if you try and learn then perhaps one day you may even be able to approach my level of expertise when it comes to acts of heroism and confronting dark and dangerous creatures and wizards. After all, you may remember that there was a time when I myself was only a student.” Here he laughed, a charming chuckle, as if this last sentence was supposed to be funny and a lot of people laughed with him. Like the idea of Gilderoy Lockhart as a student was almost as inconceivable as imagining the dark lord Hindenburg as a student.

“Now, pop quiz on the reading!” A slew of papers made their way to each of their desks and there were more than a few groans, “Now, now, in the heat of battle one must be ready for anything.”

Lily scanned the questions and stopped short, they didn’t seem… Well, she’d never had much respect for this class or Hogwarts in general but she’d expected something on trolls not ‘What is Professor Lockhart’s favorite color?’
She looked down to the next one, ‘Professor Lockhart, in 1981, once spoke with and had a dinner of oysters with this fabulous woman.’

Then to the next, and the next, well it appeared that she would be failing Defense because she had no idea how to answer any of these and more Wizard Lenin had no idea how to answer any of them. Some were about defense, such as asking how Gilderoy Lockhart slew a dozen vampires in the heart of the Soviet Union, but only in the barest way possible. The only thing they seemed to have in common was that they each centered around Gilderoy Lockhart himself.

“What is this?” She asked Wizard Lenin.

Some around her were starting to write, some looked puzzled, more than a few looked nervous probably having read as much of the books as she herself had and remembered even less.

She looked up at Lockhart, grinning, and looking directly at her. There was something in his eyes when he stared at her, something much sharper than cardboard, and again she had the feeling that he was looking at her in anticipation of something. He was excited by the prospect of Eleanor Potter, eager for something that had yet to occur, and while his outside would remain princely and charming his insides…

Something cold seemed to fall through her and she looked back down to her empty exam.

Carefully, with precision, she wrote across all the questions, “This is not a test.” She then crossed this out and started again, “This is a test within a test.” And again she crossed this out and wrote in steady dark writing, “This is a not-test.”

A few minutes later the quizzes were whisked away from them and floated to the front of the on top of Lockhart’s desk. The man smiled, not that he had ever stopped smiling, he was always wearing one smile or another and all of them were blindingly white and dashing.

At that point she stopped paying attention, even after he released pixies from a cage and dove under his desk, she just stood and slowly made her way back to the Default dormitory without a glance behind her at the pixie filled chaos. There she’d pull open the trap door and walk inside, the wooden steps creaking beneath her feet as she descended into the dark half-forgotten room, and then she’d placed the stone in front of her and stared at it.

Tea that was tea, tests that weren’t tests, somewhere in that labyrinth was Wizard Lenin’s body if
only she could turn left enough times. That was the answer, not the stone, but the tea and the
difference between pulling something from nothing and pulling it from everything. If she could tell
the difference, if she could find that small miniscule difference between something that was and
something that wasn’t, then she could do it.

It was time, they were ready.

“We’re not ready, you know nothing about anatomy, how a human body even works. You only
know what it looks like, an abstract human construct, but Lily I need a body. I want a body not a
golem!”

But he knew anatomy, had been studying it for years, and he would catch her where she went
wrong. It was past time, long past time, that they abandoned the easy and safe course.

“Having a philosophical discussion, which even you don’t understand, about tea and the absence of
tea does not mean that you are ready! I realize that I have been pushing that I have been…
desperate but that does not mean that I want to do it wrong. Lily, this is dangerous magic, you do
not toy with this sort of power.”

“Lenin,” She said inside her mind, and she could almost see him sitting across from her in the dark
room, pale and transparent, the stone between them as if it was nothing more than a gameboard. His
eyes were so terrified but also so hopeful and she could almost hear the quivering of his heart, “We
have always had the answer.”

He didn’t say it directly but all his fears began to pour to the surface of their shared consciousness
each bright, stark, and cutting.

The fear that there was no solution, that he would be trapped inside her forever, and that worse he
would grow accustomed to it. He feared that he already had, that he was only hesitating now because
he did not want to leave, that he was too used to only being the voice inside her head and nothing
more. That he had grown soft, inconsequential, and immaterial and that one day he wouldn’t even
consider leaving at all.

The fear that they wouldn’t be able to do it, that they’d produce something worse instead, and that
he’d lose his chance forever because they had been too impatient and hadn’t searched for the best
possible solution.
And then there was the almost unspoken, soft, fear (one that she shared) of where they would go now. What would happen if they succeeded, if Wizard Lenin was suddenly a Lenin that existed outside of her?

She reached across to the projected image of Wizard Lenin, to the Wizard Lenin that could be if they had the courage to take that first step, their hands met over the red stone and she imagined she could feel his cold fingers squeezing hers.

“Have faith, Lenin.”

With a deep breath she closed her eyes, pictured everything necessary in a body, and began to pull memory from the universe.
Monday evening, eight o’clock p.m.

The rest of Default was returning triumphant after their first two classes while Lily was sprawled over one of the chairs (which had decided to sport stripes instead of polka dots) staring moodily into the fireplace. No, that wasn’t right, they must have just triumphantly returned from dinner as Potions would have ended some time ago.

There they were, Hermione Granger, Luna Lovegood, a politely smiling Rabbit, and finally; to Lily’s complete lack of surprise, another Lily.

Except this Lily looked even worse than the Lily in the chair, she looked like she’d been recently hit by a logging truck, or at least the expression she had on her face did. Her Hogwarts uniform was wrinkled, deep circles had grooved themselves under her eyes, and she was standing stiffly behind Rabbit staring at nothing in particular making a point of particularly not staring at the Lily in the chair.

There was probably a third Lily around somewhere too, certainly there was the one that was still in the room beneath the room, but there was no telling if there was some other Lily around somewhere as well.

For a moment no one said anything, they all just sort of stared at each other, and then as usual it was Luna Lovegood who decided to address the Heffalump in the room.

“Are they both the real Ellie or is one of them a fake Ellie?” Luna asked, looking between the two different Lilys in growing excitement, “Does one of you only lie and one of you only tell the truth? Because if that’s the case then I think I know which door to pick!”

Luna didn’t seem to care that there weren’t any doors for her to choose and at this point Lily was certain that both she, and the other Lily, didn’t really care either.
“Ellie, it’s only Monday.” Hermione finally said, as if this was supposed to mean something to her. Of course it was only Monday, it’d been only Monday forever, if she ever got to Tuesday it’d be a bloody miracle.

“I haven’t slept in three days.” Lily, the Lily she currently was, the one in the chair, said only for the other Lily to correct her, “Seven, or eight, I’m losing count. I think I want to die, death is so much easier than this.”

It was true that Uncle Death never got her into these sorts of situations and she was beginning to appreciate that. Next time she saw him, in a train station where only one Lily could possibly exist in any given moment, she’d have to tell him how much she appreciated it.

(At that thought the hollow feeling in her head became even more horrifying. She tried to ignore it.)

“Do I even want to know?” Hermione asked, getting a very Lenin-esq expression on her face, as if she really didn’t want to know but realized that she was probably going to find out anyway. At the sight of it Lily felt her own eyes narrowing, even the other Lily seemed somewhat affected stiffening slightly, and decided that it was best not to comment or even think about it.

“Well, you’re not supposed to.” The Lily next to Hermione said with a sigh before giving the Lily in the chair a rather flat and unamused look as if this was somehow her problem, “Didn’t we synchronize watches or something, I can’t remember, either way looks like it didn’t work. Didn’t Lenin say there was a rule against this, like it will cause the universe to implode?”

“Who cares?” Lily in the chair groaned out just wishing that everyone and everything would stop talking. Plus they were both perfectly aware that the universe had always been imploding, that the fabric of time and space had always been unravelling, and that’s how they were able to get into these kinds of situations and synchronizing watches wouldn’t have done anything to prevent it.

“I don’t.” The other Lily replied back, “I don’t care about anything anymore. Who knew exhaustion was so emotionally draining? I don’t even care about that weird meeting I just had with Dumbledore.”

It was odd, watching the other Lily talk. It wasn’t like looking in a mirror, because she never stared at herself in a mirror that long, and the mirror was only a shallow copy of your image. In a way this was the first time Lily could see herself from an outside perspective, she’d never realized her hair was that red or her eyes that green before. Or how much smaller she was than Hermione, not really
shorter, just smaller more compact. There was a bit of Uncle Death’s leanness to her that Lily didn’t even know she possessed.

She also never realized how many wild hand gestures Lily had, or how dramatic she was when she talked, it was a sort of forced drama though not one that flowed naturally. It was something she’d picked up over the years from Wizard Lenin, the one man show, where every word that was significance must be said in a significant manner.

But that wasn’t addressing the fact that the other Lily had mentioned meetings and Dumbledore in the same sentence which was something the current Lily couldn’t quite handle at the moment.

“Which weird meeting with Dumbledore?” Because the Lily in the chair didn’t think the other Lily meant the one she’d just had about Quirrell and Default. Not that it couldn’t be that meeting, considering they’d just met with Dumbledore at the sorting ceremony, so by his calendar it wasn’t all that long ago…

“We have another one later, still today, well I do, you will. We’re now quidditch captains, congratulations to us, and tryouts start next Wednesday.”

“But it’s still Monday!” Lily in the chair exclaimed, she couldn’t plan ahead to next Wednesday, not even this Wednesday, if she was still stuck in Monday. Especially since the decision to reach Wednesday didn’t even appear to be in her hands anymore, that and she wasn’t quite sure in her sleep deprived state, what quidditch even was.

She just knew that Ron Weasley really liked it and Wizard Lenin thought it was the height of idiocy, but that covered a lot of topics.

“Maybe she’s started reproducing asexually.” Luna offered as means of explanation for the two Lilys, looking slightly worried, and then looking down at herself as if to make sure that she too was not budding off little Lunas.

Lily thought for a moment to bring up a Schrodinger’s Cat type explanation, of how they were both Lily and not Lily in same instant, and had somehow separated themselves from the box they had been trapped in but she really didn’t have the energy.

That and Rabbit was staring at her, at her in the chair, with unguarded interest. Not quite a human interest, but interest none the less, portrayed in a slightly human manner as he stepped past
Hermione, Luna, and the other Lily to stare directly into Lily’s eyes.

Lily did her best to pretend that Rabbit was still a rabbit and wasn’t displaying signs of sentience because that was also something she just wasn’t going to deal with right now.

“That still wouldn’t explain what happened in Potions...” Hermione muttered, her eyes narrowed as she watched the current Lily and Rabbit’s staring contest; which was really more just Rabbit perched on the floor, balancing on the balls of his feet, staring at her face without blinking while Lily tried to look away.

“What happened in Potions?” The other Lily asked looking from Hermione to the Lily on the chair. “I thought I skipped Potions.”

“I remember skipping Potions.”

Which answered the question of whether or not there was another Lily.

There must be a different Lily out there, who had apparently, for whatever reason, decided to actually go to Potions. Not that the current Lily knew why any Lily in her right mind would decide to go to Potions after having skipped it the first time but that’s why she was the current Lily and not the Lily in Potions.

Of course, she wasn’t about to tell them that, even as they all stared at her waiting for an explanation.

And kept waiting.

On second thought this was clearly getting out of hand and without Wizard Lenin’s advice on where to go from here, with only the empty echo of his presence, she was left with no choice but to tell the slightly edited story.

“There is a very reasonable explanation for all of this.” The Lily sitting in the chair began, drawing her audience into the tale of the Monday that would devour all other Mondays.

Lily opened her eyes to the sight of a human figure lying across from her. A pale, tall man, lying
naked on the floor with his eyes closed, the stone resting on his chest over his heart. He looked like he was dreaming, his face perfectly relaxed, his chest rising up and down in rhythm with his breathing.

She reached over to touch him, slowly, hesitantly and when she laid her fingers on top of his hand he didn’t flinch. He made no response at all, but instead kept dreaming, his head tilted upwards and his dark lashes kissing his face.

He was solid and he was warm.

And he was real.

“…Lenin?” She asked.

There was no reaction so she tried again, “Lenin?”

“…Goddamnit.” The body’s lips didn’t move, his vocal chords didn’t vibrate, the words instead came from inside Lily’s head as they always did.

They both took a look at the body, Wizard Lenin through Lily’s eyes, and came to the same conclusion, “Shit.”

Lily and Wizard Lenin quickly realized there was a fundamental flaw in Wizard Lenin’s original plan. They now had a body but unfortunately neither of them had any idea how to get Wizard Lenin out of her head and inside of it.

“What do you mean you have no idea how to get in it?!” Was her first response, because this was starting to be very similar to their retrieval of the Philosopher’s Stone. Where Wizard Lenin wanted these things that were very hard to get and then had no idea what to do with them after he got them.

For several minutes Lily tried everything she could think of to cram him inside the body, from exchanging blood, staring into its eyes and thinking deep thoughts, Gregorian chanting complete with candles, tackling it, but nothing seemed to work and she eventually just gave up and lay on the floor next to it, “Can’t you just do whatever Quirrell did to take over Squirrel?”

“There are a few key differences. One is that Voldemort was a wandering dark spirit, he had no
attachments to the physical plane, and as such any body he took over was most likely easily abandoned for another more suitable vehicle. Which brings us to our second, key, point. He is not a horcrux, he is the main soul, he was never tied to any specific object. I am tied to you, and for eleven years that connection has only grown stronger, and as such it’s not something I can break in two minutes of work!” Judging by the migraine Lily was getting at this point Wizard Lenin was not pleased by this, he also wasn’t pleased by the fact that she hadn’t put any clothes on the body and it was just lying naked on the floor.

Which really, that shouldn’t even bother him considering it wasn’t even his body at this point. Well, it looked exactly like him, but since he wasn’t inside it he had no reason to care about its modesty.

But that didn’t mean she wanted an even worse headache just because Wizard Lenin was getting angry and irrational.

With a wave of her hand Lily set up a bed for it, the covers weaving themselves over it so that only part of its chest and its face were visible.

“So, what now?”

The answer to that, although Lily didn’t know it at the time, had been the thing that would doom her to endless Mondays.

“We’ll need to watch it constantly.” Wizard Lenin concluded, pacing inside of her head with all the focus of the revolutionary he was, now that they had a body they didn’t want it to go dying on them. They couldn’t let it starve and they had to make sure that its heart kept beating and that its lungs kept breathing.

“I don’t know if I can skip that many classes.” Considering the detentions she got from skipping class here and there last year she doubted it would go over well if she skipped every single class, and it sort of defeated the purpose of being in Hogwarts at all. Of course, one solution was to leave Hogwarts, and it would make some things simpler, but she had a feeling that it wouldn’t be that easy to cart a sleeping Wizard Lenin outside of Hogwarts grounds.

Besides, Hogwarts, the secret room beneath the secret room, might be the best place to keep him. If she left now then Dumbledore would know something was up and the last thing she wanted was Dumbledore knowing things.
“…I can’t believe I’m actually considering this.” Wizard Lenin had a thought, a desperate, horrified, thought.

“What?” Lily asked but he didn’t explain.

“But, without other allies, and without alerting Dumbledore… There really is no other solution.” Then he let out a sigh, all the emotions from earlier passing through him to her and then let go, “We have to build a time machine.”

In the dormitory, the upstairs portion, Luna had moved several oversized pillows from her bed to the floor so that she, Rabbit, and the other Lily could have seats while Hermione took the other chair. The other Lily wasn’t really sitting though as much as lying face down on the floor, while Rabbit occasionally poked at her with a finger.

“Wait, so you just decided to make a time machine?” Hermione asked, her eyes bulging at the Lily in the chair as if looking for the proof, but just because Lily was telling her things didn’t mean she was going to go about flaunting time machines, “Today, this afternoon, you decided to just make a time machine…”

“It was for very important, and very secret, reasons. But, yes.” Lily on the floor supplied in muffled tones, not even bothering to lift her head, before the chair Lily could respond. Not that the Lily on the floor looked like she was really paying attention, since this was her second time through the conversation.

“Why would you need a time machine for your first day of classes?” Hermione asked and both Lilys just looked at her, looked straight at her, and dared her to ask further. Hermione then seemed to remember that Eleanor Potter wasn’t simply Eleanor Potter, that there would always be aspects of her that were beyond Hermione Granger’s limited understanding.

“Oh my god, you made a time machine, today, and you’ve been using it…” Hermione seemed to be getting to the conclusion a little early, the other Lily on the floor began to clap slowly.

“Ding, ding, ding, we have a winner!” Lily on the floor said loudly, everyone but Rabbit flinching at the noise.

“Ellie, how many times have you redone today?” Hermione asked in an almost horrified whisper, again as if she didn’t want to know but felt that she must.
“Well, that’s also a long and complicated story…”

Making the time machine had taken most of the night; the trouble was that it was very technical and apparently very easy to mess up beyond repair. She was pretty sure she could do it without the machine, she’d never really tried before but it couldn’t be that much different than stopping time locally, but Wizard Lenin had insisted that they do things in a way where he knew exactly how it worked.

So there she was, in makeshift work station, connecting bits of gold together and listening to Wizard Lenin’s very precise, and very careful instructions on what exactly she was doing.

She, meanwhile, followed said instructions and also asked him distracting if very important questions.

“Wait, if you knew how to make time machines, doesn’t that mean Quirrell knew how to make time machines?” If Quirrell had known how to make a time machine why didn’t he just time travel, actually kidnap her to somewhere else, and then use all the time he needed to get the stone. Or just redo everything until he beat her to the stone the first time.

“Lily, the second gold wire will go into that third hole, the third hole, not the first, not the second, the third.” Wizard Lenin said, completely disregarding her question, at least until she’d done what he asked, “Time travel is notoriously hard on the human body, even with a philosopher’s stone he could probably only manage a few hours in a twenty four hour period, and he knew that. More he would have to create one himself, which requires significant magical energy. Most of his energy, even with the stone, was going into powering Quirrell and keeping him alive, he didn’t have any to spare to make a machine much less to use it. Besides that’s not even getting into the paradox issue.”

“What do you mean?” Lily asked, because that didn’t seem like that good of an excuse to her, because Quirrell had really wanted that stone.

“I mean that if he tried it he would most likely turn into a gelatinous blob or else worse.” Wizard Lenin said distractedly before adding, “Now that wire into the central chamber, straight through to the heart… carefully!”

The idea of a blob Quirrell was more than a little weird, and she could see why he’d tried to avoid it, but he’d probably just thought he wouldn’t need one. Lily didn’t imagine that he’d thought he’d end Christmas night being stabbed to death.
“But why didn’t you have me build one before?” Lily asked, because she could only imagine the wondrous things they could have done if she’d had a time machine the whole time.

“That is exactly the reason why I’ve never brought this up before.” Wizard Lenin responded distractedly thinking through steps on where to go next, on how exactly the wires needed to be connected, on what to place inside the central chamber and how to form the dials, “Time travelling, is above all else, very dangerous, particularly if you aren’t inexplicably immortal as you are. If you don’t stay within the limits it will destroy your body within days if not a few hours and even if you stay within the limits physically the slightest of missteps can theoretically have unimaginable consequences.”

Wizard Lenin had apparently put a lot of thought into this, an almost eerie amount of thought, as if he considered this to be a very important subject. This wasn’t like his revolutionary propaganda, which he said a lot, but didn’t really believe. He used it while it was convenient but in his deepest thoughts he hated all people equally and didn’t really buy into any race driven ideology. This was different, this was something he’d spent time on, sounding almost like how he talked about the stone or horcruxes or immortality in general.

He knew what he was talking about when time travel was concerned and she’d never even guessed.

“My hobbies and interests aren’t always significant to you, Lily, allow me to have some small amount of privacy.” This was probably from the middle of his life then, sometime after being in Hogwarts but before being a revolutionary. She occasionally forgot that there was a space in between the two and that Wizard Lenin had spent that time…

Doing things she didn’t really know about.

“It doesn’t concern you, now turn it on its side, I want to see the connections…” She did has he asked and he focused on seeing it through her eyes, on if everything was wired correctly over there before they moved onto the next section. Apparently, if this section wasn’t wired right, you could melt.

“What sort of unimaginable consequences?” Lily asked because she thought she understood the blobby and melting kind.

“Ineffable, like the rabbit.” Wizard Lenin said shortly before adding, “Remember I mentioned paradoxes?”
She remembered and gave a wordless assent.

“The obvious one is that you go and change something you know to have already occurred. We’ll take a really obvious one just for simplicity’s sake, say you travel back in time and kill your father. By killing your father you have prevented your conception, and yet, somehow you’ve gone back in time and killed your father. In order to kill your father before you were born you must have existed, but by killing your father before your birth you have prevented your existence.”

Lily waited for the punchline, and waited, but Wizard Lenin didn’t say anything else.

“Then what?” Lily asked and again Wizard Lenin didn’t answer, didn’t even prompt her with directions.

“Unimaginable consequences.” He finally concluded rather blandly, “Which is why only very desperate men gamble with time. And I am, unfortunately, extremely desperate at the moment…” Wizard Lenin trailed off, thinking of the body, and how close yet far they were and also thinking that he just might be destroying the world while doing it.

Because he didn’t trust Lily at all with a time machine.

“Hey, I am perfectly reliable!” Lily protested.

“Lily, explain to me why paradoxes are bad?”

Well, he hadn’t really explained that, he’d just made it seem like things would get really confusing. Not that confusing was bad, and maybe reality was secretly really confusing, that’s what Schrodinger’s cat was all about being two contradictory things in the same instant.

That apparently wasn’t the answer that he wanted to hear.

“Lily, we’re setting down some ground rules!” Wizard Lenin declared, stopping them in the middle of constructing the machine, which all in all was turning out to be a lot smaller than she expected.
“First, do not attempt to alter something you know has occurred. If you know it happened before, if you’ve seen it, then you cannot change it! Any attempt to change it will have disastrous consequences! Do you understand?” Preventing paradoxes, right, she got the idea. Although if the universe was so against them they wouldn’t be able to occur in the first place, although maybe that was why the universe was breaking down, or was a symptom of the universe breaking down.

But in which case they’d be happening anyway and there was no real point in avoiding them.

“Do you understand?”

“Yeah, fine, I understand. No changing things.” Except that sort of defeated the purpose of time travelling since even by going back you were altering something, unless you had already gone back, in which case you needed to go back… She hadn’t even gone back in time and it was somewhat confusing.

“Second, do not make contact with your past self. Even if the past self knows that you are time travelling. If you happen to run into each other, don’t say anything, just walk away.”

Lily had the idea that this wasn’t really a rule as much as it was preventing two Lily’s from being in the same room at the same time. Something Wizard Lenin privately feared or at least found somewhat disquieting.

“On second thought we’ll just make this very clear. You’ll only travel once in a given day, once to go to classes and the other time you’ll watch the body. That’s it. Nothing more.”

“So you only planned to repeat it once…” Hermione said, the fire burning lower as the Lily in the chair narrated.

“My plans rarely work out.” Luna interjected, “It’s why I try not to have them.”

Rabbit nodded sagely, Lily imagined his evil abyss monster plans always went awry, or maybe they didn’t and wasn’t that a horrifying thought. The other Lily, judging by the look on her face, was having the exact same thought.

Just then the door to the hallway open and in stepped another, possibly even more haggard looking Lily, followed by Daphne Greengrass and Blaise Zabini.
“I come bearing recruits!” The Lily at the door proclaimed, motioning to said recruits, and then sighing dramatically while also making her way over to the floor cushions. “Make room, I’ve been awake so long I don’t even remember what sleeping feels like.” The third Lily then, without hesitation, collapsed onto the floor and crawled over to the fireplace.

“Why is everything so cold when you’re sleep deprived?” The third Lily asked which no one seemed prepared to answer, not even another Lily.

Lily had no idea why her future self had recruited for Default from Slytherin of all places. If anything, if she was going to recruit, she would have gone for Neville or the Weasley doppelgangers not Greengrass and Zabini. Half the time she barely remembered who they were, Zabini because he was maybe the only boy in Slytherin who wasn’t a complete idiot, and Daphne because she was uncommonly pretty for a twelve year old girl.

They certainly hadn’t been on her list of people who might be interested in bailing on Slytherin and joining Default.

“Hello…” Greengrass said with a slightly awkward wave, which was made possibly even more awkward by the fact that it was Daphne Greengrass being awkward which was an unthinkable concept, if anyone had suave as a twelve year old it was Daphne Greengrass, “We decided to abandon Slytherin while we still had the chance.”

“Yes, so, here we are.” Zabini confirmed, while they both just stood in the doorway, looking very out of place and very stiff. Finally he just came out and said it, “By the way, why are there three Ellie Potters?”

“Probably more than that by now.” The Lily on the floor cushions, the second Lily, commented.

“Wait, you’re not the last one?” Hermione asked looking at Lily in the chair.

“No, I’m somewhere in the middle.” Lily in the chair responded with a shrug feeling that this was one of those things that Hermione Granger just wasn’t going to get.

“Then why are you the one explaining what happened?!”

Together, all three Lilys then said, “Because we don’t know who the last Ellie is.”
“You mean you’re still…” Hermione asked her eyebrows raised.

“We assume that one of the Ellies will decide to stop eventually.” The second Lily explained, “The universe is finite after all, so even if she never does make a decision, she’ll be forced to.”

“Besides, I don’t have that much patience, especially for Hogwarts. I can only repeat a Monday so many times before one of the Ellies will just burn down the place. And since the building’s never been lit on fire today the last Ellie must just decide to move on to Tuesday.” Lily in the chair added with a shrug.

“But what if every Ellie just waits for the next Ellie to decide?” Luna asked, causing the Lily in the chair to blink. That was, well it was an interesting point that she hadn’t actually thought of.

“What the bloody hell?” Zabini asked, rather flatly looking at all of them and the room.

“You know, I feel like I should be surprised, but somehow I’m not. Just because it’s Eleanor Potter.” Daphne Greengrass responded, “Are we still doing this?”

“Are you telling us to not ingratiating ourselves with a duplicating Eleanor Potter?” Apparently, for Slytherins, this was a completely rhetorical question as at this point they both made their way inside and two new beds appeared out of nowhere.

“Good to know that Slytherins live up to their stereotypes.” Hermione said flatly, with a similar expression she had when looking at Dumbledore. No, not quite, less on edge and more just irritated with their presence as if she’d been in this situation before and hadn’t really enjoyed it.

Judging by the looks Greengrass and Zabini were giving in response, a sort of awkward stiffening, they knew exactly what Hermione was thinking about.

But Lily didn’t really care at this point what Hermione got up to in her free time while Lily was busy being not-kidnapped by Squirrel.

“Oh, Hermione, that’s not very fair. House pride is very important, I try to be the most default Default that I can be.” Luna responded.
“And we’re trying to be the most… default Defaults we can be too. Isn’t that right Blaise?” Daphne asked looking at Blaise.

“Right, of course, the defaultest Defaults who ever lived.”

Judging by Hermione’s expression she wasn’t buying the defaultest Default explanation. But considering Hermione had also abandoned her own house she didn’t have that much room to talk, at least, that’s what Lily figured since Hermione wasn’t saying anything.

And as if to add fuel to the fire, Rabbit, who’d spent pretty much the whole evening on the floor staring straight at the Lily in the chair turned to look at the rest of them and said, with that polite empty smile, “No.”

“What would you know, and since when do you even talk anyways!!”

And now they were bickering, great, Lily had been hoping to avoid this, considering she’d already been through this the very first time she went through Monday in Lockhart’s class. But at the very least, while they were focusing on her, they were actually too busy fighting each other to pay any attention to any of the Lilys.

It left her time to think about the parts of the story that she wasn’t going to tell these people.

The time machine was much smaller than she would have thought a time machine would be, a golden condensed nest of wires, with multiple circular rings of dials, labeled with various increments of time, from hours, to days, to years.

And inside the wires, somewhere in the center out of sight, was time itself transfigured and stored as tiny golden grains of sand, and the strange thing was that the machine was still light in spite of it. As if time weighed nothing at all.

She stared at it, turning it this way and that in her hands, and trying not to think about the fact that despite having a time machine the first thing she’d done with it was travel back just under twenty four hours and hang out in the room under the Room of Requirement babysitting Wizard Lenin’s comatose body.
It was sort of starting to feel like the cupboard. Dark, empty, the only difference was that it was also occupied by a very pretty man in a coma. And they still had no idea how to stuff him inside of it.

Lily had never really thought of how the whole possession thing worked. Being inside of her own body herself she’d just thought you went in through the nose or something as some sort of a weird spectral vapor. The only problem was that Wizard Lenin wasn’t actually creepy mist or anything like that, she wasn’t even sure he had any physical form at all, he existed only inside of her head and since he was in there she wasn’t sure how he was going to get out.

So they just kept staring at the empty Lenin, waiting for something to happen, as the hours ticked slowly past. She didn’t like thinking about the cupboard, not because it had been torture beyond all imagining, but because it had been one of the more unpleasant experiences of her existence.

Just waiting in the dark, waiting and waiting and waiting, for something or anything at all to happen. Watching the spiders weave webs in the corner, thinking, always trying to think of something to avoid just thinking of nothing at all. Dying for normal people, where you just drift and leave and cease existing, she imagined being in the cupboard for too long felt something like that.

“I researched horcruxes thoroughly, as thoroughly as I could as a sixteen year old, before I made one.”

It hadn’t been too long into the repeat of Monday when he started talking, almost out of nowhere, but she didn’t interrupt. It was only on rare occasions that Wizard Lenin was candid and transparent about who he was and where he came from.

“This mostly included various trips to Hogwarts’ restricted section, which contains a surprising amount of dangerous material now that I think on it, as well as a few attempts at seductions of various noble families so I might have access to their private libraries.” With these words were various images of Hogwarts, much the same as Lily’s own Hogwarts if a bit less filled with murderers, cultists, and violence. There were other students, towards the end of their Hogwarts careers, wearing wealthy clothes and green ties, and then a younger determined looking Wizard Lenin himself.

“Most sources were a little vague on the details, theoretical rather than practical. There are a few famous cases, Koschei the Deathless being the primary example, but horcruxes have never been extensively studied. It’s simply labelled as one of the darkest of arts and rituals and for the most part left at that. All texts talked about the wizard, consequences to the wizard, the effects on the wizard, they never talked about the effects or consequences on the horcrux itself.” He sighed, imagining himself sitting beside her, staring down at his translucent hands, at the way the light shone through them, at how if he angled them right he could see the other body through them.
“Wizards have little concept of artificial intelligence. They’re so used to constructs that vaguely resemble humanity, the sorting hat, portraits, ghosts… They don’t understand what it means to have sentience. Horcruxes were supposed to be memory, a thing that anchors a soul to the physical realm, they might contain a few pivotal moments of a person’s life, may contain their anger and rage, but they weren’t supposed to be able to reason or else think. Not one author, light or dark, who approached the concept of horcruxes theorized that the horcrux itself was anything more than a dark tool for immortality.” She could almost see his bitter smile, “We were all so wrong.”

“There are theories on how to merge broken fragments of soul together, but they pertain to the main soul, not to the horcrux. There are theories on how the soul of the body, when the body gets destroyed, might find or else construct a new host but these do not exist for the horcrux itself. I am a thing to these people, to him… He would destroy me if he realized I even existed.” Wizard Lenin didn’t qualify his words, or attempt to explain them, he let them rest in that room as they listened to the footsteps above. Hermione was rushing off to classes, her hurried footsteps the first to disappear, shortly followed by Luna’s lighter and almost inaudible steps, then followed by Rabbit’s even paces and then by Lily’s own footsteps.

They waited until the sounds died away, when everyone including the past Lily had rushed off to classes, before they started talking again.

“I really should have expected it. Nothing is ever easy, even for someone like you.” Wizard Lenin said bitterly, some of his humor returning, as if this situation was funny to him.

“If the stone had worked out, and we’d made a body that way, how would you have gotten inside that one?” She asked and inside her head there was the mental equivalent of an irritated and half-amused shrug.

“I have no idea.” Well, at least he was being honest.

She’d always thought Wizard Lenin was more into planning than that, but it seemed he was more the type to take things as they came, so he was always flexible in new situations but whenever he actually got what he wanted he had to flail for a few moments like a chicken with its head cut off.

“I do not appreciate that comparison.” Wizard Lenin cut in, “Besides it’s easier to plan when you’re more certain of your existence and your influence on the material plane.”

That was fair, according to Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs Wizard Lenin certainly had his priorities in
order, survival came first, then shelter, then plans for world domination and how to stuff his soul into a different body.

It seemed like it was a day to bring up topics they normally wouldn’t from time machines, to feelings, and back again. Plus being in a replica of the cupboard was just making her feel weird she really would rather not dwell on that feeling and instead think of something else.

And if they were successful, no when they were successful, she might never get another chance to ask. Not with him inside her head at least, although she had no idea what that future might look like for them, and if they would still share that mental bond.

This might be the only chance she got to really ask.

“Do you regret it?” She asked, not meaning this whole fiasco with the body or even the fiasco before with the stone, but everything.

Everything, after all, had spiraled out of control in one single instant. Life wasn’t normally like that, at least from what Lily had seen and heard, normally it was a combination of things that lead to a conclusion. But not Wizard Lenin’s state of affairs, no, it was very clear exactly what had gone wrong and when.

October 31st, 1981, Wizard Lenin had chosen to kill Eleanor Lily Potter and her family and in doing so he had destroyed his own body and unintentionally created a second horcrux. Without that single incident, without that one moment, he wouldn’t be here today.

She’d never actually brought it up directly before or even indirectly. For a while she’d been indifferent to it, Wizard Lenin was there in her head, had been there for a while, there was no need to think on things like why. The past was the past and was, even with time travel, immutable.

It didn’t matter how anyone felt about it.

It still didn’t really but she wasn’t quite as indifferent as she used to be. Old age was making her more than a little nostalgic and sentimental than she ever would have expected. She wanted to know things that were entirely irrelevant, for no real reason that she could think of, other than that things were changing.
That there was a body now in front of her that hadn’t existed only a day before.

He didn’t answer, but this was probably the most personal thing she’d ever asked him, and Wizard Lenin had always been very careful on what he revealed and what he didn’t.

If he hadn’t done it he would have had a body, he wouldn’t have had to do this whole debacle with the stone, he wouldn’t have to attend Hogwarts for the second time, he wouldn’t have even had to live inside of her head.

But if he hadn’t done it then she doubted they’d ever really have met.

“No.” He said, softly, sounding somehow surprised by his own answer. “No, I don’t regret it.”

As he said it she felt something clicking in her head, as if an untouched and half-forgotten gear had just begun to turn, its teeth grinding into another forgotten cog that in turn connected to a great machine whose purpose was unknown.

“I am a horcrux. I am not him. If I hadn’t come to you that night, if I hadn’t made that terrible mistake, then I would never have existed…” There were flashes of thought, of the past ten years, of the struggles and small triumphs they’d had and the fact that they did not belong to the original but instead to Wizard Lenin.

“So I can’t regret it.”

And it was as if some final lever had been thrown and the lights had all turned on, only the lights were all inside her head, and for a moment everything was blinding. Then she was, lighter, emptier… hollow.

When she did manage to open her eyes she could only look over to find the body, Wizard Lenin, staring with a dazed expression back.

There were still issues that needed working out.

He could barely move, for one, and even trying had pretty much left him bedridden. He also had a
bit of a problem seeing, hearing, and just about everything. He had the body, but that didn’t mean he remembered how to use one.

She just couldn’t stop watching as he attempted to climb out of the bed, only to fall back in it, thinking that somehow it had happened. Her mind going through everything they’d need to do, she’d need to do, she’d need to get him food since it looked like he couldn’t even make it up the stairs to get it himself. Not to mention he wasn’t exactly school aged looking, so sneaking around the halls looking for food probably wasn’t the best idea at the moment. She also just couldn’t help thinking about how quiet it was, unnaturally quiet, inside of her head.

Wizard Lenin didn’t always talk but there was always some sort of an undercurrent inside there, his reactions to events, images and memories to accompany whatever it was she’d thought or seen. There was always something…

But there wasn’t anymore.

And now, after having repeated the day again so that she could do various food runs (since he refused to eat food she produced out of nothing), she was sitting in a chair tired out of her mind and facing the overwhelming possibility that she was going to go back and repeat this day over and over again.

That she was going to have another meeting with Dumbledore at some point, somehow become Quidditch captain, attend Potions and probably blow something up inside of it, recruit Daphne Greengrass and Blaise Zabini of all people into Default, and God only knew what else.

And she really didn’t get why each Lily decided to keep repeating. The food was necessary, watching Wizard Lenin was necessary, but that was about it. There was no reason to keep going, Wizard Lenin would have been pissed as hell if he knew about it, he was marginally angry when various Lilies popped in throughout the day to deliver food and then the original Lily to work on the time machine (at which point Lily had had to do all sorts of fancy maneuvering of the room to keep him happy and keep the other Lily and Wizard Lenin oblivious.) If Wizard Lenin had realized what she was up to he would have thrown a fit.

Each Lily would know this, each Lily looked worse than the last one, but they all just kept going.

Lily in the chair made up her mind and stood, “Alright! Alright! That is it, I am done! Zabini and Greengrass, welcome to Default, and more importantly, welcome to Default’s quidditch team. Tryouts are next Wednesday, you will be there!”
“Quidditch…” Daphne started looking very confused and more than a little apprehensive.

“You will be there!” Lily repeated in the tone that brooked no arguments.

She surveyed her captive audience, then without a word turned on her heel towards the door, “As you can tell by the multiple Lilys that are in the room, if you need me, I’m right there and I’ll also be back multiple times later in this exact moment.”

She slammed the door shut behind her, not waiting for anyone to yell anything after her, and let out a long sigh into the empty hallway. No other Lily had been in the room with Wizard Lenin consistently (and she’d already been the other Lilys already), meaning that Lily couldn’t go back down there until Tuesday at the earliest, but at the same time she was just tired of sitting in that room without Wizard Lenin in her head knowing she’d be going through Monday many more times.

She shoved her hands deep into her pockets and started walking, not entirely sure where she was headed. She hopped down stair cases, past sleeping portraits, swerving out of the way of the stray professor or prefect until eventually she found herself in front of the third floor corridor.

She had only been inside once, not bothering to go back once she’d had the stone, and she wondered why she’d felt the need to go there. She opened the door, almost expecting the dog to still be there, but it was gone along with the trap door that had rested beneath it. The room was now just a room, an empty supply closet, with nothing inside of it.

“Well,” She said to herself, “Well…”

She kept waiting for something to respond in her head, for Wizard Lenin to finish her thoughts, but there was nothing. She stepped into the center of the room, casting a light with her hand so that the shadows on the wall flickered.

It would be too weird, too surreal, to visit Death without Wizard Lenin tagging unwillingly along with a little red book in his hand and a scowl on his face. She’d have to wait, visit later, visit when… When it didn’t feel so odd to be just Lily again.

So she just stood there dumbly, staring at the walls, waiting for something to happen.
A hand grabbed her shoulder lightly and she whipped around to find Rabbit staring at her.

“Rabbit, what the hell… Why are you wandering around Hogwarts in the middle of the night?!”

“Yes.” Was his only, completely non-explanatory, response to her question.

Rabbit, alone, in the middle of the night. Why hadn’t Luna stopped him, hadn’t Lily been clear on the Rabbit-sitting duties and the consequences of not Rabbit-sitting? Hell, why hadn’t one of the Lilys followed him? There were more than enough to go around. But the worst question of all, the one that gripped her now, was what was missing from Scotland?

“What did you eat?”

“Yes.”

She really should have expected that but it didn’t make her feel any better. Because that could have meant he’d just eaten everything. Maybe he was the reason the Lilys just kept deciding to go back, maybe there wasn’t a Tuesday, because Rabbit had eaten it. Monday was all that was left now, Monday with Wizard Lenin not in her head and the rest of her life stretching before her.

And suddenly it wasn’t about Rabbit anymore.

“I don’t know what’s going to happen next.” And maybe that was the reason they kept repeating, because Monday, at least half of Monday, Wizard Lenin hadn’t really been gone. So by staying in Monday they stopped things from changing.

He was still there, but after, who even knew. He was a physical mess at the moment but that wouldn’t last, and if it did he’d get a wheelchair, and then he could go wherever he wanted and that certainly didn’t include Hogwarts.

She could go with him, of course, she didn’t even like Hogwarts that much anyway but she also had the feeling that he might not necessarily want her around. She was a twelve year old girl, at the end of things, and if it was any other twelve year old girl Wizard Lenin would immediately say no.
For the first time she acknowledged the fact that they were companions of convenience. They’d really had no one else, they’d never been given a choice before, and she knew what she would choose but she didn’t know what he would.

She didn’t even know what he planned to do.

There was always the revolution to fall back on but he might not even want to pursue that. She had no idea, and suddenly the future was real, and she had no idea where they would all go.

“It has already happened.”

She blinked, turned her head to look at Rabbit, who was patiently smiling back, as if there was nothing wrong with what he’d just said.

She was too tired to deal with earth-shattering revelations and omens of doom.

“That wasn’t a yes or no response.”

He didn’t respond, didn’t even blink, just sorted tilted his head to the side, a movement that didn’t really indicate anything other than that he might be listening.

“Rabbit… I thought you only spoke binary English.” Lily followed up, her own voice flat, and somewhat emotionless as the gravity of the situation caught up with her.

“In a far off land only red apples grew and so the men who dwelled there felt that a green apple could never exist.”

She didn’t know if she found it reassuring or horrifying that Rabbit could apparently only either speak a word at a time or else in proverbs. She also didn’t know if it was okay to feel somewhat annoyed at the fact that he probably could have spoken in full sentences the entire time.

Also why was he saying words like dwelled, no one said dwelled.
Rabbit was looking at her as if she was supposed to be understanding something.

“…So you’re saying it doesn’t really matter because if you take a step back from time, my time, then it’s all already happened anyways.” Lily said, piecing his words together.

“Yes.”

“That still means I have to repeat this day a bunch of times though.” Lily pointed out, at least two more times given the number of Lilys she’d seen.

“Yes.” Rabbit acknowledged in that frustratingly Rabbit way of his, as if this was inconsequential when it was the entire problem.

“How do I know I’m going to stop?” Lily asked, she assumed she did, but like Luna Lovegood had pointed out assuming something was a dangerous thing to do if each Lily went on to assume the same thing.

Rabbit said nothing to this, giving her a sort of flat look, as if this was obvious and a somewhat pointless question. Because according to Rabbit, this had all already happened, so she’d either stop or she wouldn’t and worrying about it would get her nowhere.

It was surprisingly practical advice from a being from beyond all matter.

“…What did you eat?”

Rabbit didn’t respond, just tilted his head to the side a little bit again, and once again pretended he had no idea what she was saying and slowly made his way out of the room from whence he came leaving Lily to chase after him.

“Hey, seriously, I need to know what’s missing! If it’s Tuesday then I will be pissed as hell!”

And Lily’s third Monday drew to a close.
“Seriously, Rabbit, just tell me what you ate and we can stop doing this.”

It was once again Monday morning, the same Monday that it’d been for the last couple of Mondays, except this time she’d decided to join Luna and Rabbit for their Transfiguration course and find out just what it was Rabbit had devoured this time.

She was in a room filled with Gryffindors and Ravenclaws, working to transform a matchstick into a needle, a lesson McGonagall apparently repeated every year. Lily, for her own part, had cast a bubble of indifference around herself making it so that anyone but Luna and Rabbit didn’t notice and didn’t care that Lily was in the wrong classroom.

Not that Rabbit was even glancing in her direction, he was still just looking forward, like she and everything else didn’t even exist. Except that she knew he knew because he’d been speaking words last night (well, later Monday night) and had been making some amount of sense, which was very bad, and he’d probably eaten something which was also bad.

And on the whole she was still very tired and it was all very bad.

“Hello Ellie,” Luna waved and then frowned somewhat puzzled, “I thought you had a different class this morning.”

Lily liked Luna well enough but she wasn’t here to indulge her but instead to investigate Rabbit who was still doing a very good vegetable imitation. Only, no, his eyes drifted towards hers for a moment and there was some spark of awareness in them (as if he found this all somewhat funny) before they slowly drifted back to McGonagall.

“Seriously, Rabbit,” Lily repeated, “I am not willing to live in perpetual Mondays!”

She wasn’t even all that satisfied with the world she did live in, to be stuck in that world, but only Monday specifically would probably drive her insane.
Rabbit appeared unsympathetic.

She wasn’t even sure that Rabbit knew what Tuesday was though so he probably couldn’t eat it…

“It’s perpetually Monday?” Luna asked, “That’s never happened to me before, I usually have only one day of the week at a time. Unless Tuesday secretly is Monday after all… I’ll have to tell daddy about that.”

Lily turned to Luna, blinking, and the worn gears of her brain ticked away trying to tell her something important. Luna hadn’t known there was more than one Lily around, and that Lily had been time travelling, but Lily had just now almost told her and Luna really shouldn’t have acted so surprised when Lily first explained the story.

Which meant Lily had just created a paradox.

There was only one solution.

“Pretend you never heard any of that.”

“Is it a conspiracy?” Luna asked.

“Yes.” Between Lily and the universe, yes, yes it was.

“Is the ministry involved?” Luna asked, her eyes sparking as she leaned in, looking very excited by the prospect of Magical Britain’s useless bureaucracy.

“Yes.” Technically it was since the entire universe might be destroyed if Lily started causing paradoxes to happen.

“Does it involve…” Here Luna looked to her left, then to her right, and then whispered, “The toenail rot?”
It involved everything that ever was, had, or could be so it probably did involve toenail issues, “Probably.”

Luna seemed unnaturally excited by this, she abandoned her attempts to make the silver needle out of a match stick and dug through her bag to find a note pad, she then turned to Lily removing the quill she’d stuck behind her ear and pressing it to the page.

“Tell me, Ellie, when did you first become aware of the toenail rot?”

“About two seconds ago.”

Luna nodded and wrote furiously, as she did so Rabbit abandoned his vegetable impression for a moment, his head turning to look over at the paper with interest poorly concealed in his soulless black eyes.

Lily was about to point this out, to point out that she was onto him, that she would discover what it was he had done when Luna asked her another question.

“And when did you become aware that your delayed acceptance into Default was not the fault of the hat but rather an intricate maneuver by the government to eradicate Delilah Default’s legacy from Hogwarts. Set in place by the founders themselves after Salazar Slytherin abandoned the castle.”

“…Just now.” Lily said, because that seemed a bit too organized for the government.

(She had the painful thought that if Wizard Lenin was in her head right now, if he was less exhausted than she was, then he would be able to tell her which conspiracies the government was really and truly up to.)

“I see, this makes it even more of a conspiracy, doesn’t it Lepur?” Luna asked Lepur, who nodded on cue.

And there was Lily’s chance, she leaned in close to Rabbit, looking him in the eye, and asked in the voice that could make any drug addicted debtor quake with fear, “Yes, doesn’t it, Lepur Rabbitson?”
Rabbit blinked, and then, slowly his lips curled upward into a smile.

He’d clearly eaten something very important, or was going to, no he hadn’t done it yet that would be in a few hours. Unless… Unless Rabbit didn’t exist within time.

Rabbit picked up his match stick, eyed it speculatively, and turned it into a perfect silver needle.

Lily felt her stomach plummet.

“Oh, very good Lepur, you got that right away! I would expect nothing less from a great being of terror from beyond this plane of reality.” Luna clapped her hands together in delight, causing Lily to question her as a baby sitter, she had the right idea but clearly she wasn’t putting being of unspeakable terror together with something she should be afraid of.

Rabbit continued to smile that polite emotionless smile.

Lily said nothing for the rest of class, let Luna and Rabbit focus on her work, but she watched and felt herself sinking into a strange state between dreaming and sleeping. Reality became stretched, colors warped, but Rabbit somehow always remained untouched and in focus. Somehow, inexplicably, Rabbit was becoming even more terrifying. He wasn’t even really putting any effort into it, she’d be impressed if she wasn’t so sleep deprived and panicked.

Then class was ending everyone standing with either smiles of triumph or frowns of disappointment, packing their things, and headed out into the hall. Lily jolted back into awareness and scrambled after Luna and Rabbit only to find herself drifting again. About halfway down the hall she stopped walking, realizing she’d lost them somewhere in the crowd and that she had no idea where they were headed to next.

“Goddammit!” She shouted, the ward of indifference must have slipped off because a few people in the hall turned warily to stare at her.

Plan, she needed a plan, a very good plan, the best plan.

One, she was possibly trapped in Mondays because Rabbit may have eaten Tuesday or else each future Lily decided to just keep repeating Monday.
No, that was the problem, what Lily needed was a plan.

Hermione said there had been some sort of an incident in Potions. This meant Lily must have gone to Potions at some point during the Monday and must have done something worthy of Hermione’s statement. Potions was starting now, or had started, Lily had sort of lost track in her sleep deprived panic. If she did that now it meant a future Lily wouldn’t do it later, meaning she could possibly break the Monday cycle that much sooner.

Unless a future Lily was already in there, in which case she’d have to repeat until she was one Lily further in, unless that Lily also couldn’t go to Potions because there was one already in there…

“No, down that path lies madness.” Lily said, and stood, more certain of her very uncertain plan. Step one, ruin Potions, step two, find out what the hell Rabbit had eaten.

With that Lily ran as fast as she could down the moving stair cases, jumping down from one to the next when they moved in inconvenient directions. Moving with a speed that was indicative of how little she wanted to spend any more time in Monday.

Finally she made it to the closed door of the Potions classroom. Here she paused, dug deep inside of herself for the intimidation tactics that she knew would cause Snape to take notice and would cause Hermione to label the class as an ‘incident’, and kicked down the door.

“This!” She cried and everyone turned slowly to look at her. (In the back of her head she noticed that once again it was a Gryffindor and Slytherin class, which was a little odd considering she was now in Default, and they’d already had one Gryffindor and Slytherin class that morning. Not to mention Luna’s class had had Gryffindors in it. If she was a little less tired she’d be thinking there was some sort of theme there.)

There they were, Hermione, now in the back row with a palm over her face shaking her head as if she’d known this was coming but desperately wished it hadn’t. Neville looking pale and alarmed but also a little relieved to see her; and everyone else still trying to process the fact that Eleanor Potter really was back from Albania and being kidnapped and that everything was more or less back to normal.

And then there was Snape, in the front of the classroom, seething.
“Miss Potter, our local menace, why am I not surprised?”

It was about that point that Lily realized she didn’t actually have a plan and that everyone was staring at her. The good news was that there wasn’t another Lily in there, so she must be the Lily who caused the incident, but she had no clue what the incident was.

It couldn’t just be her standing in the doorway, that seemed a bit anticlimactic.

“Twenty points from… Default,” here Snape shuddered slightly at the name of the house, “For being late and disrupting class. Now, get in your seat.”

Lily remained standing in the doorway because that still didn’t seem good enough. Last year she had caused weekly wars in this classroom, kicking down a doorway and losing only twenty points was not good enough!

Snape stared at her, waited for her to get into her seat, his eye twitched.

Perhaps, had Wizard Lenin been there, he could have come up with a better plan. She had never openly acknowledged it, and neither had he for that matter, but they had learned to delegate certain tasks. Lily was in charge of overpowered magic and mastery over time and space but Wizard Lenin was in charge of strategy. In other words it’d worked out so that Lily was the brawn and Lenin the brain.

It wasn’t that Lily felt she was bad at strategy she just didn’t have the patience or the experience. Wizard Lenin had been playing chess with wizards for pieces for years and there was no disputing that he played it masterfully. It had made sense to both consult him and take his advice from time to time as the situations arose.

In moments like these he would have had a plan.

But he wasn’t here, and it was just Lily, and in knowing that it was just her she panicked.

“I regret nothing!” Lily said cried and with concentrated effort began to warp the classroom around her. The cauldrons melted onto the tables, the tables began to wobble and dance and contort themselves into bizarre shapes, the writing on the board slowly became drunken Elvish, the walls seemed to cave in on themselves and reality was slowly turning into a caricature.
The room became her room, the furniture her furniture, all things began in some way or form to resemble Lily their master and creator.

Then, abruptly, it stopped and Lily blew up the chalk board and turned the shrapnel into brightly colored confetti. The confetti settled, covering both Snape and the first few rows.

“Goddammit, Ellie.” Hermione said under her breath, “Can’t I have one day where you don’t use your godlike powers to interrupt my education? One?”

Everyone else was horrifically silent. It was clear, that even by Lily’s standards, this was extravagant. Which had sort of been the point but still standing in the doorway Lily wondered if she had perhaps gone a bit too far.

Finally, Blaise Zabini decided to summarize the situation, “Merlin’s balls.”

Snape’s hand cracked down on what was left of the first Gryffindor table. The unfortunate students who had been sitting there shrieked and moved away from him. She had to hand it to him, he looked almost intimidating. His eyes had gone very dark, the veins on his hands popped, and he was looking at her as if he wanted nothing more than to send her to an early death.

It was just too bad for him that she’d grown up with Wizard Lenin in her head, Death in a train station, and she wasn’t even getting into the Rabbit business.

Still, there was some edge that Severus Snape was dangling over, and she might have gone too far and pushed him over it. But that couldn’t be helped, because in the end she’d had no choice, an incident had to have occurred in Potions and so occur it did. Her hands were just as tied as his were.

“I see you haven’t changed one bit, Miss Potter, after your experiences last year. Tell me, Miss Potter, how was Albania?” Here he offered her a sharp smile and she returned it with a darker look of her own because that could mean many things. He could be asking about Albania in the sense that Quirrell had supposedly kidnapped her there or he could be asking about her other activities.

Because she somehow felt that Snape was very much in the know about what had actually happened that summer. But it seemed neither of them were going to get into this now, or at least, that’s what she thought. Snape appeared to have other ideas.
“One hundred points from Default, Miss Potter, and you will go immediately to the Headmaster’s
office.”

Lily blinked at him for a moment, well, that certainly solved that problem, she’d been wondering
how she was going to get Dumbledore to summon her so that he gave her a quidditch team. For once
it seemed as if things were working themselves out.

Except for Rabbit possibly eating Tuesday.

“Really, just like that?” Lily asked, to be sure, but Snape was still teetering on that edge and the
whole room felt it. Too far, she’d gone too far this time, in one day and for barely any reason at all
she had pushed Snape to his breaking point.

“Just like that. The password is no doubt something filled with sugar, take a wild guess at what it is.”
And he kept staring, as if waiting for her next move, and she simply stared back waiting to see if
he’d give her anything else to go on. It became clear that he had nothing else to say to her and was
possibly two seconds from attempting to flay her in front of twelve year olds.

Still, no point arguing, Lily offered Snape a small salute before leaving the doorway and climbing
back out of the Dungeons.

“So, cause incident in Potions, check. Meeting with Dumbledore where I become captain, soon to be
check.” Lily listed off to herself as she made her way through the now empty hallways. Now, what
was left, still Rabbit, and then recruit Zabini and Greengrass into Default for whatever reason.

“I can do that.” Lily said, although she had to break this habit of saying things out loud, it was just so
empty inside of her head though. And, now that she thought about it, Lily usually did have an
internal monologue going directed at Wizard Lenin.

He didn’t always feel the need to respond, sometimes would only respond with one word answers
but, it was never as if she was just talking to herself.

“Or I can just talk out loud to myself all the time! Why not? I already have a reputation as being
crazy, or at least, back in the old days. It really plays well into the crazy freak image Dudders had
going for me. It was only a matter of time before crazy freak began talking out loud to her non-
existent invisible friends.”
And god wasn’t that a throwback, she hadn’t thought about the old muggle primary days for a long time, hadn’t even really thought about them at the time. The absence of Wizard Lenin and lack of sleep was making her nostalgic; she wasn’t sure she liked it.

Some of the portraits, who had always been a bit leery of her, gave her decidedly odd looks and scurried out of their frames. Lily decided that she wouldn’t pay them any attention as she continued to meander towards the headmaster’s office.

Her external monologue wasn’t much better than an internal monologue. How had she stood it, in the days before Wizard Lenin and Death? She remembered vaguely the dull gray monotony that had been life but she also remembered that she had endured it. For years she’d endured it. And Hogwarts wasn’t even as bad as that had been, Hogwarts was many things but it wasn’t a cupboard beneath the stairs.

Still, it was hard to remember what those days had been like.

Eventually she reached the gargoyle and with a deep breath commenced on her candy list, “Licorice, Every Flavor Beans, Ice Mice, Blood Pops, Lemon Drops… Chocolate Toads? Butter Gin?”

Lily realized that once again she had run out of sugary food and was now just making it up based on half remembered things that Ron talked about eating. Apparently listening to Ron was actually sometimes important, who would have ever thought.

Finally with a sigh she just said, “Open.”

The gargoyle stood aside and Lily climbed the stairs with the feeling that she again had failed some vital test. But, as she had decided the last Monday, she really didn’t care anymore.

“Miss Potter, forgive me, I wasn’t expecting you quite so soon.” Dumbledore was sitting at his desk, in the same robes that he’d been wearing that first Monday which seemed so long ago to her. A year ago this had been refreshing, his bright clashing robes, it’d been something she could somewhat comprehend. Here is a man with his head in the right place, she’d thought to herself, but now she didn’t know what to make of him. Because he wasn’t really like her, it wasn’t a show, but this wasn’t what he was either. There was effort in this, years of practice and refinement, and beneath that was the chess master always with his eye on the board.
She hoped the meeting ended quickly, she had better things to do than have another show down with Dumbledore.

“I may have ruined Potions class and Professor Snape may have taken that very seriously.” Lily said to which Dumbledore only gave her a look, one that Wizard Lenin might have given, one with raised eyebrows and a healthy dose of disbelief and resignation. As if to say, “I expected this because it’s you and yet somehow I’m still surprised and exasperated.”

“I see, so then you have already resumed your war with poor Severus after the brief cease fire during your absence.”

Well, that was certainly one way to put it, although really at this point it hadn’t been about making Snape miserable. That strangely hadn’t even crossed her mind, no, the only thing she’d really thought about was getting out of Monday.

So how was she doing these things she’d normally do if her only motivation was simply to do them? There was some fault in logic in there somewhere that she couldn’t quite put her finger on.

“I had hoped he would find a new method to deter you but it seems he’s relying on me. Don’t worry, Miss Potter, I had been meaning to talk with you anyway. Perhaps not today, nor tomorrow, but soon enough.” Dumbledore finally acknowledged when the silence had stretched too long.

Lily steeled herself for whatever was coming. The last meeting had ended in her accusation of murder, the meeting before in rumors of Lily Riddle, she really had no idea how he’d up the ante from there. She also had no idea what he was doing because it seemed as if nothing had changed, in spite of everything she was still a student, he was still the headmaster. Perhaps she was channeling a little too much Wizard Lenin since Wizard Lenin wasn’t in her head to channel it for himself, but what game was he playing?

An accusation of murder, that at the very least should have changed something.

“Eleanor Potter, your housemates Hermione Granger and Lepur Rabbitson have recently declared themselves prefects.” Dumbledore pointed out and Lily nodded, this was true, not that either of them had started exercising their authority after only the first day of class but it was still true.

“This is quite a lot of responsibility.” Dumbledore pointed out, which Lily found debatable, since
their house only had four members and they were only twelve. Besides Lily didn’t even think the prefects really did much, they just sort of walked around the halls at night and looked vaguely authoritative. Lily nodded anyway since this appeared to be what Dumbledore wanted her to do.

“I think it would be best if you had some responsibility as well.” Dumbledore said and then he smiled, his eyes twinkling to an absurd degree, “I’ve decided to make you Default’s first quidditch captain.”

Even though she had known it was coming, had been warned, somehow Lily still didn’t see that one coming.

“What?” She asked.

“Default’s quidditch team, as you’ve no doubt noticed, is in the worst condition. As it is you have absolutely no players and not enough house members to even form a team. It will be a difficult challenge, but one I believe you are prepared to face.”

“But I…”

“Your father was quite gifted at quidditch, it’s in your blood, one might even say it’s your destiny. One you will have to meet next Wednesday.”

“What happens Wednesday?” Lily couldn’t but ask, but she knew what happened Wednesday because the other Lilys had told her what happened Wednesday, but she still had to ask because this was not at all what she had been expecting.

“Tryouts, of course. Then practices will begin shortly afterward and then the games.” He was smiling, looking as if he had given her the greatest present she had ever received, and it would have been fine last year when she didn’t have things to do and wasn’t stuck in Monday and hadn’t murdered Squirrel but…

Things changed.

“But I don’t even like quidditch.” Lily pointed out and Dumbledore gave her a very grave look.
“Sometimes, Miss Potter, we are forced to choose between what is right and what is easy.”

He made it clear that the right thing, in this case, was to become quidditch captain. Well, she supposed it beat the meeting she thought she was going to have. If Dumbledore didn’t want to accuse her of murder, cart her off to prison, or play mind games with her then she was alright with that.

“Sure, quidditch captain, will do, just call me Captain Eleanor Quidditch.” Lily said, standing slowly and backing away from Dumbledore.

“That’s the Default spirit!”

(Funny, because Lily really didn’t know what the Default spirit was herself.)

Lily hit the door, offered him a weak smile, and then made her way back out again and into the hallway. She stood there, dumbly, for a few moments still waiting for some sign from the heavens on what she was supposed to do next.

She felt, still felt, as if she was following some bizarre strung together plan left for her by the last Lily to go through Monday. One whose rhyme or reason she couldn’t see but merely had to trust based on what she knew. Only, the last Lily hadn’t been very kind in leaving her clues and instead left her in moments like this, standing alone in the corridor outside Dumbledore’s office after having destroyed Potions for absolutely no reason and become the Default quidditch captain.

“Potions ruined and Hermione impressed by destruction, check. Weird meeting with Dumbledore where I somehow become quidditch captain, very check.” Two down, but so much left to go, because she still hadn’t found what Rabbit had eaten even if she had gotten a few things out of the way.

“I’ll never make it out of this Monday, I’m doomed!” Lily cried out in despair falling to her knees.

Before she could agonize in despair though someone tapped her shoulder. Standing there, looking very sleep deprived and very not amused, was another Lily.

“Shit.”
The other Lily was different than the others had been though. She had a confidence to her that the others had lacked, a certainty and vitality, as if she knew exactly what she was doing and what was happening. Surrounding her was the need to feel indifferent to the scene, so that if anyone passed by they wouldn’t think on how there were two Lilys conversing with each other, or how there were two little girls right outside the office at all.

“He didn’t eat Tuesday, dumbass.” The other Lily finally said.

“What?”

Lily hadn’t ever insulted herself before, had never really thought badly of herself, Lily was pretty pro Lily but this other Lily looked fairly annoyed and her eyes narrowed further.

“Rabbit didn’t eat Tuesday. You get out of Monday, you only need to go through it one more time.” The Lily said and out of her pockets she grabbed a sheet of parchment that appeared to be some sort of time line that tracked the various Lilys throughout the course of Monday.

The other Lily squatted down, balancing on the balls of her feet, and looked Lily directly in the eye as she explained, “In all of your Monday runs you’ve seen at most only two other Lilys at a time. This means that there at least, a minimum, of two Lilys by this evening. In that time we know that we became quidditch captain, we recruited Zabini and Greengrass into Default, and that we caused something to happen in Potions. You’ve already hit two of these three known events.”

“But the other Lilys said they weren’t the last one.” Lily pointed out and the other Lily again gave her an exasperated look as if Lily was being consciously obtuse.

“They can lie.” She said slowly, and Lily felt as if she was supposed to be understanding something important but wasn’t, because why would they lie?

“So that they don’t have to go through indefinite Mondays. The time travel thing, it’s like a logic puzzle, you’re given things you really can’t get out of like the Potions thing but then you’re also given things that you can, like how many Lilys have to go back through Monday. You have to look at what you know must be true and then you can flub the rest. You know that you told yourself that you weren’t the last but that doesn’t make it true. The only thing that’s true is that they said it, nothing else.” The other Lily explained with a sigh, taking the parchment back from Lily when it was clear that she wasn’t really looking at it.
“How’d you figure that out?” Lily asked, because that seemed like very Wizard Lenin like thinking.

“The future Lily told me back when I was you.” The other Lily grimaced then, realizing that she was now the future Lily so this made somehow even less sense, “It’s all very confusing and I’m really tired.”

Lily sympathized, she too was beyond exhaustion. She felt, better, but still as if she was floating along not sure where she was going. This had answered some questions, but not all, and not the important ones. She still didn’t know where she went now.

“You go wherever your feet take you. For now, that’s Hogwarts. After Hogwarts we’ll see, there’s a whole universe of possibilities out there. Just because he’s not in our heads anymore doesn’t mean he’s gone and even if he is gone we’ve existed without him before. We’ll get through it, we always do.”

Lily blinked at herself and wondered if the other Lily could read minds and how she’d managed to develop that skill only in one day.

“I’ve been you, I remember talking to myself, I also remember what you’re thinking right now so I know what to say.”

So, it was like reading a script, maybe that’s why the other Lily was so casual. Why she looked so self-assured and calm, because that was how she remembered looking and acting. Maybe this other Lily was just as uncertain about letting Wizard Lenin go, disappear out into the world, but she couldn’t show it because the other Lily couldn’t remember seeing it.

“Irrelevant. Being stuck in Monday is useless and depressing and also very confusing.” The other Lily cut in to her thoughts, her eyes blazing, and somehow looking more intimidating than even Wizard Lenin. There was this alien like quality that Wizard Lenin didn’t have, this lean edge that declared very loudly that she wasn’t human and that she was very dangerous, she was unknown and she was not to be reckoned with.

But Lily was hardly about to be intimidated by herself.

“And how do you know Rabbit hasn’t eaten Tuesday?” Lily asked, and the other Lily just raised her eyebrows.
“At dinner he tells you very plainly that he ate some Hufflepuff girl named Sally Anne Perkins. And also Tuesday as a concept still exists, which it wouldn’t if he had eaten it, I think. I’m willing to take the chance, Monday sucks.”

“Who?” Lily asked and the other Lily gave her the look, the one Dumbledore had given her earlier, and Lily then realized the exact reason she wouldn’t remember a Sally Anne Perkins probably coincided with the fact that Rabbit had devoured her from reality.

“…Was she important?” Lily asked but the other Lily didn’t respond, after all, it was too late now. And they remained in the middle of the hallway, staring at each other, perhaps both still waiting for some instructions from a Lily who had yet to appear.

“So, what now, then?” Lily asked and the other Lily smiled for the first time in the meeting.

“Now, you go to dinner and sit with Default, get Rabbit to confess eating Sally, get chewed out by Hermione about Potions, try to translate Luna-speak into English, then return with them to the common room and terrify the Lily who’s in there having an existential crisis. Meanwhile, I go recruit Zabini and Greengrass into Default, and return to the common room to cause the Lily there to have an even worse existential crisis which will eventually force her from the room and result in Rabbit speaking English to us for the first time.”

The other Lily stood triumphantly, glowing slightly, and the world seemed to be shifting around her as if this was the solution to all ills. Lily just sort of stared at her, wondering if this was how she looked to other people, and then thought over what the other Lily had just said, “We are terrible people.”

Still, a solution that didn’t involve her repeating Monday forever was certainly one she was willing to take.
Is a Thing More than Memory?

In which Lily has a small power trip and discovers the dark side of the force, Wizard Lenin partakes in physical therapy and finds it terrible, and Hermione explains some of what happened last year.

“And that’s how I became quidditch captain.”

Unfortunately for Lily, Wizard Lenin didn’t care and wasn’t even pretending to pay attention, instead he was focusing all of his energy on standing upright. Like all the other times she’d seen him try it wasn’t going particularly well.

He was teetering on the balls of his feet, using the night stand Lily had recently created as a sort of crutch, and his arms shook dangerously with the effort. With some dramatic music behind him it might look inspiring, but with only the sound of his strained breathing and having seen this exact moment at least five times it lost some of its potential grandeur.

“Rabbit also ate some girl named Sally-Anne Perkins, if you’re interested in that sort of thing. And he speaks in actual terrifying sentences… I probably should be keeping a better eye on him but Luna swore on her ability to find crumple-horned snorcklacks that she’d watch him, and judging from what she’s said that’s a very important ability.” Not to mention she’d been babysitting him in all of their first year classes so far and it seemed like no one else but Sally-Anne Perkins had been gobbled up by extra dimensional monsters.

And so far as she could tell that hadn’t had too much of an effect. Of course, that could be because any effect she’d had had been eaten by Rabbit.

“Goddammit!” Wizard Lenin feel flat onto his back once again, sweat decorating his brow, his magic a static angry mess around him. Something would probably catch fire again, but that was why Lily was around, to get him food and put out his fires.

She was starting to think it was a pretty thankless job.

Especially since he spent most of the time not thanking her or else completely ignoring her. The least he could do was listen to her latest Hogwarts adventures; Death always listened to her Hogwarts adventures when she went to visit him. Not that Wizard Lenin had ever really cared about them while in her head, but then he’d been forced to listen because it was his only source of entertainment.
Now it was only Lily trapped in Hogwarts.

“I hate everything.” Wizard Lenin said to the ceiling, closing his eyes, he took a large breath and looked on the verge of trying again. At least, she thought, she still understood him. She’d been afraid, that Tuesday morning, that she had lost something vital.

Without his thoughts in her head would he become like all the others? An opaque caricature she only barely understood? But so far at least, so far he was still mostly transparent. It was a small comfort though and she tried not to dwell on it too often.

“If it didn’t work the first five times why would it work the sixth?” She must have been channeling some of her own inner-Wizard Lenin because that seemed like a very him thing to say.

And he must have been channeling his inner Lily because he reacted just the way she would.

“Your input is not appreciated!”

No, it certainly wasn’t, he’d made that clear. But that was why he didn’t get to learn about things like the Monday that never ended, well, that was actually because he’d probably throw a fit after it for abusing time travel.

Time was a very delicate thing, according to Wizard Lenin, and he’d already expressed deep regrets for pointing out that it could be manipulated so easily. It was like he was just waiting for Lily to break the universe, which since it was broken already shouldn’t be that big of a thing. If it’s already broken, why fix it?

“Look, clearly this is all a work in progress.” Lily said motioning to Wizard Lenin’s more or less prone form. He’d made some progress, but it’d been pretty minimal, he could now sort of sit up without being nauseous but he was nowhere close to walking around or using magic for anything useful.

As if on cue the corner of the mattress he was lying on burst into flames. With a wave of her hand Lily put it out, this seemed to only frustrate him further if the dark expression on his face was anything to go by.
“And what exactly, Lily, do you think I should be doing instead?” Wizard Lenin asked, in a way that was almost intimidating, save for the fact that he was a complete invalid at the moment.

“Well, I don’t know.” Lily thought about it for a moment and then summoned a pile of papers with a grin, “You could do my homework for me.”

The look he gave her spoke more than he ever needed to on how terrible and insulting of an idea he felt that was.

“Hey! I don’t have time today, I have the quidditch tryout thing.” Lily said, plus she didn’t want to do any of it. Without Wizard Lenin in her head she didn’t have an immediate source for magical theory, and Lily didn’t even really believe in magical theory anyway, so her actual motivation to do the homework had more or less gone down the drain.

Wizard Lenin looked through the assignments with raised eyebrows, “And why exactly would I know anything about… ‘How Gilderoy Lockhart is the Greatest Wizard Since Merlin?’”

“Because I don’t and you always know things I don’t know.”

Wizard Lenin gave her a somewhat flat look and reached out towards her, “Pen.”

Lily conjured a pen and tossed it to him, then with flourish he began writing on the parchment for her Defense essay, then with a charming smile he handed it to her. Written in far neater handwriting than she’d ever had were two words, “He’s not.”

Lily considered it, honestly that was what she had been planning to write, but it’d seemed a bit too easy. Especially since the essay was supposed to be three pages long at least, “Really?”

“No, write your own goddamned essays!” He then threw the pen at her head with a surprising amount of accuracy given his bed ridden state. She stopped it before it hit, allowed it to float in front of her face for a moment, before grabbing it and sticking it into her pocket.

Lily took one last look at the essay deciding that it was better than nothing, and vanished it back to wherever things went when she put them away. For a moment they just looked at each other, frustration clear in both of their expressions and neither with anything to say for it.
“What do you think about this whole captain business anyway?” Lily asked, when the silence lingered too long.

“What captain business?” He rubbed at his face, suddenly looking tired, older than he should. Dressed in the clothes she had conjured, still wrinkled from Monday, he seemed worn down. Just as worn down as he had been inside her head.

She didn’t like seeing him like that.

“Quidditch captain, I told you, Dumbledore made me quidditch captain.” Lily said and then her eyes narrowed, thinking back to the circumstances, “Right after I blew up Potions too.”

“Simple, he’s keeping you busy.”

He offered her that cruel half smile he was so fond of, the one he used when he knew he was right, when he had just figured out someone else’s scheme and found it beneath his intellect. Like he thought it was cute that Dumbledore felt he could be at all subtle. To Wizard Lenin there was no true master of chess like himself and all other attempts ranged from pitiful to mildly amusing.

“Keeping me busy?”

“You need to attend these tryouts, then practices, then games, not to mention meeting with players and coordinating the team. Quidditch is a complete waste of everyone’s time which, in his opinion, is no doubt exactly what you need.” His smile turned wry then, “It’d be clever, if it was anyone else. But it seems that Dumbledore is not willing to take drastic measures.”

“Like what?”

“Like sending you to Azkaban for the murder of your professor.” He said offhand, “Of course the political fallout would be unbelievable, even if he was successful in getting the minister and Wizengamot to agree. And I doubt it would work, I can’t see Azkaban holding a creature such as you… Not to mention… So instead he keeps you here and he keeps you very busy.”

Well, that was one explanation she supposed, and it made a certain amount of sense. But it seemed…
It seemed like a very short term solution, if that was what Dumbledore was really going for. And also he had trailed off a little in the middle there, as if there was some other train of thought he was more uncertain of, one he wanted to keep to himself.

Even crippled and lying on a bed Wizard Lenin was always scheming his precious schemes.

Perhaps it shouldn’t concern her, Dumbledore’s actions really hadn’t before, only with Quirrell had they become… worrying. And even then there was no true reason to be concerned, annoyed, maybe, but concerned, probably not. After all, at the end of things he couldn’t kill her, and that really took most of the dire threats off the table. Really the only reason she was even remotely unnerved was because of the Quirrell thing, which he had just… not been involved in. So what was the worst that could happen?

Besides if Dumbledore was going to find ridiculous hobbies for her she wasn’t going to complain, otherwise Hogwarts would become hopelessly boring. She probably would have done the quidditch thing eventually anyway, if only to see what Ron’s hubbub was about.

“Well, if that’s all I’d best be going, I just stopped in while I had a break. I’m sure the other Lily will be in as soon as I’m gone.” Lily brushed off her clothes and gave Wizard Lenin one final look, feeling that strange twang in her chest that always came in this moment, this leaving. As if they were truly two separate beings.

“See that she gets better food, I can’t live on a diet of treacle tart.” Wizard Lenin said in parting, and just for that Lily was sure that the other future Lily was going to get him piles of the tart.

Climbing the stairs and popping out the door she was greeted by the next Lily, who indeed had a plate filled with tarts, she offered the other Lily two thumbs up, “Good work, it’s his favorite!”

“I’m so considerate!” The other Lily agreed with that too cheery grin she liked to wear. Lily still hadn’t quite gotten a handle on talking to her temporarily displaced selves, both when she was in the past and when she was going through the scene a second time.

The first was always with the thought that whatever happened had already happened, was cemented in a way, and the second was spent remembering what was already said. She still felt, in these moments, as if she never truly made any conscious decisions. Events just sort of happened, like reading a script and not looking for a reason underneath, and what happened usually ended up consistent but all the same it was somewhat disconcerting.
She tried not to think about it too much, besides, so far it hadn’t proven dangerous just a little unnerving. A little bit like Dumbledore, now that she thought about it.

Lily ran past her, to the door, but before she exited she couldn’t help but ask, “So, how do the tryouts go?”

It usually wasn’t a good idea to find out from the future Lily how their day had gone. After some thought Lily had decided that was half of what Monday’s problem was, being told by other Lilys all the things she had to do, but sometimes it was just so tempting that she couldn’t help herself.

The other Lily made a sour face, sighing, and promptly deflated, “Oh, those… Well… You’ll see.”

On second thought Lily wasn’t actually sure she wanted to know. She quickly exited, slamming the door behind her, and made her way out to the field. Quidditch captain, captain, she didn’t actually mind the captain bit. If only she was captain of something respectable, like a ship, or a squad of elite assassins, captain of a quidditch team was downright embarrassing compared to everything she could be captain of.

Quickly she ran down the stairs and then outside of the castle and towards the quidditch stadium where her Default compatriots waited. Or at least, that was what she expected. She found only two of them

Rabbit and Luna were seated on the grass, on the side lines of the stadium, staring at the empty field.

“Where the hell is everyone?” Lily asked and Rabbit and Luna turned to look at her, Luna smiling cheerfully and Rabbit offering her his politest smile and a small nod.

“Oh, hello Ellie, glad you could make it.” Luna said looking a little dazed in the bright sunlight and completely unconcerned by Rabbit’s rapidly developing sentience.

Lily was beginning to suspect that despite Luna being the first person to understand the magnitude of the Rabbit problem, and willing to accept that Rabbit wasn’t actually a human or a rabbit, she still wasn’t quite getting the consequences of all of it.

“Seriously, where is everyone? I explicitly said Wednesday, didn’t I?” She had, multiple times, giving the exact time and location to everyone. She’d even done it that morning multiple times, in
History of Magic (which was also strangely filled with Gryffindors) she’d shouted it before she started regaling about past events that should have happened but didn’t. Luna nodded solemnly in agreement, indicating that Lily had done her best to tell everyone.

After a moment of strained silence Luna offered an explanation, “Perhaps they got lost on the road of life.”

“. . Lost on the road of life?” It wasn’t really important, Lily hadn’t even really wanted to be captain, Dumbledore had just sort of forced in on her to waste her time. So it wasn’t important like Death was important or Wizard Lenin was important, but it still somehow clung to her and clawed deep inside her heart and boiled.

She didn’t like it, she didn’t like this feeling of being disregarded, passed over for bigger and grander things. Left behind. Whatever tolerance she’d had up until this point, whatever frayed patience she’d been wearing thin, it was completely gone and something cold and dangerous was taking its place.

With a thought she summoned them, her comrades and subordinates, from different parts of the castle until they were each sitting on the field. Hermione Granger, Daphne Greengrass, and Blaise Zabini each slumped on the grass looking up at her in fear and terror as if realizing what a grave error they had made.

Good.

“Luna suggests that you all became lost on the road of life.” She said without emotion, only that coldness that she’d only ever felt every once in a while, seeping through her words, “I sincerely hope this is the case, or perhaps that you even hit your heads simultaneously and forgot what today is, because there could be no other just reason for you to miss quidditch tryouts.”

None of them made a sound.

“Now, let’s get started.” She said with a smile that was more teeth than anything else.

Out of nothing she created broom sticks and tossed them at each of them, none of them managing to catch it, “We’re going to see how well everyone flies.”

“Ellie…” Hermione asked for the first time since a year ago sounding panicked and uncertain, terror beyond measure welling in her eyes, “Ellie, what are you doing? Ellie… Ellie, I can’t fly!”
And for a moment Lily hesitated because even she could see that Hermione had long since been pushed past her breaking point but whatever sympathy Lily had quickly died at the thought that this all could have easily been avoided if she’d just shown up to the goddamn quidditch tryout like a decent human being.

“Then you will learn and you will learn quickly.” Lily responded with a smile, a polite cheery one that always somehow managed to be terrifying, and then motioned to the broom stick, “Now, up.”

With a flick of her wrist she sent the stick up into the air with Hermione clinging onto it for dear life. Of course, it wasn’t high enough off the ground to cause any real damage, because in spite of everything Lily really did like Hermione, but it was certainly high enough to look lethal and intimidating.

“Holy shit! We don’t even have enough people in Default for a quidditch team!” Blaise Zabini screamed as he, Daphne, and Luna watched in horror as Hermione gripped the wood and desperately was trying not to look down.

“I talked to Ron and it sounds as if the Seeker is the only important position. Everyone else is just a meat shield.” Which at the moment suited Lily’s mood perfectly, whoever happened to be the fastest could catch the shiny golden ball, everyone else could sit in the way and take beatings so hard they would wish they had never been born.

“That is not how quidditch works! I did not sign up for this!” Zabini cried.

“Of course you did.” Lily said, turning to face him fully, her eyes pinning him to the grass, “I specifically recruited you and Greengrass with quidditch in mind, don’t you remember our bargain?”

“You came out of nowhere shouting at us to join Default! I don’t remember negotiating about quidditch positions!” Greengrass spat, which perhaps was more or less true, but none the less Lily felt that she had been both very fair and very clear.

“Ellie, get me down right now!”

Lily turned to Luna and Rabbit, “What do you think? Should Greengrass and Zabini also compete for the head meat shield position?”
Luna hesitated but Rabbit gave, for Rabbit anyway, an enthusiastic nod. With another flick of her wrist Greengrass and Zabini were hoisted into the air along with Hermione and proceeded to cling for their lives to the wooden broomsticks.

“Meat shield is not a quidditch position! It is not even remotely a quidditch position!” Zabini shouted from far above but Lily just smiled back.

“Um, Ellie, are you going to put them down?” Luna asked, shielding her eyes as she looked up into the afternoon sky.

“Oh, but I think they’re enjoying themselves, don’t you?”

“Hermione is screaming.”

“So she is.”

It was vaguely entertaining, in a sadistic sort of way, normally Lily wasn’t this much into schadenfreude but it did ease the tension inside of her chest somewhat. Still, after a few moments, she found she really wasn’t enjoying it all that much. There was just, well, no real point to it. After they’d learned their lessons, to never ever miss quidditch tryouts, there was nothing really to gain from their extreme discomfort.

Quidditch, like Wizard Lenin had predicted, sort of was a giant waste of everyone’s time.

And with that Lily threw them all back onto the ground and watched as they crawled and tried to put themselves back together.

“Right, Zabini wins.” Lily said before adding, “Tryouts are over, good job team.”

“I win?” Zabini asked, panting, “Oh good, what do I win?”

The position of head meat shield but judging by his expression this was one of those rhetorical
questions Lily wasn’t actually supposed to answer. So instead Lily just dug her hands into her pockets, sighed, and looked up at the overwhelmingly blue sky.

Maybe she should pick up A.L.F. as a hobby again, see what Aleksander was up to in Albania, surely the wizards had managed to put up some sort of rebellion by now. Standing in that stadium, her peers attempting to get over their dread of heights, she just felt that it was so much shallower than it used to be.

Without the body problem what was there to Hogwarts?

She must have been standing like that for some time because when she looked down Zabini and Greengrass were gone, probably hightailing it back to the castle to rethink their decision to join Default. The only trouble was once you join Default you never go back, they probably hadn’t realized that yet.

“Was that really necessary, Ellie?” Hermione was glaring at her, her hands clenched and white with rage, and only a year ago she would have been flushed and screaming at this point about Lily’s complete lack of respect for other human beings.

“You didn’t show up.” Lily responded with raised eyebrows, to which Hermione sneered, an expression which looked strangely in place on her face, as if it was one she was used to making.

“I had no idea quidditch of all things was so important.” She said, practically spitting the word quidditch like it was insulting to her. Which, well, Lily felt almost the same way but the fact that Lily was captain of this quidditch team meant that Hermione should be taking it seriously.

Lily was about to say that when she noticed Luna and Rabbit watching them, Luna with a very concerned expression on her face as if she was watching her castle built of hopes and dreams fall apart, and Rabbit with… a Rabbit expression on his face which was very hard to interpret as always.

Suddenly Lily just didn’t have the energy to have this sort of an argument in front of them.

“Well, it’s over now anyway, congratulations, you made the team.” With that Lily began to walk back to whence she came, although maybe she’d take a detour around the lake since she didn’t really have anything to do with her spare time, or maybe she’d try drowning herself to visit Death.
She couldn’t remember if she’d ever drowned herself before. Of course then she’d have to explain why Wizard Lenin wasn’t with her but… But maybe it was time she had a discussion with Death about things, he always seemed to know which direction to point her in.

Before she could get too far she looked back to Default’s original members.

“Luna, keep Rabbit occupied won’t you, and make sure he doesn’t eat anymore Hufflepuffs.”

Luna nodded vigorously, pulling Rabbit up with her, “Of course, captain! There will be no more Hufflepuffs lost in the war against extradimensional beings.”

Rabbit cocked his head, looking as blank as always, before uttering the word, “Doubtful.”

How was it that she was missing the days where he just said yes or no to things? And did he just imply that he was going to eat more Hufflepuffs? Did that mean he’d already eaten them or was just planning it? But was Rabbit bound to the same linear time plane as the rest of them, did eating things in the future mean he’d already done it in the past, was there no stopping him?

No, no down that path lay madness, or at least the pressing need to ask Death for advice since Wizard Lenin seemed to be completely indifferent to anything that wasn’t him trying to stand up and failing miserably.

“I don’t have time for quidditch, Ellie.”

Funny, Lily had almost completely forgotten Hermione’s existence in those two seconds. She looked drained, so much older than she should, like a gust of wind could knock her over and take her far away from Scotland. She looked as if she was on the edge of breaking.

“I need, I need to get stronger, to learn more spells. I need to… I need to be able to defend myself, to fix my parents. I don’t have time for things like quidditch anymore!” Hermione said and then hugging herself she started to stand, looking straight at Lily as if Rabbit and Luna weren’t even there.

“Do you know what he did to my parents, Ellie?” She asked, a twitching desperate sort of smile on her face, “He took their memories, all their memories of me, so that I don’t even exist anymore. And no one seems to be able to fix it and after a little while they decided that they had to erase me from the muggle world, because they didn’t remember I existed anymore and could be sent to jail if
someone started asking where I went. But after a few months of trying no one cares anymore
because they had to spend all of their time looking for Eleanor Bloody Potter. So I have to fix it,
because no one else can or will! I have to make sure that it never happens again and undo whatever
that bastard did to them, because no one else will! So I’m sorry, Ellie, that I don’t have time for
things like bloody quidditch!”

For a moment there was silence, only Hermione’s words, practically screamed at her echoing
throughout the stadium. Then Hermione, without another word, turned on her heel and swiftly
walked back to the classroom as if all the hounds in hell were chasing her.

Lily, Luna, and Rabbit simply watched.

“Well there’s that.” Lily said somewhat dully.

Hermione had more or less confirmed what Lily and Wizard Lenin had thought had happened,
perhaps she’d filled in a few of the details. It was times like this that he would comment on how little
the Wizarding World, those good light bureaucratic witches and wizards, cared about mudbloods.
But Wizard Lenin wasn’t there anymore, so it was just Lily paraphrasing the words he would
probably never say to her.

“Is a thing more than memory?” Luna asked, her pale blue eyes staring after Hermione long after she
had disappeared, “We all carry such bitter shards of regret in our hearts, I like to forget mine, if you
cling to them too hard and too long you start bleeding.”

And Hermione was, bleeding profusely, in that strange emotional and metaphorical sense the sight of
it removing whatever bitterness there was about quidditch of all things from Lily. Now she just felt
tired.

“If you remember them does it make them real? If you don’t do they cease to exist?” Luna asked
herself once again and then turned to look Lily in the eye, “I believe in trees falling in woods, but
only because I choose to, and sometimes I still wonder.”

And Lily did too, believed in reality existing beyond acknowledgement or memory, but that didn’t
make the moment any less bitter.

“I need new hobbies.” Lily finally said, quidditch captain wasn’t going to be enough after all.
And with that she finally sauntered away from the stadium and out towards the lake, she walked on the top of the water for a little while, until she was in the center, eyes trained on the dark shadows that darted underneath her. Then, when it was clear that no merpeople or giant squids would save her prematurely, Lily plunged.

Drowning sucked, that was Lily’s first thought upon materializing in the train station, it took forever and was extremely uncomfortable. Next time she was going back to stabbing herself with sharp objects or hanging herself from rafters.

“Lily?”

“Ugh, hi uncle Death.” Lily said, still feeling the after effects of drowning, that cold sort of bleariness but managing to shake it off enough to smile at the man.

He smiled back, that special Death smile that no one else had ever given her, she’d forgotten how much she missed it. Even though it hadn’t been very long she felt like it had been forever since she’d seen it.

There was nothing sharp in it, nothing hidden beneath, just a bright warm smile.

“Are you alright?” He asked, perhaps seeing something in her expression, but she nodded so he took her hand and led her to where he had tea waiting. After pouring a cup for her and then for himself he laced his hands together and asked the question he always asked.

“So, Lily, how have you managed to turn Hogwarts on its head this week?”

Completely focused on her, willing to listen, not forced to. It was… far warmer than simply being refreshing and she felt her own smile grow because of it.

“Default is a house now, I’m quidditch captain, only we don’t have much of a team. Not that it matters, since it’s quidditch. Hermione’s horrifically traumatized, Rabbit is speaking actual words, I built a time machine and repeated Monday a ridiculous amount of times and…” And Wizard Lenin wasn’t there with her.

Death didn’t say anything, didn’t ask where her comrade Wizard Lenin was, or even where Rabbit was, he just looked at her and somehow she knew that he knew. She knew that he knew that she had...
disregarded his advice, had gotten the philosopher’s stone for Wizard Lenin, and had built him a body.

He was looking at her like he’d always known.

She was finding it hard to keep smiling.

On some deeply buried instinct, she jumped out of her seat and crossed the table so that she was grabbing onto him, burying herself in that dark clothing and trying to force that smile to stay still and constant.

His arms, slowly, confidently, wrapped around her and pressed her in.

“What do I do now?” She asked, “What am I supposed to do now?”

“Anything, everything.” Death said softly, rubbing circles into her back, “Become quidditch captain, build a time machine, found Default, teach History of Magic, why not do everything and anything?”

“Aren’t you supposed to be telling me to be responsible?” Death wasn’t quite as insistent as Wizard Lenin but she would have expected some hesitance but there wasn’t any. Death somehow seemed removed from those concerns so that they were nothing more than a stray breeze.

“I spent many years being responsible and it always made me terribly miserable.” He removed her face from his clothing so that she was forced to look up into his green eyes, the same color as hers, “And I believe, deep down, you know where the line is drawn and you know not to cross it. I have faith in you, at the end of things. We don’t have to have the same concerns as them.”

“You didn’t want him to have a body though.” She pointed out and at the mention of it a shadow passed through Death’s eyes, a flicker of doubt.

“No, I didn’t.”

“But I did, so haven’t I already crossed your line?” She asked, and perhaps Death was right, perhaps Wizard Lenin was never meant to have a body. But perhaps he wasn’t, because they couldn’t have
stayed like they were forever. She really didn’t know anymore and was too tired to think clearly about it.

“No, just because I wouldn’t do it, just because I advise against it, doesn’t mean that you’ve gone too far. It just means… that I see things differently than you do.” He sighed then, and it became clear that he still thought he was right and that she wasn’t, but it was important that he didn’t say it. That he still allowed her to make the decisions she needed to without grief.

“So, do everything and anything?” Lily asked, stepping away from him.

“Everything and anything.”

Later, when her body floated to the surface of the lake, aided by the giant squid she would open her eyes to the bright sun and blue sky, and somehow in spite of everything she would feel a little lighter about it all.
Letters from Gilderoy Lockhart

In which Lily responds to Gilderoy Lockhart’s fan mail, Hermione and Lily finally finish their conversation from the train, and Lily decides to be a better person and make up for her quidditch themed meltdown.

Lily had decided, that now that she was on her own and once again completely and utterly independent, that she would craft her own internal monologue to reflect Wizard Lenin’s missing voice. While she was at it she also decided to add Death into the mix as he had been very underrepresented in her growing years in spite of having relatively decent advice.

It didn’t necessarily make decisions easier, but it did make them more entertaining, and in general provided that much needed debate on the pros and cons of any situation.

For example, in the relative calm of detention with the flamboyant and ultimately false Gilderoy Lockhart, she could easily keep herself entertained as she made her way through letter after letter by imagining what each of them would say.

“My dear Ambrosia,” Lily began on the sheet of rather fancy parchment that Lockhart had first handed her when she’d arrived, “I graciously, and humbly, do accept your wild fanatic devotion of the empty persona I have forged which seems to lack any semblance of soul behind it.”

“You letter lacks the much needed art of subtlety.” Wizard Lenin would no doubt say (being so irritated that he’d resorted to bad puns), as he was never a fan of showing one’s true feelings about any given topic.

“Perhaps you could refrain from stating such things so directly.” Uncle Death might add in with that slightly pinched look he sometimes got when he tried to teach her social manners. Although, no, that wasn’t quite right. She could also simply picture him smiling, looking off into the distance, and saying nothing with a star of humor twinkling madly in his eyes.

The truth was that she did not know nearly enough about Death to imagine him properly, Wizard Lenin was familiar, but there were many facets of Death that still remained a mystery to her. While Wizard Lenin’s past was hazy it wasn’t unknown, Death though… She really did know almost nothing about him.
“My dearest delightful Ambrosia,” Lily started again, scrapping the first page, “It is with great honor and pride that I return your passionate worship to the cult of me. When I take over the country and provide organizational structure to my budding religion you shall surely become a shrine maiden of the highest order…”

“How, in God’s name, do you think that is any subtler?” Then Wizard Lenin would sigh, rub his imaginary temples, and imagine he was taking over Britain instead of being stuck in her brain all day. Which, well, now he was to some extent or soon would be as soon as he managed to walk up a flight of stairs without passing out from exhaustion.

Every time she’d visited him so far he’d made minimal progress, only now managing to stand for lengthy periods of time, so far walking across the room was more or less daunting. He found it exceedingly frustrating which meant that Lily got to practice putting out many fires.

He also hadn’t appreciated it when Lily had pointed that out.

And Death… He was slipping further and further through her fingers, his face and eyes still crystal clear to her, but his expression one she could not even guess or begin to decipher.

Lily set down her pen and reread what she had wrote, suddenly quite displeased with it.

Independent, alone, in a larger if more interesting cupboard that went by the name of Hogwarts. She would now have to make these decisions by herself.

And she found there were a number of decisions that she must make. The first of which and most immediate featured Squirrel’s golden replacement, Gilderoy Lockhart.

Gilderoy Lockhart was alarming; the last man she’d found truly alarming had bashed her head against a chair until it’d killed her. And true, she was sort of immune from death, but that wasn’t the point. Lockhart also wasn’t quite alarming in the same way that Squirrel was, flipping from comically incompetent to more than slightly dangerous, but all the same he was so false that there must be something hiding beneath him. And she was no longer quite as indifferent to things that she found unnerving.

At the moment the man was in the office, grading papers, and casually glancing at her every once in a while sometimes with a charming smile (when she looked him directly in the eye) and sometimes
with speculation (when she pretended she wasn’t staring back).

And his hair was perfect, perfect in a way that no human being’s hair could be perfect. Curled to the correct degree, a shining gold that seemed to glimmer without even the correct lighting, not a single hair out of place. No one human had hair like that and no one inhuman she’d met either; which made him something else entirely.

(She’d told this to Wizard Lenin earlier, while he was concentrating on trying to cast magic, he’d ended up throwing one of Gilderoy Lockhart’s books at her head.)

“Miss Potter,” He’d said when she’d walked in for detention, “How delightful to see you.”

It was as if he had been waiting for her though, had been waiting for some time, and his grin was filled with nothing just as Rabbit’s expressions were. He waited until she’d seated herself and then had continued on as if they’d already gone through standard introductions without her even having to say a word in response.

“Now, Miss Potter, I will let you know that you have grand potential. Do you know what that means, potential?” Here he paused, his blue eyes darting to hers for a quick moment, his smile never wavering, then he continued in spite of her silence, “It means you can do great things, Eleanor Lily Potter.”

“I was under the impression that I had detention.” Lily just responded, blandly, having had enough small talk with Squirrel to last her a life time. Besides, when conversations with Squirrel had gotten long and non-stuttery they had also gotten very weird. Best not to repeat that sort of thing.

“Oh, you do, you do, I was just… I haven’t had much of a chance to talk to you and it seemed like the best opportunity.” He finally finished before adding, “We’ll get to that boring detention stuff later, but this is a priceless opportunity, Miss Potter.”

She had no idea what that opportunity was supposed to be or if that opportunity involved her violent and gruesome death.

“Who are you, Miss Potter?” He asked, apparently rhetorically because although he looked at her intently he did not pause long enough to answer. Which was all well and good because the answer to that question as more complicated than she would like for him to know.
He leaned back in his chair, observing her, that smile never dimming, “An orphan, a war hero, an heir to a noble and ancient house, a pretty little school girl, with a little direction and guidance you’ll take the world by storm.” He then sighed, but still looked absurdly cheerful, like a salesman on television, “So tell me, Eleanor, what is a pretty little thing like you doing getting yourself detention from a nasty man like Severus Snape?”

Snape, after Lily had decided to live life at its fullest and restart her feud with the man, had already reached his point deducting limit and had started his old tactic of assigning her as many detentions as humanly possible with the defense professor. It was good to know that old dogs could never learn new tricks or were just too lazy to.

This time he did appear to expect an answer so she’d provided the shortest one she could, “Tradition.”

“Tradition? Well, not a very good tradition if you want to go places. Of course, I doubt anyone cares about the opinion of a greasy hermit like him but you’ve been living in the shadows, little Eleanor. You have to meet, you have to greet, if you ever want to move past men like him then you must show yourself to the public and make use of the advantages you have.” Here the smile dropped, suddenly, and he leaned forward, “Eleanor, I can help you, if you’ll let me.”

This appeared to be the true question, the only real question he wanted to ask her, and those cornflower blue eyes burned in a way that was almost reminiscent of Wizard Lenin himself.

She had no idea what he wanted, why he was asking her this, what he was even asking her to do but those alarm bells had been ringing since the first time she met him and she remembered that an elf had warned her of some great danger in Hogwarts.

“No, I think I’ll pass.”

“No? Are you sure? You’re a little young to be making decisions like that.” The man’s smile returned then as if it had never gone away, “Think of it this way, I’ve been through this already, I have the expertise you need.”

“The expertise for what?” Lily asked.

“For being a celebrity of course!” Lockhart exclaimed as if there was no pursuit in life more worthy than this, “You need to get your face out there if you ever want to be remembered. Sure, you’re
known now, but right now you’re young and vaguely adorable.”

This was about the last thing she expected him to say, or anyone to say, considering Lily was pretty much Wizard Jesus in the flesh. Somehow she just didn’t think Jesus was all that concerned about his celebrity status and book sales on his three year tour.

“Nope, nope, super good with my… current status.” Lily said, holding up her hands, and causing the man to look somewhat disappointed.

“Ah, I see, well, I’m sure you’ll change your mind. And when you do, remember I’m always here to help.” And then he’d gone back to grading papers, handing her a pile of letters, as well as parchment to write handwritten responses to each and since then they hadn’t said a word to each other.

That was the first problem, Gilderoy Lockhart and whatever was lurking behind him. Sitting in his office, writing responses to his fan mail for him (and still stuck on the first one to the aging Ambrosia), her mind kept snagging on that too charming smile.

The decision was what to do about it. The nice thing was that there didn’t appear to be too many options. It was either, get rid of him now or wait and see.

She would prefer the get rid of him now tactic but that had the potential to get a little messy, that and it would undoubtedly mean dealing with Dumbledore more which she wasn’t sure she could handle right now.

And that left her with the option she was taking by default, the wait and see. It didn’t really involve her doing anything, just sitting and watching and waiting for that inevitable sign that would tip her into the do something now decision. As it was he hadn’t really done anything yet, just been vaguely unnerving, and there wasn’t anything incriminating about that. Hopefully this meant someone else would be forced to deal with him first, although given Dumbledore’s lack of action with Squirrel this was highly unlikely, and if she did have to deal with him it meant she didn’t have to deal with him now.

Thus, the first decision, was made before the first letter was even finished and Lily was marveling at her own independent ability to make reasonable and rational decisions without Wizard Lenin bickering with her for a half hour.

“My dear Ambrosia,” She started pausing slightly before writing, “It’s clear that you’ve read all of
my books; this pleases my bank account. I would like for you to continue this hobby the next time I slay some great beast.”

She eyed this, it wasn’t her best work, but then detention was hardly the time and place for a magnum opus anyway. With that she put the completed letter into its envelope and moved her way onto the response to the next one; from another aging woman who had read far too many of this man’s books by the name of Venus.

(Wizards, she’d realized at some point, really did have a thing for their Roman and Greek names and she was just waiting for the day she ran into some poor bloke named Zeus. It hadn’t happened yet, but probably somewhere in this pile there was going to be a Zeus, and she could ask him about all of the animal affairs he had over the years.)

“My dearest voluptuous god of love, Venus,” She started and then wrote, “Did you know you are also a planet? I’ve heard it has unpleasant weather conditions.”

The letter thing, Lily decided, was getting easier as she went and was actually way more efficient without Wizard Lenin’s perfectionist nagging. A lot of things were actually easier without his perfectionist nagging, except for her essays, those had more or less gone down the drain without his intervention and knowledge of magical theory.

The second letter finished, she stuffed it into the envelope, and moved onto the third which was also (strangely enough) addressed to an elderly witch who had read quite a few of his books.

Gilderoy Lockhart really knew how to milk the aging populace for all it was worth.

Quickly writing out a response and signing his name she began to think about things far more worthy of her time and attention.

The second, and perhaps the most consuming decision to cross her path, was what to do about Hermione Granger.

Lily had returned to the common room the night after the quidditch tryouts, having spent the rest of the afternoon walking around and wrapping her had around anything and everything, a concept she hadn’t been doing too well recently.
She had been so caught up in Wizard Lenin’s body issue that everything else had faded, had become secondary to that goal, and now she was left only with all these secondary things she had previously disregarded.

There was a time when they would have almost been overwhelming.

But after meeting Death she understood that she had to face these little things she’d turned aside. Things like quidditch and things that weren’t like quidditch, the things she never thought to consider.

Things that Wizard Lenin probably wouldn’t even care about.

When she’d finally opened that door she’d been met with the sight of dying embers and Hermione staring into them. It was like it was only a shell of Hermione and that the real girl was somewhere else entirely, and that this shell was dimly burning just as those embers were; ready to blaze at the smallest provocation.

For a moment Lily had simply stood there, watching her, neither moving into the room or out of it.

(At the time it hadn’t been a decision, it’d just come out, something she’d had to say.)

“We never did finish our conversation on the train.”

Hermione’s shoulders stiffened and in a voice that tried its best to be steady she said, “I don’t want to talk to you.”

Lily stepped into the room, made her way to the seat across from Hermione, and strangely enough was reminded of her own meetings with Death or Wizard Lenin. It wasn’t quite the same feeling but there was something raw and intimate about this. The way the shadows danced on the wall, the breathing of the other Default members fast asleep, and only she and Hermione left to whisper secrets in the dark.

It had a rawness that Lily had only ever felt with Flamel in that small dark workroom in France where he had told her his deepest most guarded truths.
“That’s nothing new.” Lily pointed out, “You’ve never wanted to talk to me, I always say something that upsets you.”

Before Quirrell Hermione had been upset even more frequently, taking anything Lily said and twisting it into something morally offensive. Compared to that Hermione the new one was far more even keeled, but her temper was deeper for it, and instead of shouting her moral outrage she would seethe in silence.

So Hermione said nothing, instead left Lily to fill the tense silence, but Lily had nothing else on the tip of her tongue and instead found herself wandering down various trains of thoughts.

Hermione was starting to remind her of Wizard Lenin. She wasn’t quite as intimidating, not as old or powerful, but there was that ever present anger and irritation at the world she lived in. As if everything chafed at her and only the completion of a single solitary goal would satisfy her. But even that satisfaction would never make her happy.

A younger Wizard Lenin, one who was more untried, less weary but just as determined.

But she didn’t know what to say to her.

She could offer to fix Hermione’s parents, she supposed, it would probably work but then… But then what if Hermione just slipped back into the Hermione she’d always been? What if she learned nothing from this experience and only to Lily would it be like something happened?

The truth was that Lily liked this new Hermione better.

Perhaps that was unfortunate for Hermione but it was true. This new Hermione didn’t spend her time pointing out the flaws in Lily’s reasoning, demanding Lepur Rabbitson learn English, and more she understood on some level that Lily wasn’t like them. She was one of a very select few group of people who knew that and the only one close to Lily’s own age.

Death, Hermione had heard that name, and she hadn’t flinched.

And, even more than new Hermione versus old Hermione there was that thought that if Hermione chose to move past this, to return to what she was and leave Lily behind, then only Lily would remember the way the world truly worked. That not all authority figures were benign and that not all
Defense professors were what they seemed.

And that thought made her uncomfortable. No, more than uncomfortable, it was a pit of dread in her stomach that ate at her.

But staring at Hermione, and remembering her words from the afternoon, she was almost equally uncomfortable. She knew that things couldn’t stay as they were, not forever, something was going to break at the end of things.

So something had to be done, she had to say something, she just didn’t know what it should be.

Then it struck her, the decision she had to make, the one that would tie together quidditch, Hermione, and Lily’s latest and greatest hobby into one single great idea. (And thus the ideas of Lily’s second decision began to come together.)

She started off slowly, musing into the darkness, “You know, I’ve been thinking about quidditch.”

“What makes you think I want to hear another bloody word about quidditch?” Hermione practically spat, her eyes burning, but Lily held her gaze and continued as if Hermione hadn’t interrupted. Hermione was too young and too inexperienced to be nearly as intimidating as she wanted to be.

“I’ve been thinking about quidditch and I’ve realized that it’s a very silly sport but that it doesn’t need to be. I need a hobby, true, but it doesn’t have to be quidditch.” Lily said, her eyes never leaving Hermione’s face and then added, “It could be something more useful.”

“More useful?” Hermione asked, dully, her eyebrows raised.

“I’m very good at being destructive and blowing things up. You once asked me to teach you my brand of magic and you said this morning that you have to learn to be better at certain things.” She waited for Hermione to catch her drift but Hermione just stared.

“You’re offering to teach me dueling?” She asked in a tone she was more than familiar with from Wizard Lenin, the kind that seriously doubted her judgement. But Lily was on a roll, not to be deterred, onto her latest and greatest scheme.
“Not dueling, combat. Why be a quidditch team? Why not be the A-team? Why not be the best there is at survival, combat, guerilla warfare, and pitying fools?” In other words, why leave A.L.F. behind to the Albanians, why not create her own super awesome team with her as the super awesome captain?

Anything and everything, Death had said.

“You’re kidding, right?” Hermione asked.

“Oh, no, I’m very serious.” Lily said, she always was, and then leaned in close, “You said it yourself, Hermione, you need this. It will take you years to match someone like Quirrell in spell work but to beat him physically, well, he’s a wizard. When was the last time you ever saw a wizard partake in physical conditioning?”

Hermione’s eyes widened and it became clear that she realized it then too, saw the weakness Lily had always seen in wizards, that they relied far too much on magic and that if you were fast enough and strong enough you could take them down before they even said a word.

“And this… This is what we’ll do instead of quidditch?” Hermione asked, almost hesitantly, and Lily nodded because all at once it seemed both more useful and more interesting than quidditch ever could be.

And for a moment it had truly been that easy and simple as if all their problems really could be solved with that one single decision.

But Lily had recently discovered that things were rarely that simple.

“You said that you’re death.” Hermione said, “On the train, you said you’re death. What does that mean?”

What did it mean?

Lily didn’t know herself, staring back at Hermione, as she felt something cold drift through her. It meant that Lily wasn’t like them, any of them, and that she had power beyond their imagination because of it. But it could mean far more than that, have secret meanings she had yet to discover.
Whatever it meant to her it meant something much different to Hermione in that moment.

Because Hermione had an expression that Lily knew but had rarely seen directed at her, one that she imagined was very at home on Wizard Lenin’s face, the expression of someone who saw Lily as little more than a means to their own ends.

“It means what it means.” She finally answered, and the vagueness caused Hermione to narrow her eyes, but where the old Hermione would have been sidetracked and started nagging how that wasn’t a proper answer this new one stayed focused.

“You can fix my parents, can’t you?”

The embers, without being stirred, began to die in the fireplace and the light in the room slowly but surely became nonexistent.

“Probably.” Lily finally answered, her voice duller than she expected it to sound.

In the silence that followed an entire conversation took place. One where Hermione asked why Lily hadn’t started with that in the beginning and one where Lily responded that she hadn’t wanted to, that she wasn’t necessarily on Hermione’s side. But they didn’t have that conversation, not with words, only with their breathing and their eyes.

“You fix my parents, Lily, and I’ll join whatever sport or team you want.”

And that was the second decision.

To fix or not to fix, and time was ticking, each day that passed where she hesitated to answer yes or no Hermione’s eyes became more brittle.

In Potions, in the ridiculous excuse for quidditch practices which Lily had more or less decided to cancel since they were all equally terrible at it, in the library, at dinner, in every and any opportunity Hermione would stare at Lily as if she was trying to set fire to her with her eyes alone.
If she fixed them then Hermione would most likely return to the thirteen-year-old little girl she had been before but if she didn’t then there was no telling what Hermione Granger might become.

You couldn’t stay in limbo forever, you had to either move forward or back.

Either way, Lily felt that the moment she chose she would lose something, something she didn’t know.

What would Wizard Lenin say?

He probably wouldn’t care, he hadn’t the last time she’d brought it up, fix them or don’t fix them he was indifferent to the prospect.

So then, what would Death say?

She leaned back in her chair and closed her eyes breathing out and sending all of her thoughts away. Picturing herself in the train station, a cup of tea in front of her, and Death smiling across at her with that smile that had only ever come from him. The smile that understood and was not afraid to reach out to her.

“What are you so afraid of?” She heard him ask, his voice echoing inside of her imagination, a soft warm breeze of noise.

“I don’t know.” She responded inside of her own head slowly drawing herself in to this hypothetical conversation that she might never truly have, “It’s hard to put into words.”

“Friendship is a hard thing.”

And her eyebrows raised at him questioningly, “I didn’t know we were talking about friendship.”

“It’s new for you, isn’t it?” He asked instead, “Your friend Lenin is different, you two were thrown together by circumstance and forced to live with each other for years. You intimately know the best and worst of each other. Hermione Granger has a choice. But you can’t force her to choose you.”
“Is that what I want?” She asked, not sure even then.

“She reminds you of Wizard Lenin, you don’t want her to lose that, because you don’t want to lose him. But you can’t force her to remain as she is and you can’t force her to choose you. That’s a bitter and lonely path you’re condemning her to; just for your own peace of mind.” Funny, that the Death inside her own head should say this so easily, as if she knew this too deep down somewhere inside of her.

“She just wants to use me for my god like powers.” Lily finally said, stating it clearly in the open.

“Probably.” Death said, “But does that change anything?”

Not really, because Lily could easily do it, it would just… Be a little insulting, put a gap between her and Hermione Granger that had always existed and always would exist. It just made things between them a little clearer and a little less hazy.

“So, what should I do then?”

“Let her go.”

And perhaps it was because this conversation never truly happened but when Lily opened her eyes she understood what that meant.

She would return Hermione’s parents to her, she would create the quidditch A-team to rival all other teams of awesomeness that had ever existed, and she would become independent and self-sufficient as she had once so easily been.

Just as soon as she finished all of these goddamn letters.
The Shadow of Quidditch

As with most things when everything went to hell it all went to hell at the same time. Lily figured it was just one of those fundamental flaws in the foundation of the fake reality they lived in that nobody seemed to concern themselves over.

It was what happened in Shakespeare plays. Hamlet swears revenge on the man who killed his father and somehow ends up killing Polonious through a curtain and causing Ophelia’s madness and suicide.

You didn’t intend for these things to happen, didn’t even think that they could possibly happen, and because you were unprepared for the possibility as you headed towards your goal you found them happening anyway.

(Lily had never intended the events of last Christmas even as she’d worked to recreate Wizard Lenin’s body.)

It was the third weekend in September and in spite of careful planning, training, and then even more careful planning the quidditch field looked like the Western Front, the walls were literally painted in blood, the hallway was littered with dead headless chickens, and Rabbit was missing somewhere amidst the chaos and general mass hysteria of the student population.

“Ellie, what’s the Chamber of Secrets?” Hermione asked, staring straight ahead at the words with less of a panicked expression and more one of an irritated one, slipping back into the Hermione she’d been for the past half a year as if that Hermione had never slipped away at all.

They were standing in the back of the mob of gathering students, staring at the flickering torch light that illuminated bloody words written on the wall. So far they had been more or less unnoticed, safely under Lily’s ‘these aren’t the droids you’re looking for’ wards, and it gave them a moment to stare at the scene quietly while professors and prefects urged students to return to their dormitories.

Lily, for her own part, couldn’t help but wonder what it all was supposed to mean and cast her mind
back to a great and terrible danger and then further back to Quirrell. He hadn’t written on the walls in rooster’s blood, but then, he’d had no reason to.

But if he had, what would he have written?

_There is a shadow under this red rock,_

_(Come in under the shadow of this red rock),_

_And I will show you something different from either_

_Your shadow at morning striding behind you_

_Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you;_

_I will show you fear in a handful of dust._

Yes, those were the words that Quirrell would have left for her, T.S. Eliot’s words. And she could see those words echoed in the shadows and the crimson splatters of these crudely painted letters.

Because between the two of them, for a night, they had once turned Hogwarts into The Wasteland.

“Ellie?” Hermione asked, impatiently, ripping Lily from thoughts.

“Hm?”

“The Chamber of Secrets has been opened. Enemies of the heir beware. What’s the Chamber of Secrets?” Hermione repeated.

Lily blinked, inspected the red words, tilted her head to the side a bit as if that might give her a clearer idea, “I assume a chamber filled with secrets… And maybe dead chickens.”

Considering the hallway was filled with dead chickens Lily felt like it was a safe enough assumption. Granted, if she had a giant chamber where she kept all of her secrets chickens would probably not be in it.

It was probably something far more ominous.
“Why am I not satisfied with that answer?” Hermione said in that tone of voice that Wizard Lenin reserved for rhetorical questions, “Hogwarts a History mentioned it, you know. Salazar Slytherin supposedly built a secret chamber beneath the school and some say that he kept a monster inside of it.”

“Oh, then why are you asking me?” Lily asked, since Hermione already apparently knew the answer, even if Lily couldn’t help but feel that answer was at once both too vague and too precise to be satisfying.

“Because, Ellie, I know you’re behind it and I really doubt that your Chamber of Secrets is the same as Salazar Slytherin’s.”

“This isn’t mine, Hermione.” Lily responded quietly, the gravity of the situation and the words behind the words falling onto her, and the feeling that once again she was descending down a spiraling path whose destination remained murky.

“Ellie, there are dead headless chickens on the floor, a petrified cat, and words painted in blood on the walls. Who am I supposed to blame?” She asked that as if it was rhetorical, and she probably wanted to believe Lily was behind this, desperately.

Because if Lily wasn’t behind this then things had just become much more serious.

The terrible danger had begun to show its head, and without Wizard Lenin beside her, with Death a dimension away, she had the feeling that she was woefully unprepared just as she had been one year before.

As with most things it had all started that morning.

Well, no, that wasn’t quite accurate. Really, it had started about a week before when Lily had gotten around to telling Hermione that Operation Total Recall was a go.

“What the hell is Operation Total Recall? Neville, please don’t… don’t touch anything.” Hermione
said distractedly as she focused on the potion du jour, Neville, for his own part wasn’t touching anything at all but was instead sitting at the table with a vaguely pathetic look that he usually had during Potions.

Snape had finally decided to mitigate the damage and had decided to pair Neville with someone who could make sure his potions didn’t explode or release poisonous gas and kill everyone in the room. It was an admirable decision, probably one he could have made a year before, but one that Snape was too stubborn and petty to think of doing before he had no other choice.

The honorable position of saving everyone in the Potions classroom from certain death tended to be split between Lily and Hermione and this week it was Hermione’s turn. She normally was better about it, considering that she considered Neville to be one of her only friends, but this week she wasn’t feeling the spirit of it which only added to Neville’s general twitchiness and nervous attitude.

“No, I’m not… I’m not touching anything.” Neville said before adding a little hesitantly, “But um, what is Operation Total Recall? Now that you don’t sit at the Gryffindor table I feel like I never know what’s going on.”

“Operation Total Recall is a top secret mission assigned to my elite team of guerilla warfare specialists of which I am the glorious captain.” Lily summarized but apparently it wasn’t a very apt summary because the only response she got from Neville was blinking.

“Right… Well… I’m taking remedial Potions with Snape and um… sometimes Headmaster Dumbledore.” Neville said before his eyes darted to Snape and then darted away, “Did you know he’s even more frightening when there’s no one else around to distract him, Snape, I mean?”

“Remedial Potions? I thought Hermione’s tutoring made you competent.” Lily said, because while Neville was still the worst in the class he no longer was tying with Rabbit for rock bottom. Rabbit, according to Luna, still vacillated between wandless genius in Transfiguration and just sitting around and impersonating vegetables.

Luna claimed that his eggplant routine was coming along quite nicely.

“Well… um… It did but… I guess I just needed more help than that.” Neville said, his eyes darting away from hers, almost as if he didn’t want to look at her directly when he said this. Which, was a weird thing to do, if anything he should be looking away from Hermione. Lily, after all, had no stakes in whether Neville managed to learn how to make potions without killing himself.
“Ellie, I have to study, I don’t have time for your shenanigans.” Hermione said, stirring her wand into her Potion without breaking eye contact from the bubbling liquid.

Lily for her own part had realized that without Wizard Lenin she actually had no idea whatsoever how to brew a Potion. She’d never actually paid attention to the process, he’d known all of it, she’d just chopped things when needed and stirred when necessary and that was all there was to it.

She’d decided to just use glitches to turn water into whatever it was that was needed and so far it seemed to be working more or less but it required much less concentration than Potions used to. Which just made her wonder why she’d wasted time doing it Wizard Lenin’s way in the first place.

“Oh, but agent Hermione, you’ll make time for these particular shenanigans. Total Recall, Hermione.”

Hermione looked at her blankly and Lily then realized what Wizard Lenin probably would have shouted at her from the beginning. Hermione hadn’t seen Total Recall, from the look on her face she hadn’t even heard of it.

“Most sheltered thirteen-year-old girls do not go out of their way to see explicitly violent action movies. Particularly ones which feature exploding heads.” Imaginary Wizard Lenin said then, with disdain, because he had never really gotten the point of Total Recall and had always gotten caught up on the very necessary and glorious violence in it.

Lily would go on to explain why Total Recall was a great movie and why Wizard Lenin just had no taste but given that this was all a hypothetical imaginary conversation (that she didn’t need to have because she was totally independent) with Wizard Lenin she decided it was best to clarify for Hermione.

“We’re going to get your parents’ memories back.” Lily clarified.

She didn’t know what she expected in that moment, another brittle dismissal, a snapped comment, but she did not expect Hermione to stop, to turn from her Potion and just look at Lily silently, a desperate fragile hope burning inside of her.

It stung, watching that.
“You’re… You can do that, Ellie?” Neville asked and Lily just nodded.

“We’re going to need to sneak out of Hogwarts, which is surprisingly difficult and annoying, but that should be the most tedious part of all of this.”

Neville was still just staring though, along with Hermione, like neither of them had any idea what to say.

Finally, Neville said quietly, “I’m glad, you know… Nobody else could, but if you can do it… Well, I just… It’s good.” He paused then added in a rushed almost desperate sort of tone, “You know, you guys can still sit at Gryffindor if you want to.”

“Come to Default, it’s cooler.” Lily added, because really, Neville was one of the few people she’d even bother to visit at the other table anyway. He had more reason to come to them than they had to go to him.

She had the feeling then that she was missing something, something important, but that it kept getting swept under the rug by more glaringly obvious and immediate issues. Even reflecting back on it Neville positively paled next to the bitter, fragile, Hermione Granger.

Always teetering over the edge, halfway to becoming something else, only Lily had no idea what it might be.

“Oh, I can… Thanks, Ellie, um, Hermione. I guess I should have done that to start with… Fred and George will probably want to come too, just to warn you.”

Lily wasn’t paying attention to that, instead she was watching Hermione’s bubbling potion which was beginning to rotate rapidly through colors, “Hermione, you should probably pay attention to your potion before it explodes.”

And that had more or less ended that conversation.

Lily had hoped that they could leave that night and just get it out of the way before she lost her nerve or motivation but unfortunately Lily was finally starting to realize what Wizard Lenin had meant when he said why she was quidditch captain. Dumbledore was methodically eating through her free time with a diligence that was almost uncanny.
Lily had had detentions almost every night of the week the year before and that tradition had more or less continued, the only difference was she was now stuck with Lockhart instead of Squirrel.

And when she didn’t have detention she had quidditch practice which Dumbledore had taken sometimes to overseeing himself as their head of house and quidditch coach. Thankfully he didn’t interfere with Lily’s meat shield strategy of quidditch but the fact was that she couldn’t predict when he would watch and when he wouldn’t.

Plus, there was also the fact that all of the time travel was just starting to wear on her. It turned out living forty-eight hours in what should have been a twenty-four-hour period was just plain exhausting. She’d started napping through History of Magic, rather than doing anything productive, and if she trusted Lockhart only a little more she’d probably sleep through his class too. As it was she just sort of would dully watch him flit about, talking about this adventure or that, and just wish she was sleeping or anywhere else doing anything else and wondering how his hair could possibly glisten.

Normal hair did not glisten outside of sunlight and normal human teeth did not sparkle.

Perhaps though, what really bothered her, as she went through her week was not that Dumbledore had outmaneuvered her without her even realizing it or Gilderoy Lockhart but the fact that Wizard Lenin didn’t approve.

And there was once a time, not so long ago, when that alone might have been enough to stop her.

“The last thing you need is more attention from Dumbledore.” He’d been getting better, he could stand for long periods of time, even walk up the stairs without too much trouble. He was still winded and exhausted but with each passing day he began to resemble more and more a real person instead of someone on the verge of death.

In that moment he was standing, leaning against a desk that Lily had conjured sometime during the week, staring down at her as she sat cross legged looking up at him. Looking up at him she could remember how tall he was, how his charisma almost made him glow even in a half lit room, and how he was so alive and real that she couldn’t tear her eyes away.

It terrified her.
“Dumbledore already pays attention to me, it never bothered me before.” Lily pointed out and received a sharp and pointed look from Wizard Lenin in response.

It was odd, seeing that look in person, before Wizard Lenin’s emotions had always been impressions. Flashes of memory, thought, and sometimes image. In person, seeing those eyes on a real face, it somehow felt more solid (weightier and more intimidating) than it ever had before.

“Don’t be naïve, Lily, it no longer suits you.” He said, in that tone that allowed the words to sting just a little more, “This is different, you know it, it is one thing to be talented with wandless magic but this shows him power far beyond that. If you’re successful then you’ll have solved something that he himself couldn’t do and believe me when I say that he’ll remember that.”

Lily was fairly certain that Dumbledore already knew she was extremely powerful, more powerful than him, but she knew better than to point it out. It wasn’t worth the shouting match that would needlessly ensue.

“Then I won’t get caught.”

He laughed, a sharp biting noise, because Wizard Lenin never really laughed, “That’s one solution. The easier one is to not do it at all.”

And, although she had considered not doing it, leaving Hermione as she was for some reason it was surprising that Wizard Lenin would suggest that. As if Hermione Granger meant ultimately nothing to him, like she was inconsequential, as if the things that were important to Lily were not necessarily important to him.

This was what it meant to be two separate beings.

And then something in him fractured, she would have said softened but Wizard Lenin never could manage soft. His posture slumped a bit and he sat back down on the mattress, sighing, and looking over at Lily with a worn expression, “You don’t owe her anything, Lily, you saved her life that night. Humans don’t get to hold gods in their debt.”
“It’s not about debts.” Or gods, she wanted to add, but she couldn’t find the words to say what she meant and could only look back and see the complete lack of understanding on his face.

He watched her for a few moments, dissecting her cog by cog and trying to build some great sensible machine from her parts, and then quietly said, “You know I won’t be coming with you.”

It was the first time either of them had said it so bluntly, about anything, and she didn’t have any words for that either.

“If you run into trouble, if you’re reckless as usual, I won’t be there to help you.” One of his hands twitched, as if to reach out for hers, but remained at his side.

“I know, I’ll be fine.”

He didn’t seem convinced, just stared, and didn’t say anything else. Maybe he couldn’t find the words either.

But as the week marched by and she kept not leaving she didn’t have to read minds to know that he was a little relieved that she couldn’t find the time to escape the castle. His movements became smoother, he started demanding the Prophet so he could catch himself up on the news, asked her to tell her if there was anything new regarding Draco Malfoy, Theodore Nott, Pansy Parkinson, Severus Snape, Dumbledore, anyone and anything who had a remote connection to his revolution.

And his relief only added to her own irritation and need to get it done and get it over with before anyone else could say anything against it.

So by the time Saturday, their first quidditch match, rolled around Lily was more than ready to leave. She didn’t quite know what she was ready to do, but she was ready, perhaps she had even been born ready.

Crammed together in makeshift quidditch uniforms, featuring the standard Default colors of whatever color you happened to want to wear, they stood in the huddle of pure sportsmanship that never failed to inspire the underdog to victory against the overpowered enemy du jour.
Outside Lily could hear the roar of the crowd, dulled by the walls of the locker room, but still filled with all that need for violence and competition that always haunted these sports. Uncle Vernon had always been overly fond of football, and over the screams of Hogwarts students she could easily superimpose the image of uncle Vernon, purple with excitement, screaming at the television to beat the bloody hell out of those Spanish bastards.

Unfortunately, while Lily may have once gotten into this sort of thing, she no longer felt the divine inspiration to have victory at all costs.

After deciding to create an A-team out of her quidditch team what little interest Lily had in the actual sport of quidditch almost disappeared entirely. As it was she still didn’t know the rules, even Wizard Lenin didn’t seem to know the actual rules, and at the moment she was too focused on the fact that she still hadn’t found a decent time to duck out of Hogwarts and as a result Hermione was still glaring daggers at her every few seconds for not delivering.

It would probably be mildly alarming if Lily herself didn’t collect debts as London’s unofficial queen of the magical gutter.

“Alright, team, this is it. Our first game…”

“Match.” Blaise Zabini interjected, “It’s a quidditch match.”

“Right, who cares, anyway it’s our first match against Slytherin… And that is something we should all care about, a lot. We may never be able to care as much about anything else as we do the outcome of this single match. I know I care, a lot, and am not trying to think of ways to get out of it so I can drag Hermione out of Hogwarts when no one’s looking… Do we all remember our positions?” Lily cast her eyes over the group noting the way they all blankly stared back, none of them having any idea what their respective positions.

“Well, I guess we’ll go over them again. Rabbit, being an eldritch horror from beyond the outer abyss, is hereby benched. Hermione, being ridiculously angry and afraid of heights, is also benched. Everyone else is a meat shield and I guess I’ll be the sneaker.” Lily said, which earned her a blank look from Rabbit and nothing from Hermione, not even a flicker of appreciation, her eyes still burning with that unfulfilled promise Lily had made to her.

“Seeker, not sneaker, and why do you get to be the seeker rather than a meat shield like the rest of us? And you know that we can’t afford to bench people, we don’t have enough players as it is.” Blaise once again very helpfully pointed out, in the mindset that quidditch was something she cared about and cared about playing correctly. Daphne never pointed these things out, Default’s resident
ice queen only said what needed to be said and Lily very much appreciated that.

“Well, all you need to win is to catch the shiny gold thing, right? I can do that pretty easily and then we can all go home. The number of meat shields doesn’t actually matter.” Not as far as Lily knew from hearing Ron’s explanations.

“Then why don’t Blaise, Luna, and I sit this out and just leave you on the field.” Daphne suggested, and immediately Lily could feel everyone holding their breath and waiting for Lily either to crush them all in quidditch themed anger again or else to let it slide.

No one, it seemed, wanted to play quidditch.

They would leave Lily out there all by herself, on a broom, and let whatever happened happen. And even though she didn’t really care about the quidditch aspect of all of this she couldn’t help but feel their team spirit and comradery slipping away. A captain without a team is hardly a captain at all, instead a hollow wasted thing.

Lily bit down on her bitterness and pushed through, “Fine, don’t play, I’ll be the sneaker…”

“Seeker.”

“Seeker,” Lily corrected herself with tried patience, “All by myself and you all can be benched. Everyone can be benched!”

“Oh, good, good luck Ellie.” And then they were all filing past her onto the field and taking their seats on the bench, none of them even touching their brooms and instead looking at her expectantly to get up into the sky and face the eleven green uniforms opposing them.

Somewhere inside the Room of Requirement, Wizard Lenin was laughing, Lily was sure of it.

But there was nothing for it, with great reluctance Lily mounted her broom, feeling more than a little ridiculous (because really, why broomsticks, couldn’t it be anything else but a broom stick) and floated her way up to where the other players were waiting.
Most were some of the unfamiliar older ones Lily had never associated with, but Malfoy was there too, looking slightly less pimp-like than usual in his quidditch robes but equally as ridiculous.

Humiliated, that was the word, she’d never really felt it before only hints of it. One must have shame to feel humiliation, and she’d always assumed that Wizard Lenin was the one who felt more of it than her, but hovering there in the sky in striped rainbow quidditch robes alone facing Slytherin her face was burning and her stomach rolling over itself in shame.

Lily decided that she didn’t like humiliation in the slightest.

“Uh, Potter, I think you forgot something.” One of the older Slytherins, the one in the front of the triangle, said nodding down at the benched players.

“Oh, yes, they have been benched.” Lily said, her eyes flickering down towards them, grimacing at Luna’s enthusiastic waving.

“Benched.” He repeated dully.

“Yes, benched.” Lily repeated before asking, “Is it a problem?”

“For Merlin’s sake, Potter, you can’t play quidditch against just one person!” Malfoy said from the back of the formation, “It’s embarrassing even for you.”

Lily had gone from being a terrifying overlord in Slytherin to embarrassing even for her, she hadn’t realized how badly her reputation would suffer from quidditch. There was once a time when even Draco Malfoy had rightfully cowered in her presence, and he still quaked a little on that broom when she looked at him, but it wasn’t anywhere close to what it could have been.

Lily’s hands tightened on the broom.

Suddenly Lily cared very much about quidditch and winning quidditch and showing everyone in that stadium that Lily, even on a quidditch field, was not to be trifled with.

“Unless I win.” Lily said, her eyes narrowing and voice hardening, instinctively shifting into the Lily
The other team laughed, not small chuckles either, no they were in hysterics. Over the laughter Lily dimly recognized that someone was commentating on the lack of Default participation and on how short a match it would be when Slytherin slaughtered them.

To be honest, the rest of the match was something of a blur to Lily, she hadn’t really been paying attention. Or rather, she didn’t like to get into the details, because even for her it had been rather fast and more about the emotional need to win and maintain her reputation than it had actually been about quidditch.

She just knew that with only a wave of her hand every broom of the opposing team was snapped and they were all hurtling to the ground (Draco Malfoy for the second time in his Hogwarts career), and then the balls that had been enchanted to hit Lily instead crashed into the earth like great meteors, taking out chunks of the field with each impact and then taking out more as they careened towards the stands, digging out trenches.

And with the other hand she’d just reached out and summoned the flying golden ball without having moved an inch from where she started.

A ten second quidditch game, possibly the fast that had ever been played.

For a moment there was only stunned silence from the crowd, her Default comrades, and her opponents alike, and then there was screaming and a loud cry from the announcer’s box, “Disqualified! Default loses by disqualification!”

Lily floated back down to the ground, dropping the broomstick as she went, but still holding the flying ball in one hand, too stunned to really process the words, “What?”

“Ellie, you have to score a certain number of points before you can catch the snitch… And you can’t use wandless magic to destroy the opposing teams brooms, or tamper with the bludgers, or create giant trenches in the field.” Blaise half-whisper-shouted from the sidelines as Lily just stood there, looking at the flying instructor staring at her, but not really listening, and hearing the crowd booing in the background.

“Oh.” And she just stood there, dumbly, wondering how she was supposed to feel about winning but not really winning or her teammates who had put absolutely no effort in and continued to put no
The important thing hadn’t necessarily been the winning but more maintaining her reputation, and as far as she could tell by the groaning Slytherins trying to crawl off the field, they remembered why you took Lily seriously.

Lily was trying to figure out if she should take this as a victory.

And then she was being handed some sort of a red card and being told she had yet another detention for vandalism and severe disregard for the rules of quidditch and the dazed stupor drifted away and Lily’s severely frayed patience returned.

And perhaps it was because of losing quidditch and being reminded of how annoying she found Hogwarts that she remembered an essential fact about her life. No one could force Lily to do anything she didn’t want to do and similarly no one could force Lily to not do something she wanted to do.

“That is it, I am done! I am done with this place and with quidditch and with detentions and I am going back to doing whatever I like!”

Lily wasn’t too busy to leave, she could leave any time she wanted, just as she had with the Dursleys so many years ago. Hadn’t she already concluded that Hogwarts was just a larger more decorative cupboard beneath the stairs?

She released the golden flying ball, then with a sense of assurance she stepped outside of time, freezing those who booed and gawked and twitched in their place and walked towards the bench, leaving only behind the sense that Lily was right where they expected her to be and doing exactly what they expected her to do.

And she pulled Hermione out of time with her, “Change of plans, time to go fix your parents.”

“Now, but, I… It’s this again, you did this with…” Hermione trailed off, not mentioning his name, Quirrell or Hindenburg and leaving Lily to grab her hands and ask where her parents lived releasing her hold on Hogwarts’ space time continuum as they teleported through the wards and out into the greater world.
(Lily didn’t expect, or prepare for, the consequences of her leaving the castle and the blood soaked walls they would find when they returned.)

It was very suburb like, the kind of place that made Lily itch, too reminiscent of the Dursleys for comfort. Staring at the row of white picket fenced houses Lily couldn’t help but feel that she might as well be standing in Little Whinging on the doorstep of Number 4 itself.

Hermione stumbled forward, all expression dripping from her, it only now sinking in that yes Lily was living up to her word and doing what she had said she would. And Hermione looked almost as empty and broken as she had a year before in the pub Lily had abandoned her in.

“Ellie, I… Why are you helping me?” Hermione finally asked, her eyes roving over each of the houses, the lawn in disbelief as if she hadn’t believed she’d ever see a place like this again.

And again Lily was struck with that feeling she’d had with Wizard Lenin, that she couldn’t really explain why, because the reason wasn’t really concrete. It wasn’t even about Hermione at the end of things, it was about… About being independent, about letting go, about moving on and moving past all those things that were simultaneously moving on and away from her.

It was about Wizard Lenin.

But Hermione wouldn’t understand that, couldn’t understand that, “Does it really matter?”

“No, but I… Thank you, Ellie.” Hermione finished somberly, in her seriousness attempting to make the words mean more than they already did.

And perhaps they did, perhaps Hermione really did mean it, but all Lily could think as she stood there was that it must be very convenient for Hermione to know someone like Lily. To have a friend with god like powers to be used at a moment’s need.

But if Hermione wasn’t going to talk about that then neither was Lily.

“Alright, Hermione, we’d best be getting on with this.”
Inside was a house without a cupboard beneath the stairs but one that looked as if it should have had one. Inside the empty picture frames, ones which had probably featured Hermione at some point, Lily saw the reflection of Dudders proudly displayed on the Dursley’s walls (while Lily herself had always been absent from the photographs).

Hermione had to be towed through, silent, unseeing and weightless as if she wasn’t really there but still at Hogwarts and this body was simply a shell of her.

In the kitchen she could replace the bushy haired woman with the thin and grim aunt Petunia, chopping vegetables and pinning Lily with a glare to hurry it up girl before something starts burning, and at the table the man with an oversized uncle Vernon reading through the newspaper and blathering on about those damned union workers.

They didn’t even have time to turn around, to notice the blank eyed girl staring at them, before Lily reached into their heads and turned the small almost unnoticeable knob called memory. And just like that the woman’s knife dropped, the man’s paper tore in half, and they were descending on Hermione and hugging her and they were all crying.

And Lily was thinking about Death, Wizard Lenin, and a conversation she’d once had with Dumbledore about the Dursleys and love.

Lily would never belong in a place like this, the very structure of it, the very sight of it, drove her out and pushed her away into the corner where she could sit silently and unseen. Because that’s what she was doing, with all this hugging and crying and remembering, this was Hermione’s moment and not Lily’s.

And maybe this was the reasons he’d hesitated so long, not Wizard Lenin’s fears, not her own fears, but her dread of standing in this house and watching everything she’d never had and never even really wanted for herself.

Quietly, manipulating the strings of the universe so she was just a little outside of it, a little forgotten and unnoticed, she took a post-it-note from the desk and wrote a short message to Hermione (for whenever she wanted to go back) and then made her way outside into the sunlight.

And she waited.

And waited.
And waited.

“It was easier to kill time when Lenin was around.” She said to herself at one point, when the sun had dipped lower in the sky, almost at a sunset, “There was always something to talk about and if there wasn’t something then we could always talk about nothing. I wonder if he gets like that too, well, maybe not because I always travel back to stay in the room with him.”

No one answered and she sighed, feeling boredom creep through her, and glanced back at the damn house.

“Independence isn’t nearly as much fun as I remember it being.” Lily commented to the grass but as grass usually did it didn’t bother to answer, “Really, it was too long ago, it’s hard to grasp its benefits after all these years. I don’t think I like being independent all that much, I’m not any good at it now.”

She wondered then if Hermione was coming back at all. She didn’t have to, she could just stay inside that suburban nightmare forever, and eventually Lily would be forced to leave without her. Of course, it would ruin Hermione’s plans of being a strong enough pseudo glitch manipulator to stand up to the likes of Hindenburg, but all the same she could picture it so easily.

Because that sort of a life must be so tempting.

It rang false with Lily though, even if she was offered something like that, she would never take it. That wasn’t her world and never would be.

“Ellie,”

She looked different, smaller, her eyes red rimmed, almost broken, where before she had been bitter some sweetness had drifted in. She wasn’t what she was originally but she wasn’t what she had been that morning either.

Lily stood, brushed off her quidditch uniform, and gave Hermione an assessing look, “All good?”

“I… Yes… They remember everything… They, I… Thank you.”
Lily didn’t respond to that, just held out her hand, an offering, “You going back to Hogwarts?”

And for a moment Hermione hesitated, looked back towards the house, before nodding and taking Lily’s hand.

And that of course was when they returned and found dead chickens, the bloody graffiti, and the ominous words that meant far more than they actually said.
Of Mice and Pawns

In which evidence regarding Hindenburg’s second infiltration of Hogwarts is revealed, Lily claims that if you can dodge a textbook you can dodge a spell, and Wizard Lenin reminds us that he and Hindenburg aren’t so different at the heart of things.

Before her somewhat loyal work in progress defaultian peers, at a time far too early in the morning for any of them to really appreciate what was going on (except for Rabbit who didn’t really appear to appreciate or comprehend anything), Lily almost hesitated.

After all, it’d always been Lily against the world. Or, rather, it’d been Lily against the things that the world ignored, tolerated, or pretended didn’t exist. The idea of letting people in on anything, on preparing them for the worst, on… well, letting them see the world she saw and comprehend the things she understood, it was more than a little bizarre. It was… unnerving.

Wizard Lenin, Death, and even Rabbit had never really counted because in a way they were all more or less removed from the place. They got it but only because they were only faking at being human and were more or less removed from the physical plane. They were like the audience to a great play that was her life and she could make the occasional aside to them but… But none of them were truly there.

And even now, looking at her peers staring back with dull glazed eyes, only a hint of anxiety in their expressions Lily couldn’t help but feel that they just wouldn’t get it. They could continue, after all, to leech onto what seemed to be the natural conclusion that Lily was behind all of this.

Lily was either intentionally or unintentionally behind of most things like this, she’d admit it. Half of last year’s ridiculousness had been more or less her fault, either intentionally or unintentionally. But this wasn’t always true, events just… revolved around her, outside of her control, but centering on her as if she was some unwitting sun in the center of everything.

That’s what Eleanor Lily Potter really was about, after all.

And it was comforting for them to think this was simply something that Lily was responsible for, blood on the walls, dead chickens, petrified cats. It was a lot less ominous if it was just the usual cracking apart of the universe that seemed to take place on a biweekly basis than something maliciously planned.
In some other world perhaps Lily really would have been behind this. Writing something a lot cooler on the walls, probably something from T.S. Eliot since she seemed to be in that sort of mood, and then going on to wreak havoc on the castle with the giant evil chickens she stored in her secret chamber. But that wasn’t the world they lived in, they lived in some other world than that, and Lily wasn’t responsible.

The fact was that it was only the morning after she and Hermione had played hooky, restored Hermione’s parents’ memories, this Chamber of Secrets had supposedly been opened, and already Lily was beginning to feel prickles of dread in the bottoms of her feet.

A tingling sensation associated with the oncoming storm.

“Bloody hell, Ellie, it’s three.” And there was Blaise, good old disrespectful Blaise, rubbing at his eyes and glaring at her, “Are you really just going to stare at us after forcing us all to get up?"

Her eyes drifted over them, transforming them inside of her head into chess pieces, or no not quite chess pieces… It was a game of strategy, but it wasn’t chess, and if it was then Lily had collected a batch of very poor pieces when it came to Default.

There was Blaise Zabini, alright in the best of times, and his partner Daphne who had abandoned Slytherin for some unspoken political reason and joined up with Default. There was nothing particularly special about them, Daphne was a little prettier than average and Blaise a little more Italian, but even among the old pureblood families they had been known for being hopelessly neutral and therefore more or less boring.

(Although, according to Wizard Lenin, Blaise’s mom was some dastardly combination of Elizabeth Taylor and Ted Bundy and had disposed of no less than seven husbands without anyone saying a word about it.

Wizard Lenin, surprisingly, was actually quite impressed by Mrs. Zabini and Lily felt that said more than enough about that situation.)

Then there was Luna.

Lily liked Luna, she reminded her of a younger more naïve less cinema inclined version of herself, but that being said there was nothing hard in Luna. Luna was all dreamy wandering softness,
questioning the universe and receiving unsatisfactory answers, nothing seemed to touch her but then nothing had really tried either. Luna seemed… Happy. Happy with friends, happy even to babysit Rabbit, happy in Default.

The idea of Luna being where Hermione had been last December was…

Lily didn’t like it.

And Hermione… It’d really only been a day since Hermione Granger’s world was put back together, and she was still in this odd state of transition, probably not quite sure of what she should do now that her problem had been solved. Give her time and she still might drift back to her old bossy nagging ways and insist on teaching Rabbit passable English. Or perhaps, she’d maintain her newer harsher demeanor and become downright terrifying. The fact was though, that Hermione didn’t have time to prepare herself, if there ever was a way to prepare yourself for this sort of thing.

Another confrontation with Quirrell could very well break Hermione Jean Granger.

Which brought Lily to the real issue, that this wasn’t really about Lily.

Well, it was, but at the same time it wasn’t.

The reason Wizard Lenin always won at chess wasn’t because he knew the rules better, had memorized all the tricks, and actually cared about the game enough to think two or three moves ahead at a time (although that did certainly help). It was that he was able to acknowledge that you couldn’t rely on the king or even the queen alone. Every slain pawn could lead to the death of an empire.

And that was what you did in games of strategy, you went for the pawns first.

“I’m afraid, comrades, that I have some good news and some bad news.” Lily started, clapping her hands together, and looking intently at her fellow Default members.

“At three?” Blaise asked, eyebrows raised, and in response Lily summoned one of Gilderoy Lockhart’s books from a nearby table and threw it at his head.
Blaise Zabini, at three in the morning, appeared to have pitiful reaction times (this wasn’t a good sign), “Bloody hell!”

“What’s the good news, captain?” Luna asked, standing at attention, hand in a salute, and of all of them the only one who was taking this moment seriously. Luna was slowly but surely becoming Lily’s favorite, she was probably due for a promotion from all the Rabbit sitting anyways.

“The good news, is that in the few hours that comrade Hermione and I were outside of the castle…” Lily started only for Blaise to stop rubbing at his head and interrupt without thought.

“When the hell did you leave the castle?”

Lily through another Lockhart book at his head, “Dammit, Potter, where do you keep finding these things?!”

And Lily continued as if she hadn’t been interrupted in the first place, “It seems Rabbit didn’t eat anything important during the mass panic of the petrified cat incident. So… good job team on mitigating world ending catastrophes in our absence!”

“Yes.” Rabbit responded with a slight incline of his head, taking all of the credit for not eating anything of importance, and just for equal measure Lily threw a text book at his head too.

For a moment it seemed as if Rabbit too would be brained by Gilderoy Lockhart’s ridiculously thick required reading, but at the last minute he was suddenly ducking and it was whizzing over his head.

“That… That is bullshit, Rabbitson.” Blaise said, rubbing at the second bruise forming on his forehead and muttering about Albanian war refugees and their crazy reaction times.

“Physics.” Rabbit responded, cocking his head to the side and staring at Blaise like… well Rabbit didn’t really have expressions when he stared at people but if you looked at him long enough you could imagine some expression was there, something that questioned Blaise’s sanity, “It is physics.”

And the idea that Rabbit could make… puns? Was that a pun? Could one call that a pun? Was frankly horrifying and Lily, as always, just didn’t even want to go there.
“And the bad news?” Hermione prompted, eyes narrowed, but not really feeling the impatience or the anger as she had in the past few weeks. Already, her parents back and she was softer than she was, that Wizard Lenin impersonation was dripping from her because Wizard Lenin had never and could never be soft. That also wasn’t a good sign.

The bad news, it always came down to the bad news, the bad news that Lily herself wasn’t quite sure she wanted to face and that Wizard Lenin had all but insisted she leave to herself.

The bad news that she knew not one of these people was prepared for.

Earlier that night, after following the herd of whispering and nervous students up the stairs, confronted with the occasional question of, “Hey, Potter, it wasn’t you, was it?”

Neville looking at her, desperately in the crowd, grabbing her arm and asking, “Ellie, are you… Are you sure that it’s…”

Only for him to be pulled away by his prefect before Lily could call after him or give him an answer.

After all of that and more as they’d had brief discussions of secrets and heirs and probably just Ellie Potter again, Lily had descended down through the trap door into Wizard Lenin’s domain with that unspoken nervousness only beginning to rouse itself inside of her head.

And he was there, reading through the latest prophet with terrifying scrutiny, barely even acknowledging the sound of her footsteps as she walked down the stairs. At the sight of her the other Lily in the room looked up with raised eyebrows, collected herself, and silently walked up and out of the room and crawled back into bed until it was time to use the time machine again.

The other Lily didn’t ask what had happened, having been that Lily before, Lily remembered the expression on the face she wore now. Tight at the corners, pretending to be casual, but coming off a little tenser because of that pretense.

And Lenin still hadn’t looked up.

For a moment she just stood there, on the bottom step, just observing him quietly and waiting for something to happen. Eventually, perhaps just out of that uncertainty, she blurted out, “So, I restored Hermione’s parents’ memories. It wasn’t all that hard, really, like flipping a switch. Then there was a
lot of hugging and crying and…”

And uncomfortable flashbacks to Dudders and the rest of the Dursley clan that Lily really didn’t come down here to talk or even think about. Although, really, it hadn’t been worth even thinking about. Who cared about the Dursleys? She hadn’t even seen them for over a year, really.

Finally Wizard Lenin appeared to take interest, he lowered the paper and raised his eyebrows, observing her for a moment, and then asked, “And, you weren’t caught?”

With his attention on her, Lily let out a relieved breath she didn’t know she was holding in, and did her best to swagger inside of the room. She jumped onto the desk so she could sit on it properly, kicking her legs back and forth while Wizard Lenin just watched her antics with raised eyebrows.

“Nope, I left during the middle of our quidditch game… We lost, disqualified, quidditch turns out to be very stingy about its rules and very boring because of it. But anyway, with a few wards and things nobody really noticed. Besides, I think they were all too busy noticing…” Lily trailed off, staring forward, and superimposed over the room were those words written in the blood of dead chickens.

“Noticing…” Wizard Lenin prompted, with more of an amused lilt to his voice than anything else, like this really was one of Lily’s daily antics that he suffered through on a daily basis.

And perhaps it could have been except for that feeling that it wasn’t.

“Hey, Lenin, do you know what the Chamber of Secrets is?”

And suddenly it was like the room had gotten ten degrees colder. Apparently, Lily thought to herself, Lenin knew exactly what the Chamber of Secrets was.

“Where did you hear that?” He asked, quietly, his eyes narrowed and Lily could already tell that he knew she hadn’t heard it from an innocuous source like Hermione’s favorite “Hogwarts a History”.

“Outside the Great Hall, written in blood, it says ‘The Chamber of Secrets has been opened. Enemies of the heir beware.’” Once again, in those simple plain words she could hear many more ominous ones being written, ones that promised fear and dust and death all in a single line.
For a moment she wondered if Wizard Lenin would ask if she’d done it, if she thought this was a joke, but he’d known her too long and too well and so he was the first person (and maybe the only one) who would take her at her word. He sat down in the chair by the desk, his eyes distant, searching far into his own past and his face paler than it should have been.

“What else was there, besides the words?” He asked.

“Dead roosters, feathers, a petrified cat…” And that last detail seemed to strike home, more even than the other ones did.

“Why would he come back here?” He mumbled and somehow that alone was enough for her to start putting the pieces together. He didn’t even have to say it, she didn’t have to ask, she’d just looked at the words and in a bizarre way been reminded of Quirrell.

“I, Lily, am the last heir of Slytherin.” He said slowly, and somewhere deep in her mind she filed this information she hadn’t known about him away where she could think about it later, “The last parseltongue in existence. If the Chamber of Secrets has been opened, then I am the only one who could have done it.”

“So that means…”

Lenin finished for her, “That Voldemort has returned to Hogwarts.”

Something in him seemed to snap and that quiet dread was replaced by a scorching anger and drive to do something, “He’ll be after the stone, he knows you have it, it’s the only thing worth infiltrating Hogwarts for a second time.”

Tapping his fingers on the wood of the desk he considered her for a moment, then said, “I’ll need your wand.”

“My wand?” Lily had almost forgotten she even had one.

“It’s not like you use it.” Wizard Lenin scoffed, adding, “Our wands are brother wands, chances are that I’ll be able to use yours. And chances are that we will need it. If he discovers I’m here… Realizes that I exist, am autonomous, then I will need it… And I am in no condition to fight him off right now.”
Wizard Lenin leaned back, considering her again, but not as a person but instead something with strengths and weaknesses which must be taken into account, “I don’t make the same mistake twice, Lily. Twice now he’s seen you conquer death without batting an eyelash whatever he’s planning… If it was me, then I would play a very different game then the one I played as Quirrell.”

“Oh, that’s… not good.” Lily finally settled on this severe understating of current affairs causing Wizard Lenin’s eyebrows to raise.

Of course, the stone had turned out to be mostly useless but… But all the same she didn’t want him to have it.

(A year before, before everything had fallen into place, when Dumbledore’s treasure didn’t have a name associated with it and was only this thing hidden in that corridor.

“That stone has no right to exist, it will only attract violence and death as it is doing at this very moment. It must be destroyed.”

Death had once hinted that should Wizard Lenin break ties with her then worlds would burn for it…

“You cannot give it to him, Lily.”)

The idea of simply letting Hindenburg have the stone, have the stone that she herself supposedly created, to let him regain a body and use it for his own nefarious purposes. Whether that was killing his rival, Wizard Lenin, or simply conquering Britain, was unthinkable.

Not to mention that Hindenburg would probably want more than the stone. He’d want… not revenge but something close to it, vindication maybe. He’d want assurance that Eleanor Lily Potter wasn’t really an obstacle that she was at best an illusion. He’d been defeated by her twice now, he’d want to make sure that it couldn’t happen a third time.

And to do that…

“So… Hypothetically, if it was you, I mean it is but you know what I mean.” Lily started waving her hands about and then redirecting her thoughts, “If it was you, what would you do?”
“I wouldn’t open the bloody Chamber of Secrets.” Wizard Lenin said, almost like it was a joke, one that she couldn’t quite get a feel for without the context.

Seeing this he attempted to explain, “It’s a bit… dramatic for someone trying to infiltrate Hogwarts. Last time it turned the place into a circus not to mention it spiraled completely out of control. Thank god for Hagrid, if it wasn’t for him and his man-eating spider who knows what would have happened.”

There were a lot of questions she could ask about that, like what he meant by the last time, or Hagrid (who Lily was pretty damn sure Wizard Lenin didn’t even like), or any of that but instead she was caught on what he’d said before all of that, “So if it was you then you wouldn’t do what you’re currently doing.”

There was a moment of silence where they both considered that rather contradictory statement.

“He must be very desperate.” Wizard Lenin offered as explanation although judging by his expression he found it lacking too.

“Right, well, what do you think he’s up to then.”

“…Apparently releasing a basilisk on the more or less unwitting student population. Recreating a drama and mystery from fifty years ago, one that was never truly solved… Unless you count Hagrid.” Wizard Lenin explained, waving off Hagrid with a sigh and a small hand motion, as if this admission somewhat pained him.

“A basilisk?” Lily asked, “You mean like a giant snake… There was one of those inside Hogwarts?”

She couldn’t imagine why they thought having a giant snake inside the castle was a good idea. But then it went along with the troll logic she supposed, and the giant spiders in the woods, and having Snape for a professor… Actually, with that reasoning in mind, it was a wonder that anyone was really alarmed by this.

Giant snake attacking students, it must be Tuesday.
“Technically yes.” Wizard Lenin responded, eyes narrowed in that way that he knew exactly what she was thinking and didn’t agree with any of it. He probably didn’t have a good enough argument to dissuade her though because he didn’t add anything more to that.

“It does fit in with the whole snake theme, I guess. It’d actually be somewhat surprising if there wasn’t a giant man eating snake beneath the castle. What if it was a giant chicken instead, or Rabbit? It’d just ruin Slytherin’s whole snake complex.” Lily said, feeling strangely elated at having puzzled out Hogwartsian logic, even with the idea of Hindenburg’s return for the stone.

He was on the verge of a rant about how idiotic her logic was, she could tell, it was in the twitching of his dark eyebrows. But with visible effort he restrained himself and said instead, “That’s not important.”

“It’s not?” Lily asked and he grimaced thinly, very clearly unamused.

“No, it’s not.” He replied tersely then leaned forward and with deathly seriousness said, “More important is what face he’s chosen to wear.”

“I imagine he’s using a similar method as before, hiding behind a seemingly innocuous face, waiting for the chaos to unfold before he strikes… All while letting Dumbledore know he’s inside the castle by practically spray painting his name on the wall.”

“Like Squirrel?” Lily asked, although she would have noticed the headaches and the stuttering, if it was anything like last time.

“No, not like Quirrell, that would be too obvious now. No, it will be something very different this time, I’m sure.” Wizard Lenin said, waving this suggestion off, and then quietly he said, “I need to think.”

Thinking required a few minutes of silence, where he just stared into space, trying to outthink himself or discover what he would have planned if he was a bodiless wraith doomed to stutter for all eternity.

If Lily was a bodiless wraith doomed to stutter for all of eternity she might resort to graffiti too… Except, no, she wouldn’t go back to Hogwarts. Because why would anyone ever go back to Hogwarts unless they had absolutely no choice in the matter? Plus, as Wizard Lenin had pointed out, he’d already been there and done that and it hadn’t gone…
It was at that point that the idea of the chess board dawned on Lily, and, more importantly the idea of pieces. Lily didn’t necessarily see the world that way, that was more of Wizard Lenin thought process, she’d always seen the world as…

As an empty stage filled with bizarre, colorful, enchanting, and distracting props. A place of wonder, superficiality, where actors walked in and back out again rarely staying for more than a few moments.

Quirrell didn’t see it that way though, he saw the game, he saw the chess board and on it he saw Lily’s pawns. Her mortal, young, inexperienced, and frighteningly fragile pawns.

“Lenin, you don’t think… You don’t think he’ll do the same thing last time, I mean with Hermione and…” She trailed off when Lenin looked up at her, and for a moment she could almost feel his voice and thoughts inside her head again, like he’d never left in the first place.

“Hermione Jean Granger and those like her are inconsequential.”

(December 25, 1991.

“That, is hardly fair.”

He watched her through eyes that were at once a stranger’s and frighteningly familiar. She’d known those eyes for most of her life. Those eyes lived in her.

“I was originally going to get Neville Longbottom, when I realized you might need some extra motivation. But as the heir of a noble and ancient house, as well as other reasons, it was easier for me if I just went for the mudblood instead.”

In memory she couldn’t see his face, Quirrell’s face, but instead Hermione Granger superimposed over those haunting words in Wizard Lenin’s voice.

“You see, I didn’t think that you’d necessarily come to me, but I thought I might as well wrap everything up tonight all the same. I thought about killing you, but then I will admit that in your own way you are clever, clever enough to make it very inconvenient to search for it. That and, well, we all remember what happened the last time I tried to kill you. I thought about torturing you, but I can’t picture you as someone who breaks easily, somehow I think that it would be very hard to get you to
say anything you didn’t wish to. But then I remembered we had a conversation about the merits of friendship and being close enough.”

And instead of her hands, this time it was a knife against the girl’s neck, blood welling…

“Well, Eleanor Potter, are you close enough?”

“I think it would be best, Lily, if you focus on finding him and neutralizing his vessel sooner rather than later.” He said instead, and then, added, “Focusing on people like Hermione Granger or Neville Longbottom will only give him the opening he’s looking for.”

And in that moment she remembered, really remembered, exactly what Wizard Lenin was. On Christmas he’d stood against Quirell, agreed to dispose of him but… But they had once been the same person and they looked at the world through the same eyes. When they looked at people like Hermione Granger, Luna Lovegood, and Neville Longbottom they saw the same thing.

An inconvenient means to an end.

In the present moment, in the Default commonroom surrounded by these inconsequential people, Lily closed her eyes and felt herself grow cold and sober, “The bad news is that we are at war.”

She opened her eyes, watching the shadows dance from the firelight, took in each of the pale exhausted and naïve faces of those who had no idea what could lurk inside of Hogwarts. Then Hermione, who knew, yet somehow still seemed so woefully unprepared for it, “Someone in Hogwarts is most likely going to try to destroy you. Not merely kill you or dispose of you but destroy you completely and utterly until there’s nothing left of what you were before. In other words, you will become a point to prove.”

“I don’t know what they look like, how old they are, or if they’re even a boy or a girl. I just know that if we don’t start training now, if we don’t find them, then you might very well die.”

They didn’t seem to believe her, Blaise and Daphne at least, having placed Lily in the role of the girl who cried “Rabbit” a year ago. Luna faltered, grew uncertain, but it didn’t seem to click. Even Hermione, who of all people should know best, while she hesitated and her face grew pale didn’t truly understand.
Because she’d just gotten everything back, how could it possibly slip through her fingers a second time?

“And you?” Strangely enough, it was Rabbit who asked, staring at her with those empty somehow not empty eyes. Like if she stared into them long enough she could find the light that had been sucked in ages ago.

“Well, I suppose I’ll abide.”

(And for good measure she threw another text book at Rabbit’s head which somehow infuriatingly managed to miss once again.)
Detective Lily on the Case

In which Lily begins investigating her top suspects, training her lackluster and ultimately disappointing guerilla warfare unit, and meets the highly unusual if tolerable Ginny Weasley.

October 31st, 1992 brought a very sleep deprived Lily, staring dull eyed beneath her rarely used invisibility cloak, which was both serving its intended purpose and acting as a blanket, staring into the dungeon girl’s bathroom waiting for anything to happen.

It had been almost a month since Hindenburg’s revelation of his return as well as Lily’s own retaliating declaration of war.

From an outside perspective though, Lily doubted anyone would realize the significance of either of those events, because when you looked at it considering it had been a month both Lily and Hindenburg were taking their good sweet time.

On Hindenburg’s side he appeared to be aiming more for spectacle than results, which was frankly a little bizarre, because that was the very antithesis of Wizard Lenin’s usual modus operandi. Wizard Lenin was all about ruthless efficiency, if there wasn’t an audience, if there wasn’t a point in the show then he wouldn’t bother. Not only would he not bother, he’d scoff at it, he hated pointless showmanship and pandering to the masses. Recreating this whole Chamber of Secrets drama, which he still even refused to explain, went against every fiber of his being.

Either way, in a month after his declaration of bloody vengeance against those of lesser pedigree, so far his victims included a cat and a petrified little boy with a death grip on his camera.

The camera that had undoubtedly, according to Wizard Lenin, saved his life.

This all seemed well and good, it allowed the panic to remain subtle, only spiking with the discovery of Colin Creevy but then mellowing out after nothing happened, but Wizard Lenin thought it boded something much more alarming.

“The Chamber of Secrets is a distraction.” Wizard Lenin concluded “It’s not the true act in and of itself, but something to guide the eye away from his real intentions, a second attempt for the stone.
It’s serious enough that neither you nor Dumbledore can completely ignore it in good conscious but not his true ploy.”

So instead of the hallways being littered with dead mudbloods they just had one or two showing up every once in a while in very public places, making sure you remembered that yes, there was a giant snake slithering around the school casting judgement down upon students and cats alike.

Lily’s excuses weren’t as neat or strategic.

Training Default wasn’t going all that well. The ex-Slytherins weren’t all that invested, Daphne and Blaise continuing with their family honored traditions of ‘neutral or bust’ and had more or less refused to participate.

They also had this outdated notion that physical exertion was for the muggle peons.

“Ellie, for Merlin’s sake, wizards don’t run! They just don’t! We haven’t had to run… ever!” Default had decided to use its slotted quidditch practice to run laps instead as she’d discovered that her comrades were pitifully out of shape, aside from herself and Rabbit none of them could even make it through a mile.

And after about the third time around the pitch Blaise had given up.

“If you’re fast enough…” Lily started only to be cut off.

“And you become fast at casting spells!” He motioned to the track, “None of this really matters! Not against… whatever it is you think we’re going up against. Which we’re not, by the way, so you can just… Ugh, I don’t know, go get yourself some new project.”

Luna was better about it than them, cheerfully going along with the plans, whether it involved speed-reading Shakespeare (because all great duelists could also have had careers as Thespians with their emphasis on clarity and enunciation under great stress), dodging text books, or learning how to come out of a roll and fire a spell without missing. And she wasn’t bad at it, she was attentive, but as a first year her arsenal was truly pitiful.

Lily had never had to worry about firepower or spells, but apparently, a normal eleven-year-old couldn’t even stun a person properly. They’d be more dangerous if they really were running with
scissors instead of a wand.

Luna had her own perspective on this though, “I don’t think one’s ever truly ready to face the monsters that lurk out of sight and mind. Because as you train, they too train, they match you step for step and spell for spell… That, and, sometimes the worst things of all are not the ones that are so easily seen.”

This wasn’t all that reassuring.

Hermione was… Being Hermione Granger. She seemed to have decided that it was just best to sort of go along with Lily’s plans, but only with half a heart. Oh she’d listen, she’d give it some effort, but then she’d just go back to practicing whatever hex she’d learned in a book or what she’d read about in defense.

“Lily, if I’m going to be able to defend myself I’m going to do it my way.” She’d said at one point, looking up from her book with a glare, “If you really care about me, then respect that.”

So training her fellow housemates to avoid excruciating deaths was happening but with about the same rate of efficiency as Hindenburg’s kills by giant pet snake.

Which left her with her other, perhaps more vital, task: finding Hindenburg before he went in for the kill and made to eliminate her.

She and Wizard Lenin had started early on that, and it had almost been like old times, except instead of being inside of her head and sifting through memories they stood over a long table cluttered with photographs of everyone residing inside of Hogwarts which Wizard Lenin had arranged into various categories.

Staff, students, faculty, relatives of Death Eaters, house members, etc.

And perhaps the truly strange thing was that he remembered all of them. He remembered all of these people that Lily had only paid the barest attention to, because to Wizard Lenin knowing the name, face, and background of each of these people was important.

“I haven’t been getting any headaches and no one’s been attempting a repeat performance of the nutty professor since Squirrel’s untimely demise.” Lily said as she eyed the photographs that Wizard Lenin was pushing here and there, arranging and rearranging, as he considered each one.
“I no longer reside inside of your head, perhaps, because of that, you no longer are able to sense him.” He muttered out as he concentrated before adding, “Besides, I told you, he wouldn’t act unless he could safely remove his old tells like stuttering. He won’t make the same mistake twice.”

He then looked at her, his eyes piercing, and began to carefully explain just what he believed his other half was playing at, “His main goal will be to appear unassuming and to gain access to you. He will do this by either increasing his emotional or physical proximity to you or else repeating his strategy from last year and gaining authority over you as a professor.”

He slid the photograph of Gilderoy Lockhart in front of Lily, leaving her to pick it up and stare at the man’s chiseled features, “We’ll consider that last category first, as it’s the one in which there are the least amount of suspects. If we look at professors then Gilderoy Lockhart is the only true choice, the rest have been employed too long, they know too many of each other’s habits that I wouldn’t be able to pick up through legillimancy alone. It’d be too much of a risk to bother with particularly since Quirell was discovered by Dumbledore last year.”

Wizard Lenin then picked up one of Lockhart’s books and began flipping through it as he continued speaking, “This man however, in spite of being new, seems to garner trust and respect that he doesn’t deserve. He’s charismatic, charming, and thrives on the spotlight yet somehow manages to deflect real criticism.”

With care he closed the book, and glanced over at her, “I don’t know if you noticed, Lily, but there’s something very wrong with many of the details in his books. Some could be excused as editing errors, but there are larger fundamental issues, five of the books take place too close together placing him in very harrowing situations all at the same time.”

It took Lily a minute to realize what Wizard Lenin was saying, and when it did all come together she nearly fell out of her seat, “Wait a minute, he’s a fake? He just made all of that shit up?”

“Oh, no, these events undoubtedly happened but whether he participated…” Wizard Lenin trailed off with a skeptical look on his face leaving Lily to fill in the blanks.

“So then, it’s him, right?”

“Supporting that is also the fact that he has this unnerving desire to become close to you, has tried to persuade you to use him as a resource to further your career. However, that said, while he undoubtedly is a fraud he could be here for his own purposes.”
“But why would anyone else come to Hogwarts if they’re faking their resume?” And why would he still be okay with her in his detentions, because if he didn’t have a reason for wanting him there, then she was pretty sure she’d have driven him up the wall.

As it was, he’d had a whole rant about how he did not appreciate the letters she’d sent out in his name, and asked if she was trying to sabotage his career. It might have been intimidating had it been coming from anyone else, from Gilderoy Lockhart, it was just a little ridiculous to watch.

“Teaching at Hogwarts has a sort of prestige that accompanies it and perhaps he truly does wish to network with you and use your own fame to support his own career. I actually believe this is more likely, that he’s not my main soul.” Wizard Lenin paused, picking up the photograph again and eying Gilderoy Lockhart as he spoke, “He’s a little too incompetent in winning you over, if it was truly me then I’d know that approaching you as a professor during detention is the last thing you’d be receptive to. More, I wouldn’t leave my false trail in a place so easy to find. While he’s well respected and good looking, both of which are useful, it would be too easy to get caught. And then people would start wondering just who the real Gilderoy Lockhart is and what he’s been up to.”

Gilderoy Lockhart remained a suspect, if only because he apparently faked at least half of his books, seemed to be actively sabotaging Defense (which was actually quite impressive considering he somehow managed to be worse than Squirrel), and still lingered over Lily’s shoulder in detention, forgiving her for her letter mishap (kids and their jokes these days), while still asking if she wouldn’t like any help with her blossoming career as wizarding Britain’s poster child Jesus.

And yet, somehow, she still couldn’t find it in herself to pay attention to his lectures. They were just… They were so perfectly boring, so wonderfully terrible, there were simply no words to describe it.

But that was later, right then Wizard Lenin was moving on to his next group of suspects, “The other categories contain many more possibilities. If he wishes only to be physically close to you then he just needs to become a student, any student, ones you wouldn’t look at and Dumbledore might overlook.”

Here he gathered up a pile of photographs and began to dole them out, sighing as he did so, “Honestly, Lily, you’re so unobservant when it comes to people that it really could be anyone in the student body. Just to thin the herd somewhat I’m going to assume he’d aim for being in your year, possibly in Gryffindor so that he rotates classes with you, but even then… He could be anyone.”

With a sigh he just dumped the photographs on the table, giving up on them and moved to the last few, and these were familiar because Lily had expected him to bring these up but even so hadn’t
really wanted to think that he’d actually do it.

But he would, because the truth of the matter was that Wizard Lenin didn’t trust anyone, and there was nothing sacred to him in a game of strategy.

Without a word he handed her the photographs of Daphne Greengrass, Blaise Zabini, Luna Lovegood, Neville Longbottom, and Hermione Granger.

Lily stared at them, dully, and for a moment said nothing as she looked at each of their faces and how much they didn’t remind her of Quirrell. Finally, she asked, “Do you really think he’d try this?”

“It’s risky, true, but I’ve never been afraid of risk.” Wizard Lenin said before his eyes narrowed and he moved close, “You’ve let these people get close to you, close enough that they could easily stab you in the back before you could move to stop them. You didn’t even really know three of them until this year, when he would have already overtaken their minds, and the other two have trauma to excuse any great change in their behavior.”

“You think he could be any of these?” Lily thought, and he considered her for a moment before relenting.

Carefully he took back Neville’s photograph, “For a variety of reasons he might choose to be careful around the Longbottom boy, and, I imagine if he had taken over Longbottom he would joined Default to gain closer access to you.”

Then, again with care, he took back Luna Lovegood’s, “I wouldn’t be able to act like Luna Lovegood if I tried, it’d come off as a bad Lily impression, and in a game like this I wouldn’t bother with something that needlessly complicated.”

“Really? I’ve always thought your Lily impersonation was pretty good.” Lily pointed out, granted it was usually when he was beyond irritated and would resort to a mocking falsetto that was more to deride than to convince anyone that he was actually her. But still, she’d always thought it hadn’t been half bad.

He simply gave her a look, the incredulous, disbelieving, contemptuous look that she was all too familiar with, “Do you want a demonstration?”
“Well, considering you were kind enough to put Luna Lovegood on your list of suspects for those who are most likely to try and smother me in my sleep. Yes, I’d like a demonstration, your best shot at a Lily impression.”

He closed his eyes, breathed out in deep irritation, his knuckles white as he gripped the table, and finally in a voice that wasn’t mockingly high but instead changed in tone, something more whimsical than he usually allowed himself, he started, “So, I had detention today with professor Squirrel, who I realize now is not a man at all but in fact a giant oversized rodent who is merely disguised as a man, and I realized that he plots not to steal the philosopher’s stone but instead to enslave the human race. Just like in Independence Day, but instead with giant squirrels in people suits… It’s positively diabolical.”

They both fell silent, taking in those words, and finally Lily said, “A giant squirrel people conspiracy?”

“Like I said, I’m hardly convincing.” Wizard Lenin said, no doubt ready to wave it all off and move on, except Lily wasn’t ready for that yet.

Lily was still stuck on it, “That was the best you could come up with? I didn’t even come up with that at the time.”

“Lily, I lived inside your head, every time Quirrell opened his mouth you would subconsciously superimpose the image of a giant stuttering squirrel in glasses over him and give it the impossible task of trying to collect acorns for winter.” He said, eyebrows lowered and twitching, looking on the verge of breaking something unintentionally with his magic again or else lighting something on fire.

“I don’t remember that happening.” Lily pointed out, which was true, because she didn’t.

“Oh, I’m sure you don’t.” He said before adding, in a tone that sounded casual but was anything but, “Your mind is a deep, dark, and rather terrifying place that I really don’t like thinking about now that I’m outside of it.”

Well, she supposed he would know best, given that Lily didn’t really have any way to view the inside of her own head. Plus, there had been that whole play incident, back with Quirell when he’d tried to read her mind. And if that was what it was like all the time… She could see why Wizard Lenin might find it unnerving.
In the silence his belligerence and irritation seemed to fade, his shoulders dropped, and he stared at
her in silence for a moment, weighing his words. And she stared back up at him, caught by the color
of his eyes in the half lit room and the way the shadows played on his face. It was a different kind of
charisma than Lockhart’s, a truer one, where he didn’t even have to say a word and still you waited
for him to say something, anything, to you.

“Lily, I know you’re not going to like what I’m about to say.” He started, plucking the photographs
from her fingers one by one, “But I know that you’ve shared some of my observations and that if
you weren’t clouded by our last encounter with the main soul, your own perceived failures, then you
would share my concerns.”

“He could be hiding behind Daphne Greengrass or Blaise Zabini, they did seem to appear out of
nowhere with little reason to join your little house, but there’s someone even better that he could
have chosen as his puppet.”

In her hand was one final photograph, that of Hermione Jean Granger, staring back at Lily with
accusing eyes.

“You’re kidding, right?”

He wasn’t kidding, he was deathly serious, “You’ve said it quite a few times yourself, she reminds
you of me, she has my habits, when she looks at you it’s my eyes you see staring back.”

“But that’s… She has her reasons to…”

“And that’s why it’s clever, because she has perfectly acceptable reasons for why she might be that
way. And who knows, perhaps they are true, perhaps that obnoxious bookworm took a look at her
new world and became disenchanted with it and everything she had once believed in. But, it’s a little
too convenient, how easy it is to excuse this new persona and it’s a little too alarming how quickly
you’ve set her up to be your weakest link.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking…” She wasn’t even able to finish before he interjected.

“You went to her house and restored her parents’ memories! You act as if you’re indebted to her
when you saved her life! You’ve shown that she can be used against you and because of that I
guarantee she will be.” He slammed his hand on the table, the photographs fluttered, some falling to
the floor, “This is how the game is played, Lily! This is what you must be prepared to face!”
But it wasn’t Hermione Granger, Lily would believe that, even if Wizard Lenin wouldn’t. So it was one of those faceless students she’d never suspect, whose names always slipped her mind, and that was the end of it.

A month had passed, Wizard Lenin showed no sign of leaving, even when he had started functioning like a human being again. He wanted this business in Hogwarts settled first, he said, before he left for London and began to reconvene the Death Eaters after his ten-year absence. That, and, it was inconvenient to leave while classes were still in session.

That meant at the very least until December and then… Well, that was a bridge they’d cross then, but at the moment Lily wasn’t even willing to deal with.

So there they were, Lily training and investigating, and getting nowhere on both fronts. Eventually, after refusing to spy on Hermione Granger or anyone else for that matter, she and Wizard Lenin had come to an agreement.

Stopping the basilisk was a bad idea mostly because it let Hindenburg know that the jig was up. Nothing would force him into faster action than knowing that Lily was onto him and shutting it down.

But that didn’t mean she couldn’t use the basilisk’s release to her advantage.

“It travels through the pipes.” Wizard Lenin explained, “There are a few exits that it could use throughout the school but the entrance to the chamber, where it will sleep and rest, is in the dungeon girl’s restroom.” And it was sad how it physically pained him to say this, Lily doubted he’d ever planned to unleash the basilisk again, but Wizard Lenin had this thing about his old hiding places in Hogwarts and he hated giving them up.

Just by telling Lily the vague location of the Chamber of Secrets you’d have think that she’d have destroyed it.

All of this culminated to the dungeon bathroom stakeout duty. The great thing about having a time machine was that being three places at once wasn’t all that different from being in two places at once. There was a Lily for daily life, a Lily for Lenin, and a Lily for the bathroom.

Unfortunately, if Lily had thought she was sleep deprived before she had another thing coming. Att least Lenin was entertaining, and if he wasn’t in the mood to be entertaining then she could sleep in
his room and steal his blankets. This, this was boring, and she wasn’t allowed to sleep through any of it.

No, she had to mark down every name of every person who walked through those doors, special markings if it was odd hours of the day. Luckily no one really liked the bathroom for some reason, no one really knew why, just that it was somehow labeled as annoying and tedious, in spite of just being a bathroom.

This meant the number of people who actually used it was relatively small. But that didn’t excuse her from watching it, twenty-four seven, just sitting there waiting for something or anything to happen.

It had been a month, Voldemort wasn’t making his move, Lily wasn’t making her move, and she was dying because of it. Between this, quidditch, and detention Lily was starting to wonder if Hogwarts was actually another planet’s hell.

Hell was not other people; it was magical boarding school.

She looked to the left and right, the hallway was empty, which was understandable given that it was very late at night, and with a sigh removed the invisibility cloak and stretched out. If she couldn’t enjoy her own damn holiday she could not be held responsible for her own actions. Plus, it wasn’t like she was getting anywhere in this Lenin vs. Lenin game either, because after a month she’d come to realize that they both were probably a little too good at outwitting one another.

It was probably the person that Lenin would least expect or someone who found another secret way into the bathroom!

(Or, it was Hermione Granger, like Lenin had suspected all along…)

“...Lily?”

Lily started, turned around, and found herself staring at a small red-headed girl, Ron’s little sister if she was remembering right. Gin or something like that. Only, the girl was looking at her, looking like she’d seen a ghost… Or, something more wonderful than a ghost, because the girl was grinning at her and stepping towards her.

And she’d called her Lily.
Lily jumped backwards to avoid contact, “Do we know each other?”

“Eleanor Lily Potter, your middle name was Lily…” The girl trailed off abruptly her eyes widening and looking at Lily like she’d just made some fatal error, but then the expression was gone and she smiled politely, “Sorry, I guess I’m just a bit overwhelmed. I’ve always been a huge fan, you know.”

As Jesus the wizard, Lily had quite a bit of experience with overwhelmed fans, but she’d sort of hoped people had gotten over that by the time her second year in Hogwarts had rolled around. Surely most of the novelty had worn off already.

“Really, I’m sorry, I guess I didn’t expect to see anyone here.” The girl held out her hand, “I’m Ginny Weasley, Ron’s little sister.”

Gingerly, with great caution, Lily took it, “Ellie Potter, but you apparently call me Lily.”

Only the truly dangerous or aware called her Lily.

That alarmed look returned for a moment, but then it was gone and Ginny was flushing, “Sorry about that, you look like a Lily, is that a strange thing to say?”

She felt like a Lily but she wasn’t about to tell Ginny that, bizarre appearing out of nowhere Ginny. Slowly Lily sat back down, eyes on the girl, wondering just what she should do about her.

Ginny sat down with her, “So, I know what I’m doing here but what are you doing here? Are you trying to catch the heir?”

“You don’t think I did it?” Lily asked, because that was still the majority opinion in the school, in some circles at least. Most of Gryffindor had her back, and some of Slytherin too, but that wasn’t everyone.

The girl considered Lily, appraising her, tilted her head and then offered a slow smile, “No, I don’t think you did.”
Ginny could be the heir, after all, Voldemort could be anyone. That was the whole point of this. Maybe he was seeking her out now, trying to fish out where she’d put the stone, get inside of her head or…

“What’s your favorite color?”

Lily’s eyebrows raised, she turned her head to find Ginny staring at her, staring at her as if by merely looking she could stare into the depths of Lily’s soul.

“Is that important?” Lily asked, she didn’t really have much of a preference for one color over another. Some were aesthetically more pleasing than others but that was no reason to be biased.

“It’s always bothered me, that I don’t know your favorite color.” Ginny confessed, not looking ashamed of the fact that she wanted to know, “I know other things, I mean things that people have published and what Ron’s said, but I don’t really know that many of the small things.”

“I don’t have a favorite color.” Lily said and Ginny didn’t interrupt to insist that she must, or tell her what the books said her favorite color was, instead she nodded.

“Flower?” Ginny prompted.

“I’m impartial to most things like that.” Lily responded, blandly, crossing her legs and staring forward. For a moment they sat in uncomfortable silence, both staring ahead, Lily wondering when Ginny would get the idea that she wasn’t wanted and leave.

But so far Ginny seemed remarkably unflappable for an eleven-year-old girl in the presence of her idol. She was just sitting there, smiling to herself, looking perfectly content.

“Aren’t you worried a professor’s going to come by?” Lily asked and Ginny just gave her a look, a strangely familiar one that Lily couldn’t quite place, one that asked if Lily was really going to go there and ask that.

Which Lily took to mean, no, Ginny wasn’t concerned at all.

“Alright then, I’ll just warn you now that detention is tedious as hell.” Lily said and Ginny just continued to give her that look and said nothing.
“Why’d you leave Slytherin?” The girl finally asked, “It seems a bit drastic to go and make your own house.”

“You know, your brothers made a shrine in my honor when I did that.” George and Fred Weasley had basically declared her the god of all pranking gods and said that none would surpass her. It was a bit flattering if also a tad bit bizarre and not the reaction she’d been expecting from anyone.

“But you’re not like them, you didn’t do it because it was funny, you have some other reason.” Ginny then shrugged and sighed, “You don’t have to tell me if you don’t want to.”

Lily decided to be perfectly frank, “I did it to avoid these types of conversations.”

Ginny just gave a small ‘hm’ that really didn’t convey much of anything and proceeded to just stare at Lily for way too long. It looked like she was memorizing her, or something, moving from her hair to her eyes and even her ears.

“So, again you don’t have to answer if you don’t want, but are you really just going to sit outside the restroom all night?” Ginny asked before adding, “It’s a bit of an… odd hobby, if you don’t mind me saying.”

Why did it have to be outside of a girl’s restroom? It really was kind of creepy whenever Lily sat down and thought about it too long. That was half the reason she did this invisibly, so that no one would walk up on her creeping outside the girl’s bathroom.

“That’s none of your business.” She said, and this time she put some emphasis into it, but Ginny Weasley apparently had nerves of steel because she just smiled politely back.

“Do you play chess?” Ginny asked, “I have time for a game or two, and if all you’re doing is sitting here…”

“Shouldn’t you be going back to your dorm or something?”

“Or something,” Ginny responded, “Besides, none of that’s really important, is it? You’re bored, I’m bored, and besides I want to find out if the girl-who-lived has any strategic insight. Were you doing
anything better?"

No, no she wasn’t, and she really doubted anyone else would be passing by at midnight.

With a wave of her hand a chessboard appeared and she carefully moved the first white pawn forward. And Ginny just smiled again, looking positively delighted, if somewhat restrained.

They played in silence for a while, Ginny occasionally commenting that Lily should slow down, that she wasn’t thinking ahead in the game, but Lily had never really had the motivation to truly play chess so she just continued to move pieces here and there.

“Who do you think is the heir of Slytherin?” Ginny asked at one point her eyes curiously sharp, “You must have some idea, if you’re investigating the hallways in the middle of the night.”

Abruptly Lily said the first thing that came to mind, “Lockhart.”

“You think professor Lockhart’s the heir of Slytherin?” Ginny asked, eyebrows raised, “My mother will be very disappointed, if that’s the case. Any reason why?”

And again, Lily could go into more detail, but instead she cut her reasoning short with, “He’s too pretty.”

“…He’s too pretty.” Ginny repeated, almost dumbly, eyebrows raised and questioning Lily’s intelligence for all it was worth. But that was all Lily was willing to give her and eventually Ginny seemed willing to let the rest of that conversation go.

Two or three victories later on Ginny’s end, the girl stood up, thanked her for the game, and said that she hoped they’d see each other around some time. Then she walked away, leaving Lily behind, waiting for the next Lily to relieve her from her shift.

But there was something familiar in that walk, the way Ginny moved, but she just couldn’t place it.
Wasting Away in Margaritaville

_In which Lily realizes that enough is more than enough and gives a heart rousing speech, Wizard Lenin’s counterpart shows his artistic side, and Neville decides that it’s time to express certain doubts._

“Look, Margarita…”

“Ginny,” Ginny Weasley corrected, which well, while Lily did remember Ginny’s name she always had the weary feeling that it was five o’clock somewhere when Ginny showed up. It just never happened to be five o’clock in Hogwarts itself.

“Look, Gin, not that I’m not… flattered but…” Lily trailed off at the sight of Ginny’s unflappable smile, always perfectly at ease and in control never flustered by anything, and promptly trailed off and gave up.

Because three days after Halloween and there wasn’t anything she hadn’t already said to get Ginny to skedaddle.

Like, didn’t Ginny have friends her own age that she could play chess with and ask invasive and non-invasive questions?

Or, Lily wasn’t in the mood for non-atmospheric dates in front of the dungeon bathroom in the middle of the night and found it rather alarming that Ginny appeared to find this not only romantic but also vaguely attractive.

(Possibly, this could just be Lily grasping at straws for motives, she didn’t really know.

If someone stared at you for a good ten minutes was that a sign of attraction? If it’d been accompanied by dramatic and sappy music then according to television, yes. Also, if Lily had been above the age of eighteen and Ginny had been a man, then undoubtedly yes. Of course, she was only twelve and Ginny was neither a man nor anywhere close to approaching the age of puberty, and Lily had certainly never seen that on television.)
Or maybe Lily could have settled for saying that she was busy hunting down a vengeful dark lord who had once concussed Lily to death, which Ginny had claimed she was in full support of.

Well, sort of, Ginny seemed all for her personal hero Eleanor Lily Potter confronting the heir of Slytherin and pounding him into dust but she didn’t seem all that excited by the prospect.

She offered vague useless help, which Lily would reject, and on the whole didn’t seem all that terrified or in a hurry for him to be found. Perhaps, like Lily, she’d realized this was a more or less common occurrence in Hogwarts and to the average student the heir probably wasn’t that large of a deal. No more than Squirrels, trolls in the dungeon, three headed dogs, or man eating spiders.

Of course, there was the possibility that Ginny wasn’t terrified because she was Hindenburg’s puppet herself, but then she wasn’t really exuding any Hindenburg-esq qualities. Even Squirrel had had his non-stuttering moments of terrifying competence. Ginny didn’t even show vague concern at the idea that Lily was trying to shut down the heir’s operations or sitting outside of the dungeon bathroom. She would just show up every night, play chess, chat, and then return from whence she came.

All of those actions seemed extremely non-Lenin in nature so much so that when Lily had brought her up aside from seeming dubious of Ginny’s actions Wizard Lenin still remained fully in camp Hermidemort.

“But?” Ginny asked, prompting as she moved one of her pawns forward, inching her way towards the inevitable check.

“I can’t keep having these weird chess parties outside of the bathroom!” Lily shouted, throwing her hands into the air.

Ginny simply stared at her for a moment, blinking and then pointed out, “You know, I’m not the one who chooses to sit outside of the restroom.”

“That’s not the point!” Lily exclaimed.

“No, I think that is exactly the point.” Ginny said, “The fact is that if you didn’t insist on sitting out here I wouldn’t either. You are the only one in this situation insisting we sit outside of the restroom that no one can stand.”
“I’ll have you know that I have serious business outside of this restroom!” Lily said, which, if Ginny was truly as large of a fan as Eleanor Potter as she claimed she would have taken Lily at her word, but Ginny wasn’t really a fan of Eleanor Potter.

Sure, she’d bought and memorized every book every published about Eleanor Potter, but aside from knowing the name of all of Ellie Potter’s fictional unicorn princess friends she didn’t have that same crippling worshipful nature that still prevented Lily from having a real conversation with half the student population.

“Serious business,” Ginny parroted dully before continuing, “I’m going to go on a limb here and assume you’re talking about the heir.” This appeared to be rhetorical because she barely paused to allow Lily to answer before she was talking again.

“Are you implying that you will somehow apprehend the heir of Slytherin in the girl’s dungeon bathroom?” Ginny simply asked, crossing her arms, thin red eyebrows raising and her expression one that no eleven-year-old girl had any right to wear.

Lily simply crossed her arms in response and bit down her own response on how this was perfectly logical for inexplicable reasons, “Yes.”

“The bathroom that barely anyone goes into except as a last resort?” Ginny continued.

“…It’s the last place that any reasonable person would ever suspect.” Lily responded, to which Ginny just continued to stare, eventually prompting Lily to slam her hand on the floor and proclaim, “I don’t have to justify myself to you, Tequila!”

“It’s still Ginny,” Ginny said before her expression settled into one of discontent, “And while your statement is undoubtedly true I suspect there is a flaw in your logic somewhere.”

Lily wasn’t even going to respond to that, partly because while she didn’t exactly think Ginny was Squirrel she also didn’t trust her, so telling her something like ‘the entrance to the chamber is secretly inside of this bathroom everyone avoids’ wasn’t exactly doable. Also, even if she did say that, that would just bring up the issue of why the entrance was in a girl’s bathroom of all places. She imagined the castle might have changed over the years, but still, you think it would have been anywhere else.

But it seemed that Ginny had moved on because she was only silent for a moment before bringing up
a completely different topic.

“You know, people keep expecting you to show back up at the Gryffindor table.” Ginny said, seeming to find nothing wrong with the complete switch in topic, which wasn’t exactly unusual for Ginny but still through Lily for a loop every time.

It also meant that they’d probably end up talking about something very weird, like Lily’s fictional life as a dragon slaying heroine princess with unicorn friends and handsome suitor princes in abundance, or even small details about Lily’s childhood that she really didn’t want to get into outside of the girl’s restroom.

But there was usually no avoiding this part of the conversation, Lily had tried, and like many things with Ginny it had gotten her nowhere.

“I told Neville he was free to sit at the Default table.” Lily said with a sigh, resigning herself to her fate, and summoned two cups of tea hoping the calming taste of green tea would pull her through whatever came up this time.

Ginny took her own cup without complaint or even questioning, just a bemused smile, as if she expected nothing less from Lily than miracles that would have had Hermione Granger gaping and screaming.

That, at the very least, was a little refreshing.

“It’s not just Longbottom though, all of my brothers keep waiting for you to show up, maybe Ron more than Fred and George but still… Also, you never invited Ron to the Default table, at least, not that I’ve seen.” Ginny offered Lily a somewhat thin smile, “Ron’s a little too cool for me at the moment and tends not to tell me about these things directly.”

“Well, that was a grand exaggeration that Lily would entirely expect Ron to make, it seemed in line with his usual lack of thought process. Still, this was rapidly becoming as awkward as Lily had been afraid it would be.
There was something about the way Ginny stressed the word friends and then her name, Lily, that Lily couldn’t help but find unnerving.

“…Ron is… not terrible?” Lily finished, she really had no feelings one way or another about Ron Weasley, as it was she really hadn’t seen too much of him since she’d joined Default. Given that he was a cardboard cutout of a human being she hadn’t really seen a reason to check in with him.

As far as she knew he still loved quidditch, hated snakes, and thought she was a secret Gryffindor behind enemy lines.

“Not terrible?” Ginny parroted, before giving a small hum of acknowledgement and continued the game, then after a moment she added, “And Neville Longbottom is…”

“Look, no offense Gin, but Ron… Well, he has this thing about snakes.”

Ginny didn’t even ask, she just raised her eyebrows, and Lily continued, “Every time I talk to him it’s about snakes. Slimy snakes, evil snakes, metaphorical snakes… And given that the heir of Slytherin is going on a paralysis spree throughout the castle I just can’t handle any more motherfucking snakes in this motherfucking castle.”

At Ginny’s expression Lily hastily added, “It’s nothing personal!”

“…I’m actually quite fond of snakes.” Ginny finally responded.

“Oh, well, it’s nothing personal against you either then.” Although Lily couldn’t really understand why, it wasn’t that snakes were bad or good, but they weren’t particularly interesting either.

“They’re quite intelligent creatures.” Ginny explained, which, considering Lily had heard the opposite from Wizard Lenin for years she wasn’t buying it.

It wasn’t that Wizard Lenin said snakes were stupid, after all as a parslemouth he could carry a conversation with one, but they had a limited understanding of the world that made it very difficult to convey abstract thoughts. In short, he found them boring and a waste of time other than being good for intimidating the masses.
There was nothing quite like hissing to a giant python in front of your subordinates to garner that respectful fear that was so necessary in a dark revolutionary leader.

“Anyways, Ron and I just aren’t that close.” Lily decided to summarize before the conversation could become lost in snakes.

“Hm, but you and Neville Longbottom are?” Ginny asked and for the first time that night, any of those nights in front of the bathroom, Lily felt the back of her neck prickling under Ginny’s stare.

“Neville is less fixated on snakes…” Lily started only for Ginny to cut her off.

“There are many people in this school who are less fixated on their prejudice against Slytherin than Ronald Weasley. There must be some more definite reason.”

Well, when she put it like that it was hard for Lily to pin down anything definite. She liked Neville, he was one of the few students she genuinely got along with. Even she and Hermione had their ups and their more frequent downs depending on Hermione Granger’s mood.

It was true that at a glance he was pretty much useless. After all, even with tutoring from Hermione who had memorized every Potions text book they’d ever had, he still had to take remedial potions (the poor bastard). He was barely passing any of his classes, was a rubbish quidditch player, and couldn’t talk without mumbling, but Lily didn’t really care about any of that.

No, it really was a continuation of where they had been a year before, in Potions detention when Neville had offered her a place to sit at his table when it seemed as if all of Hogwarts was set against her.

She had taken that very seriously and she still did and would continue to.

“He would do the same for me.” Lily settled on but judging by Ginny’s expression she wasn’t placated in the least.

It was clear that there was something on the edge of Ginny’s tongue, something she was almost spitting out, but whatever it was she shifted it to the side and altered the conversation once again.
She had a way of doing that, weaving strands of topics together in a way that only made sense to her, as if they were threads in a great tapestry that Lily herself could only glimpse.

“Just what do you intend to do about the heir, Lily?” Ginny asked and finally moved her queen across from Lily’s king, into check, “Since you’ve made it a point of staking out this random bathroom I assume you have some plan.”

Kill him.

(A memory, staring up into dark eyes that should have been blue, the look of shock on his face, a knife in her hands, and then…)

Lily blinked, paused, and ran over that thought again.

It was an automatic response, one that she hadn’t really thought she’d have, not one she’d intended. After all, the plan was simply to find him. She and Wizard Lenin hadn’t talked about confronting him or even stopping him, just finding him, and then readjusting from there. Know his face, protect the stone and destroy it as a last measure, and possibly even leave Hogwarts if it was necessary.

That is, if Wizard Lenin himself didn’t leave first, to pursue whatever it was he felt so desperate to pursue.

She hadn’t realized they’d never thought further than that, because in Lily’s mind there was no need to think beyond that. She’d always known there was only one possible outcome in this situation.

She’d never say it, had never even directly thought it before, but that didn’t make it any less true.

She would have to kill him.

She could try to avoid it but when push came to shove she’d have to do it, because he was smart enough to figure out her game and try to kill her, or else settle for killing everyone around her.
Only, he wouldn’t be able to kill her and she in turn wasn’t really able to kill him. Instead he’d return in some other puppet body a year or a few years in the future and they’d be doing it all over again.

With a sudden, dawning horror, Lily realized that she would be doing this forever. Playing the metaphorical game of whack-a-mole.

“Lily?”

Lily started, remembering that she was speaking to Ginny in a hallway in the middle of the night, and said, “I… I’m not really sure, I think finding him should be the first step.”

“Just find him?” Ginny asked, again dubiously, “You realize you’re probably what he wants to eliminate most, don’t you?”

Oh, she knew that very well, better than anyone besides Wizard Lenin ever would. She didn’t say that out loud though, that was the last thing she needed to explain to anyone while on bathroom stakeout duty, so Ginny continued with a strangely earnest look on her face.

“You’re not going to tell the Headmaster?”

Now there was an unintentionally hilarious statement, Ginny must be new and inexperienced, if she thought going to Dumbledore got anything done. Not that Ginny argued with Lily’s bout of hysterical laughter, just pursed her lips, and finished the game.

“Well, I suppose that answers that question… I do hope you know what you’re doing, Lily. It really would be too bad if you went and turned yourself into a martyr at the tender age of twelve.” Ginny said, and handed Lily back her cup of tea and stood, taking the chess board with her.

Lily as always stayed put and just tilted her head up at her, “You going back to your dorm?”

“Oh no, Lily,” Ginny said, “I’m much too busy to go to bed now. I’m afraid there’s work to be done.”

What she was going to do instead of sleeping was left unsaid, not that Lily wanted to ask, and not
that she really cared. With Lily guarding the bathroom twenty-four hours a day even if Ginny was Hindenburg’s puppet she didn’t have access to the giant snake, so whatever Ginny was doing it wouldn’t involve serial petrifications, thus Lily really could care less.

Also, she just had a feeling that she really wouldn’t like Ginny Weasley’s hobbies.

Then with a small wave, the girl turned, and said without looking back over her shoulder as she walked down the hall, “I’ll see you tomorrow, Lily.”

It had seemed more or less like an ordinary night to precede an ordinary day. One where Lily would get little to nothing done and Hindenburg would get little to nothing done, where Lenin would worry and scheme and read newspapers, Hermione would bitterly insist that she could take care of herself and didn’t need anyone’s help, and Rabbit would slowly master sentient thought.

Students might chatter, as they always did, Malfoy would certainly brag that the heir was doing them all a favor by riling up the mudblood populace and there would be the hushed questions of, “Did you do it, Ellie?” But they would mostly be concerned with the upcoming midterm exams, the latest quidditch game, and perhaps even the controversy that was House Default’s continued existence.

It was what Lily had come to expect from Hogwarts, even in the worst of times things went on more or less as they usually did. Her largest concerns then, aside from time travel and catching a giant snake charmer, was how she was going to manage sitting through double potions without causing something to explode just so they could get out early.

At least, before she’d arrived in the Great Hall that morning for breakfast, those had been her largest concerns.

Thanks to Lily’s morning training routine Default was always the first to breakfast. Hermione, Blaise, and Daphne, as Default’s hopelessly netural and unappreciative members, were never eager to do this but had more or less gotten used to it after about a month. Well, Hermione silently and bitterly accepted the routine and Blaise cursed about it, but to Lily that counted.

So, as it was, they arrived before any other students or even the professors themselves and were the first to see the heir of Slytherin’s magnum opis.

And then she’d just stared, stared and kept staring, without a thought in her head except, “That asshole.”
Colin Creevy, despite being the first human victim, hadn’t been all that dramatic. For Wizard Lenin it could be considered a show, but for anyone else it was very understated. It’d been unnerving, the way he’d clutched at his camera so that his face was hidden from view, but there had been nothing ominous in his positioning or where he was found. It looked as if he’d simply been unlucky, in the wrong place at the wrong time, catching the eyes of the basilisk.

There was no fanfare, no great reveal as there had been with the cat, just someone to show that anyone anywhere could fall victim, this was a much different story.

Luna stared up at the ceiling with wide dazed eyes, and with hesitation said, “Oh glorious captain, the ceiling appears to be dripping blood.”

This was true or appeared to be at any rate. It was painted with something dark and red so that they enchantment of the sky was no longer visible. Dark red clouds rolled across the ceiling, and in their center, a surprisingly realistic rendition of Michael Angelo’s “Creation of Man” was painted in painstaking detail only with Adam replaced by an older, wary, Lily and God replaced by Wizard Lenin.

And written on the wall, in dripping red letters and familiar handwriting, was, “Did you really think it would be that easy? Let’s not forget who made you, my friend.”

“I really hope that’s paint.” A bit dripped from the ceiling, with great caution Blaise inspected it and blanched, “Oh Merlin’s pants, that is blood, the ceiling is officially covered in blood.”

“This wasn’t here yesterday… How would anyone even access this much…” Daphne trailed off, also blanching at the sight of the ceiling and forced herself to look down at the floor.

“A powerful wizard can duplicate material they already have.” Hermione said but her eyes were locked on that older student, unseeing, and her hand gripping her wand.

“Right, of course, so it’s just one guy’s bucket of blood instead of the whole bleeding town of Hogsmede!” Blaise said, breathing out and adding, “Merlin, Potter, you’ve gone too far this…”

“This wasn’t mine.” Lily interjected, before Blaise could go any further on to a path that Lily wasn’t even willing to contemplate.
“Wasn’t yours?” Blaise asked and then motioned to the hall, “Look around, Potter, who else but Eleanor Potter could have painted a literal bloody portrait on the ceiling in one night! Who else would even want to? This has your hand written all over it.”

And then it all clicked together, his scheme of how to get Lily out of the way, how to get her cornered and isolated, “He’s going to frame me. That son of a bitch is going to frame me.”

Because no one would believe that a fragment of the deceased dark lord’s soul was behind this, or that he wasn’t cleansing the school of mudbloods but instead after the philosopher’s stone which Lily currently owned, they would all think what Blaise Zabini so clearly believed.

That Eleanor Lily Potter was the heir of Slytherin, without cause, without rhyme, and without reason.

This was a public declaration of war against her personally, whether because she was hunting him down and he knew, or just because he had grown impatient with the situation was unclear. In many ways that didn’t matter at all.

This was a challenge and it was one she didn’t intend to pass up.

Sitting, waiting, watching, those were Wizard Lenin’s tactics and while they seemed to work for him they had yet to ever truly work for her. Sitting outside of bathrooms was just getting her into awkward conversations with Ginny Weasley, it was time to up her game!

With a wave of her hand Lily removed the blood from the ceiling and walls. Then, stalking forward, she allowed the wheels in her head to spin in fashions which Wizard Lenin would not approve of but which didn’t matter because Wizard Lenin wasn’t winning and wasn’t even there at the moment.

In an infinite game, with limited resources, Wizard Lenin and his other half would forever be evenly matched and taking turns gaining the upper hand over one another. Just as, if Lily just chose to kill the body she’d be doing this forever, Wizard Lenin too would never manage to finish his round in the game.

He’d probably be able to prevent himself from losing, but winning, well that was another thing entirely.
If this was chess then Lily’s weakest pieces were Default and Neville, she knew that, her strongest was probably Lenin himself, but there were her enemy’s pieces to consider. His weakest was his puppet body, the closest to his heart and the one, if removed, would destroy all his schemes. She hadn’t managed to really find this piece yet, there were suspects but they remained just that, but why go after the weakest piece on the board when there were others to consider as well.

She could remove the basilisk itself, leave him without his spectacle, and then see what moves he might make then.

Because then he had no distractions, no collateral damage to hide behind, and anything he tried to do wouldn’t be nearly so painless or easy. After all, Wizard Lenin might not make the same mistakes twice but that didn’t mean Lily did either, she’d play her own game, she was done with stakeouts and training and pointless efforts getting nowhere at all.

Lily grinned.

“And I just remembered why Eleanor Lily Potter terrifies the ever loving shit out of me.” Blaise commented to the silent Daphne and next to them, Rabbit tilted his head, as if acknowledging this change in strategy or else out of curiosity for what was to come.

She didn’t respond, she just leaned back with that easy smile, feeling light and confident and prepared for whatever might come next.

And she waited, waited for the professors to walk in and take their seats waiting for the new day to start, waited for the students to trickle in one by one, and when every house seemed to be accounted for Lily made her great stand on the top of the Default table.

And in Wizard Lenin’s vein of thought she didn’t shout, didn’t rage, simply stared out coolly at her audience with narrowed gunslinger eyes and waited for each of them to meet hers. “I know you’re listening out there somewhere. I know you don’t expect me to ever find you, hiding behind the one place I never would look, wherever that might be. And perhaps, if we were playing your game, this might be enough. But, my old friend, we are not playing your game.”

There was mostly silence, someone from Slytherin shouted at her to sit down already, but the fact was that there was mostly stunned and terrified silence as each of them met her eyes. They, too, must have the feeling that this went far beyond any one of them and that in a way it had nothing to do with Hogwarts at all.
“Miss Potter,” Dumbledore started, standing from his position at the head of the table but Lily spoke over him, not giving him the chance to interrupt.

She motioned to the student population, the stage and setting, and slowly walked across the table as she spoke always keeping her eyes on the mob, “This is not a play about chivalrous knights and powerful dragons, this is not a play about an unseen monster lurking in the dark waiting for the hero to descend into the depths and confront him, this has never been a play about Eleanor Lily Potter. This is my game, this is my play, and I say it’s high time we stop these needless dramatics and collateral damage.”

She pointed into the audience, “You wish to challenge me, fine. I accept your challenge and we’ll see if you really understand what it means to accept mine! Because you know very well that I don’t play nice and I don’t play fair and I will ruin you if I must just as you will ruin me. And we will play this never ending game of whack-a-mole as we see fit.”

She let those words float in the air and then with her hands in her pockets, leaning back and surveying her enemy with cool detachment, “I will play the prisoner’s dilemma until the sun expands and beyond! So, your excellency, I will make my move as your moves have dictated and we will see what you make of yours.”

There was nothing for a moment, no applause, no yelling, just open mouthed gaping from every single student in Hogwarts including those sitting right next to her. Then, slowly and uncertainly, the Weasley doppelgangers stood from the Gryffindor table and began clapping. They were joined by Ron, then Neville, then Ginny, the rest of Gryffindor, and then all of the school except for Slytherin who just seemed more or less uncomfortable.

At this point Lily wondered if dramatically standing up on the table had been a good idea. It seemed all well and good at the time of the speech but now that she was up there she felt a bit silly what with all the cheering. Plus, she was also literally standing in her own breakfast.

“Holy shit, Ellie.” Blaise said, “I didn’t understand a word of that but it was… sort of inspiring.”

“You’re planning something drastic, aren’t you?” Hermione asked with furrowed eyebrows and a strange expression on her face, as if she was deciding whether or not she should be concerned.

“Well, desperate times call for desperate measures.” Lily muttered out with a shrug, still keeping eye contact with the cheering population, who had now started chanting her name.
“Will you be alright, with these desperate measures?” And here that nervous concern increased, for the first time in a month seeing something other than an obstacle, a tool, and a tyrant in front of her.

Lily had almost forgotten that Hermione remembered that Lily herself wasn’t without thought or feeling.

“We can assist you if needed, oh glorious captain.” Luna said cheerfully as she buttered her toast, “Perhaps the abominable Lepur can simply devour the problem for you!”

Lily met Rabbit’s blank expression, watched as a slow grin crawled over his lips while his eyes remained blank and untouched, and shuddered, “I think I’ll pass on that backup, thanks.”

She’d add more at Luna’s look of fiery determination and Hermione’s unusual hesitance but Dumbledore had finally decided to speak again, his voice roaring over the cheers and clapping, “Thank you, Miss Potter, for your inspiring speech. But alas, for disturbing breakfast when Hogwarts has long since done away with breakfast speeches I will have to deduct ten points from Default. Had it been a limerick, or accompanied by a cheery tune, then perhaps I could have granted points, however hindsight always is clearer than what we choose at the time.”

Dumbledore smiled across at her, his glasses twinkling and his eyes probably sparkling behind them, but she knew just as she smiled at him and him at her that none of them truly meant it in that moment. She wasn’t offering to bring him information, he wasn’t offering to help her or do it himself.

She would make her move with or without him; it was good of him to recognize that this time around.

Awkwardly students returned back to their breakfasts and Lily slowly clambered back down into her seat.

Luna handed her a piece of toast like the dutiful second in command that she was.

“You’re sure that you’ll be alright?” Hermione asked, and Lily just looked at her with raised eyebrows, conveying everything that Hermione should have remembered in a silent response.

Hermione had seen Lily return from the dead, she should know better than that. More, until two seconds before, Hermione had always given the impression that she wouldn’t have been bothered.
either way.

“I’ll be fine.” Lily managed to say between bites of toast, “More important, I think, is whether after
my very dramatic speech I should bother going to double Potions.”

“…You’re skipping class again?” And suddenly Hermione seemed a lot less understanding of the
situation and was back to being chronically irritated by everything Lily ever said.

“I am vanquishing evil; that’s far more important that class.” Lily pointed out.

“Indubitably.” Rabbit added with a nod, leaving Lily to just look at him and respond, “Don’t back
me up, Rabbit, I really don’t need that right now.”

Rabbit did not look in any way shape or form regretful of what he’d just said, not that Lily was even
sure what indubitably meant anyways, that was a Hermione word to win the spelling bee if there
ever was a word for that.

“Well, good luck I suppose, but how many classes have you skipped anyways?” Daphne asked with
a vague sense of curiosity, as if she was mostly above this but sort of interested in spite of herself.

“Not that many.” Either Hermione or Blaise scoffed at that, Lily hadn’t been watching closely
enough to tell which one.

“I barely even see you in History of Magic.”

“Is that a class?”

“Yes it’s a class!” Daphne said, which, really Lily still wasn’t anywhere near convinced. Plus, Lily
wasn’t the only one who didn’t show up every single time, Luna said the whole thing was a giant
conspiracy and had taken to frolicking around the lake with Rabbit during that time looking for
strange creatures.

“Ellie, just go to Potions.” Hermione said, “You can vanquish evil after class.”
“Alright, fine, I’ll vanquish evil after double Potions.” Lily said, throwing her hands in the air in defeat, although why they even cared whether she showed up to Potions was beyond her. Really, Lily didn’t care when other people didn’t show up to class.

“Do I even want to know how you plan to confront him?” Hermione asked, after a pause with raised eyebrows.

“I’m going to kill a giant snake.” Lily said, which, compared to what Hermione had seen really wasn’t that bad.

“Wait, like a basilisk? You’re going to try and kill a…” Blaise started, looking incredibly dubious at the prospect of twelve-year-old Eleanor Lily Potter slaughtering a basilisk in its own lair.

“You know what, I really didn’t want to know.” Hermione said, cutting Blaise off before he could ask just how Lily thought such a feat was possible.

“I’d say you were insane but… Well… If anyone can…” Blaise through his hands in the air looking at Daphne for support who just looked coldly back, expressing perfectly well that Blaise was on his own in this conversation.

And that seemed to be all that anyone had to say about that.

They then ate in silence for a few uncomfortable moments, listening to the pointed whispers coming from the other tables, and Lily just wondered if any of this ever got old to them. The speech hadn’t really been for them, after all, and if she’d known who to say it to directly she would have avoided confronting the whole school at once.

Maybe she should have come up with some other plan but she supposed it was too late for that now.

“Oh, Ellie?” She looked over her shoulder to find Neville awkwardly standing there. Not that Neville ever managed to stand in a way that wasn’t somehow awkward, he was just an awkward being, constantly in conflict with his own thoughts and actions.

“You said I could sit here… right?”
Lily glanced at the table and the rest of Default, then back to him, he could have picked better timing but she did technically say that. She gave him a small nod, watched as stumbled into the seat next to hers and just stared at her for a few moments.

“You… Um… That was a nice speech.” Neville said before hastily adding, “I liked it… I mean, it’s nice to hear somebody talk about it out loud. Just…”

“Are… Um… Could we talk in private maybe?” Neville blurted, and wasn’t it strange how insistent he looked in that moment, as if this was terribly important but he could not explain why.

Lily cast a glance to Luna, received a thumbs up that yes Luna was all good to Rabbit sit once again, and Lily stood from the table grabbing another piece of toast as she ushered Neville into the hallway and out of sight and hearing of all their peers.

“What’s up?” She asked and then waited as he nervously shifted on his feet again, opening his mouth and closing it with nothing coming out.

“Well?” She prompted.

“Are… You made it sound up there like… Well, like it wasn’t about everyone getting petrified or dying even.” Neville finally said, only, his eyes said something else, something Lily herself couldn’t decipher.

“It’s not.” Lily said, “There are much higher stakes in the Slytherin prince’s game.”

Neville looked stricken at this answer, his face contorting in a way that made it looked like she’d kicked him in the stomach and rolled over his puppy, and she felt her own insides twisting in response. Because she hadn’t lied when she’d talked to Ginny, she did like Neville, and she wanted to see him happy or at least not unhappy because of her. But she also didn’t like to lie either; not when he shouldn’t need her to.

“But it’s…. It’s not really a game, Ellie!” Neville finally said, “These are people’s lives! Our lives! That’s what’s really important. Don’t you…” He paused and searched her face, finally said, “Look, I know we haven’t talked in a while, and a lot’s happened with me too. I just… I feel like I don’t know you anymore.”
And where did that come from? Sure, she and Neville had never really had a heart to heart and hadn’t talked for a bit but… Surely nothing really strange had happened. She’d gone to Albania and back, but she told him about that, and more there were parts of that he just didn’t need to know. And back then he hadn’t been saying anything like that, just that he was glad she was alright.

“I know that…” Lily started only to trail off and wonder just what it was they were arguing about, because it was true that the heir was threatening everyone in the castle, but that didn’t mean it was about them. Perhaps it was unfortunate, but it was true, “And besides, I’ve always been this way.”

“Right, of course I… How are you going to stop the heir anyways?”

“That is a secret.” Lily said with solemnity, “Besides, it doesn’t really matter, does it? So long as this all stops.”

“I guess it doesn’t. Just… How would you know how to stop him if Dumbledore doesn’t?”

Did that even deserve a response? No one had ever asked that sort of thing before, she always just did what she did and moved on. Of course, it was a logical question, but still one she never really faced. Not as Eleanor Lily Potter at any rate.

So she gave the only answer anyone had ever expected her to give, “Because I’m the girl-who-lived.”

And just as it wasn’t enough for her it didn’t seem enough for him, no matter how true it happened to be.

He stared at her for a few moments, nodded slowly, and then said, “Right, okay, if that’s all... Good luck then, I guess.”

Then stiffly, without looking behind, he walked back into the great hall leaving her standing there blinking at his retreating figure and wondering what the hell she just missed.

If Wizard Lenin was in her head, at that moment, she’d comment how weird this was all getting and he’d have some rational reason for why Neville just said what he said and why people were doing
what they were doing and how it all tied together. As it was, Lily just looked at the doors to the Great Hall and listened to the noise inside, and wondered how these things could be so obvious to him and so non-evident to her.

Like something infinitely important always eluded her.

“You know, if I wasn’t so busy trying to ward off an immortal ghost I’d probably be worried about that.”

As expected no one responded. So, standing there, hands in pockets. Lily decided to do what Lily did best. Damn the consequences, skip Potions, and save the school from certain doom whether by Squirrel, by troll, or by giant man eating snake in the basement.

She imagined that Wizard Lenin would have secretly approved if he had any idea what was going on.

She’d just have to fill him in later.
In which Lily explains the prisoner's dilemma, Ginny Weasley shows more of her hand than she should, and Wizard Lenin's secrets remain unclear and unknown.

The trouble with Wizard Lenin’s secret secrets, Lily thought to herself as she stared at the empty bathroom, was that he kept them buried deep inside his heart and no amount of prying could usually get them out.

Normally, it wasn’t that much of a problem.

True, there were times Lily wondered just who Wizard Lenin had been and where he had come from. How he had turned from that orphaned, angry, boy that Albus Dumbledore had met to the feared revolutionary that would come to reside inside of her head. However, she’d never thought she’d really needed to know, or, if she did then he'd tell her.

After all, there were some things she knew.

And easing this lack of past, of history, was the knowledge that no one had ever truly known Wizard Lenin. Whether in his youth, his young adulthood, or even at the very end before he’d condemned himself to imprisonment inside of her.

And perhaps this wasn’t the best way to live, but at least it meant that out of everyone in the world she probably did know him best, even if she didn’t know him at all.

And for many years this had been enough, had to be enough, and she’d worked with it.

It wasn’t until she was inside of the Dungeon bathroom that she realized that perhaps she should have pumped Wizard Lenin for a little more information. Or, at least, pumped him for a bit of practical information.

“…I have no idea where this thing is.”
Saying this and staring dumbly at the stone walls and the marble basin did nothing to rectify matters.

At least it wasn’t large, or at least, not as large as the dormitory bathrooms. And, at least it was empty and likely to remain so.

People had this thing about the dungeon bathroom, not like it terrified them but more like they found it obnoxious for some inexplicable reason, like just being there was like listening to nails screeching down a chalkboard.

As for herself, well, she wouldn’t call it obnoxious but she didn’t feel exactly at ease in the place either. There was a cold, desolate, barren feel to the place. The sound of water dripping from the faucet gained a thundering quality, weighted down by something unseen and unknown, and always the place felt like forgotten death. Like a tombstone worn by time whose engraved name had long since been erased, leaving only a jagged stone behind.

She walked further in, listening to her footsteps echo, peering at every nook and cranny, her eyes tracing the stones for any sort of sign.

“Alright, if I were a secret entrance to a giant chamber of secrets, where would I be?”

She paused, considered her own question, and blurted, “Behind the refrigerator, the one place no one would ever look.”

Unfortunately, there was no refrigerator in the bathroom and probably hadn’t been fifty years ago either. She sighed, began looking over things again, thinking that Wizard Lenin really had gone out of his way to tell her nothing specific.

Well, he’d given her a room which she supposed was nice of him but he could have at least said, “Hey, Lily, the secret entrance to my secret chamber is behind the mirror.”

Lily glanced at the mirrors, caught her own dazed and rather haggard expression in it, looking far too overworked and tired for someone her age.

(How long had it been since she’d really looked in a mirror?)
Focusing, she raised her hand, let the power flow out, and watched as each mirror shattered, the glass and her reflection crumbling down and tinkling onto the stone tiles below.

“Well, shit, I guess it’s not the mirrors.” Lily said, her fingers twitching to repair the mirrors, but hesitating as she caught sight of her own reflection once again, at her eyes staring back critically at her.

Although, she couldn’t tell what they were saying to her, only that they were colder than she’d ever thought they could be.

What had happened here, fifty years ago?

And why was it that she still only knew vague details, about a young Wizard Lenin, a basilisk, and Hagrid taking the blame for all of it?

Of course, maybe that wasn’t really that important. The important bit was killing the snake and then… Well, waiting to see what Wizard Lenin’s other half might do.

Because surely, surely he too must realize the devastating infinite nature of the game they played. There was a piece of Wizard Lenin in him somewhere, and if it was Wizard Lenin, then eventually he’d realize…

Or he’d just try to kill her again out of spite.

“Still, the giant snake plan is ridiculous.” Lily concluded, flicking her hand and sending the mirror shards flying back into their original position, “I mean, it really doesn’t accomplish anything and is filled with pointless collateral damage.”

Lily proceeded to check each of the stalls while rambling to herself, frowning when blowing up the toilets caused nothing but water to shoot out from the pipes, “And it doesn’t even really accomplish that, I mean, so far it’s only managed to get a cat and that one kid. That’s minimal as far as collateral damage is concerned, almost non-existent, so why even bother with it?”

Even Wizard Lenin wouldn’t be able to refute that kind of logic. Of course, it wasn’t really his plan just… His other half’s plan, which Wizard Lenin still didn’t even understand.
It was at that point that Lily realized that the bathroom was starting to flood.

“I probably could have planned this better.”

Of course, planning was what had gotten her into this whole mess, or at least, the whole mess of sitting outside of the bathroom under an invisibility cloak twenty-four seven. That, at least, had been gratifying. Walking through the door and seeing that the other Lily, the future Lily, wasn’t there.

But then, that also could mean something quite different, it could mean that Lily might never come back out of that chamber.

“Well, that’s not going to happen. I mean, I’m immortal, it’ll take more than a secret snake dungeon to get rid of me permanently.” Lily’s laughter echoed off the walls, and with each reverberation sounded less reassuring than it had before.

Lily startled at the feeling of water soaking through her shoes, the toilet water finally having reached where she was standing, with a grimace she backed up slightly, willed her shoes to be dry and frowned at the newly formed geysers pumping out of the toilets’ remains.

She should probably fix that.

Of course, if the chamber entrance had been easy to find then she wouldn’t be having this problem. Or, if Wizard Lenin had just told her where the damn thing was instead of, ‘inside the bathroom, don’t question my logic’, then she also wouldn’t be having this problem.

“Would it kill him to be a little more specific?!?”

She wasn’t asking for much, wasn’t even really asking for anything. She didn’t need to know how he felt, what he thought about, or even what really happened she just…

Couldn’t he give her something real for once in his life?!
“…You know, Lily, I was going to use this bathroom.”

Lily turned around rapidly, almost losing balance and stepping into the water again, seeing the one person she probably wanted to see the least, “Tequila, what an unpleasant surprise!”

Only, Lily paused as she caught sight of her, and felt whatever dread she had over another awkward and nigh incomprehensible conversation with Ginny fade and something starker take its place.

Ginny Weasley stood in the doorway, pale, shaking, and clutching at her arm with a weak smile and a too dazed expression. She looked like a gentle breeze would be able to knock her over.

“I wanted to tell you, earlier, that I was very inspired by your speech… Maybe a bit too inspired, I think I’m feeling a bit too… much, recently anyways. You ran off before I could say anything though, and then, well… That is what you do, isn’t it Lily? Run off at the most inconvenient moments.” Ginny stepped forward, into the room, and as she did so some of the color returned to her cheeks and her steps became more certain, the sweat dried from her brow, and for a moment she looked like nothing had happened at all.

“…That’s nice.” Lily managed to say, really trying to avoid saying that somehow, some way, Ginny had gotten worse.

(What was wrong with Ron’s family? Doppelgangers, Ron the snake cultist, and now… Ginny… They must be aliens.)

Ginny didn’t say anything to that, just straightened her tie, and glanced at Lily out of the side of her brown eyes (eyes, that for a single instant, didn’t look like they should be brown at all).

“Should you… Oh, I don’t know, be in the nurse’s office?”

Ginny’s lips curled into a rather cutting and self-deprecating, smile, “I’m fine. I was just… a little divided I guess you could say.”

That wasn’t what Lily was going to say.
“Divided.” Lily repeated, to which Ginny’s smile turned a bit more cheerful, almost sunny in disposition.

“It’s not every day that one gets to see their personal hero, Eleanor Lily Potter, make a dramatic speech from on top of a table.” Ginny pointed out, her teeth pearly white as she beamed across at her personal heroine, in a flooding bathroom that nobody in their right mind visited.

“…Right.” Lily said, and then turned to stare back at the overflowing toilets, a problem that she probably could fix. Unlike the Ginny problem.

Ginny just continued to smile, and stare, and smile some more.

“Uh, Ginny, look… don’t you have class right now?” Lily asked, to which Ginny raised her eyebrows.

“Don’t you have class right now?” Ginny retorted, her expression making it perfectly clear that she knew Lily had class right now too.

“I don’t need to go to class.” Lily was practically a god, she was above things like Double Potions, Ginny didn’t have that excuse.

“Strangely enough, neither do I… Well, at least, some of the time.” Ginny said with a shrug, as if this should explain… something.

“Only some of the time?”

“Soon I won’t need to attend class at all.” Ginny said, delivering it like it was the punchline to a very bad joke that nobody should laugh at. Trouble was that Lily wasn’t even grasping how it was a joke.

The water had reached her new position and was now flooding out into the hallway, it might eventually reach the Potions’ classroom if Lily didn’t put a stop to it.

“Great, well, I’m busy.” Lily said, grimacing, stepping on top of the water and willing her feet dry again, taking mild pleasure in the fact that Ginny at least had no choice but to get her socks soaked
“Blowing up toilets?” Ginny asked rather drily, casting a glance towards the toilet geysers, then added, “You know, Lily, I think you have a real problem with this restroom.”

“I do not have a problem with this restroom!”

“One would think you were its jilted lover.” Ginny added, elaborating with extravagant hand gestures, “You sit outside of it, during all hours of the night, and now here you are destroying its property.”

Lily spluttered, almost lost her balance on the top of the water, and shouted, “I am not having a love affair with this place!”

“Then, enlighten me, Lily, because I really don’t get it.”

Lily blinked, felt unfamiliar heat rise to her cheeks, and tried desperately to think of a way to explain without explaining, “Well, what are you doing here?!?”

Ginny’s eyebrows raised, “What am I doing here?”

“No one uses this restroom besides you and me! So, what is someone like you doing in a place like this?!?”

Ginny didn’t answer for a moment, her expression strangely somber, and then answered, “True love, I suppose.”

Ginny didn’t elaborate, didn’t even leave time for Lily to splutter properly (because what, why, and what even was Ginny), and moved on instead to, “You said this morning, or at least I think you said, that you wanted to challenge the heir directly. Is that what this is about?”

Lily stilled, looked at the perfectly calm and unruffled Ginny, and felt everything inside of her still.
There was something wrong with Ginny Weasley.

There was some shadow in her eyes, something that shouldn’t be there, but it wasn’t the sharp edge of a knife that was in Quirrell’s or even Wizard Lenin’s. It was dangerous, yes, but it didn’t belong to any form of Lenin.

It was… something entirely different.

“You think the entrance is in here, don’t you? Sort of an odd place to put it, don’t you think?”

“It probably wasn’t a girl’s restroom back in the day.” Lily commented, watching as Ginny drew closer to the toilets to inspect each of them.

“True, but there’s a certain irony in it, if you’re right about all of this.” Ginny mused, pausing before the water, and noted, “I’m guessing you haven’t been having much luck.”

“…I can neither confirm nor deny that statement.”

Ginny spared her a rather amused glance, “You probably have to be a parseltongue to find it.”

“A what?”

“Talk to snakes.” Ginny said, which, now that Ginny had mentioned it that had been one of Wizard Lenin’s rather embarrassing super powers. Like aqua man, but with snakes.

No wonder he barely talked about it.

“…What a useless talent.”

Ginny looked patently unamused before grudgingly admitting, “I won’t deny that it’s… overrated, but, it does have its uses every now and again.”
Now it was Lily’s turn to be patently unamused, standing in the overflowing bathroom, thinking that somehow Ginny Weasley had managed to make Lily’s day ten times worse than it was to begin with.

“Well, then, I guess you aren’t needed here, Gin, since you aren’t a snake whisperer either…”

“Of course,” Ginny interrupted rather casually as she surveyed the bathroom, “There should be some other way in.”

Ginny walked towards the overflowing toilets, seeming not to mind the cold water flowing out of them, “I’m going to make a wild guess here and say that Slytherin’s monster probably doesn’t kill from a distance. However, no one’s seen it roaming around the castle either. So how is it moving from the bathroom to all of these hallways?”

Lily wasn’t feeling in the mood for guessing, “Maybe it teleports.”

“…It teleports?”

“Maybe it’s an evil petrifying house elf with a grudge against muggle born students. Maybe it’s been waiting fifty years to exact its revenge on all those who spurned it before.” Lily said with a shrug, which, if she didn’t already know it was a giant snake she could buy that explanation. It was very Hogwarts-esq in its ridiculousness.

“And it lives in the bathroom?” Ginny asked.

“I can’t justify the actions of crazed house elves gone rogue.”

Ginny frowned, seemed more than a little irritated, but soon enough turned back to the water, “Well, I think that it moves through the pipes.”

Lily’s eyebrows raised, “The pipes?”

“The pipes were built with expansion charms, so that when water freezes, or more needs to be pumped through, they don’t explode. The pipes also run through nearly every room in the castle,
through almost every single wall. If it were me then I’d set it loose in the pipes.”

Lily’s eyes drifted to the ruined toilets, finally catching Ginny’s drift, and feeling herself sour because of it.

“So, if you want to find the Chamber of Secrets, then the best way to look for it is probably…”

“Through the pipes.” Lily finished, dully, her eyes narrowing on the fountains of cold water coming from each of the stalls.

Ginny glanced at Lily with a smile, “Not getting cold feet, are you? Come on, Lily, I’ll be horribly embarrassed if my favorite heroine in all of existence doesn’t descend to slay the man eating monster because her shoes will get wet.”

Although she would never admit it, Ginny did have a point, it was almost embarrassing that Lily was getting apprehensive just because she’d have to wade through freezing water to get there. That didn’t change the fact that Lily was not looking forward to wading through very cold water to get there.

…Maybe she could still find the snake entrance.

“Bombarda.”

Lily started at the sound of a small explosion, one that swept away the remains of the stonework surrounding one of the toilets, widening the hole Lily had already created. Ginny didn’t even glance at Lily, just put her wand away, and before Lily could even shout after her dropped into the hole.

“Wait!”

But it was too late, the last strand of Ginny’s red hair had disappeared from sight, leaving Lily to stare at where she had once been standing.

On the one hand, this probably was the closest thing she was going to get to an entrance. It also, probably, might lead to Ginny’s death if Lily didn’t run after her. Ginny might be insane, creepy, and apparently very ill but that didn’t mean she deserved to be eaten by a giant snake.
On the other hand, Lily really was not feeling jumping into that hole or having to deal with Ginny in any capacity what so ever.

For a moment, she stood, truly torn between the two options.

Then, cursing herself for not finding it sooner or just getting the information from Wizard Lenin while she had the chance, she ran and jumped in after Ginny, plunging into the dark.

For a moment she spluttered, submerged in deep, cold, and terribly dark water, grappling for hold and a way to push herself up to the surface, then a hand grabbed her by the back of her robes and drew her to the surface.

“There, it’s not so bad is it?” Ginny asked, seemingly indifferent to Lily’s own gasps for air and shuddering.

Lily summoned a light in her hands, illuminating herself and a drenched too pale Ginny, looking again as if she was on the verge of dying from a disease with far too long of a name.

“It’s freezing!” Lily cried, summoning a glitch to keep herself warm in spite of the ridiculously cold water.

“Well, I doubt the founders intended for people to go swimming in here.” Ginny said, before wading forward, past Lily into the dark, “Come on, the sooner we start moving the sooner we can be out of here.”

“Wait, hold up!” Lily clambered out of the water and onto its surface, jogging along, feeling the damp ceiling brushing the top of her soaked hair as she made her way towards Ginny.

“You know, Lily, for a moment I didn’t think you’d jump in after me.” Ginny commented, an uncertain look on her face, “I… Well, I’m glad you did.”

“It’s not like you left me much of a choice!” Lily pointed out, “You really shouldn’t be going down here!”
“Probably, but then, you probably shouldn’t either.”

“Oh,” Lily said, stepping in front of Ginny and halting her rather dogged progress, “I have every right to be here. I’m Eleanor Lily Potter, trapped in her destined infinite battle against the forces of evil, if anyone should be here, it should be me!”

Ginny did stop, stared at Lily, the light casting strange sharp shadows on her eleven-year-old face, finally she asked, “You mentioned something in your speech I didn’t understand. Actually, you said a lot in your speech I didn’t understand. Lily, just what is the prisoner’s dilemma?”

The infinite game against an adversary you could not truly beat in a town that simply wasn’t big enough for both to truly reside in. The game that no one could ever truly win but that you must play regardless.

These weren’t thoughts she wanted to share with Ginny Weasley.

Shoving her hands into her pockets, letting the light drift in front of her like a leisurely floating firefly, Lily stalked forward into the dark, her footsteps echoing on top of the water.

“Lily?”

There was an indescribable look on Ginny’s face, something that didn’t belong to an eleven-year-old girl, something jagged, broken, yet still somehow fragile as if it could shatter even further. It was...

“Two members of a criminal gang are arrested and imprisoned. Each prisoner is in solitary confinement with no means of communicating with the other. The prosecutors lack sufficient evidence to convict the pair on the principal charge. They hope to get both sentenced to a year in prison on a lesser charge. Simultaneously, the prosecutors offer each prisoner a bargain. Each prisoner is given the opportunity either to: betray the other by testifying that the other committed the crime, or to cooperate with the other by remaining silent.” Lily paused, took a breath, saw not the floating light in front of her or Ginny’s pale features but instead that metaphorical prison with herself and that other half of Wizard Lenin’s soul trapped inside.

“The offer is this. If A and B each betray the other, they each serve two years in prison. If A betrays B, but B remains silent, A will be set free and B will serve three years in prison. The same goes if B betrays A. Finally, if A and B both remain silent, they will each serve only a year in prison.”
Lily fell silent for a moment, her voice darkening, and her mind reeling back to that disastrous night with Quirrell, “If you consider it in terms of a single game then both prisoners have incentive to betray the other, in spite of the maximum outcome for all parties being if they both kept silent. However, if it’s an infinite game, then A and B will take turns betraying one another, pointlessly, eventually realizing that the only true optimal solution is if they both keep silent.”

Lily blinked, the memories fading back into her mind, and only Ginny in the dark remaining.

“Thank you, Lily.”

Ginny then broke the moment, moving forward, past Lily and into the dark leaving Lily to walk behind. The rest of the time was spent in silence, only the sound of Ginny’s splashing and Lily’s lighter footsteps breaking the almost oppressive quiet.

What would Wizard Lenin say to any of this?

What would he say to her decision, to the only decision she could make, that he’d left her capable of making? What would he say about the game?

Wizard Lenin, for all his brilliance, for everything that he was and was capable of… She couldn’t see him accepting something like that easily. She’d always thought it was a strength, that indomitable will, where he would push himself through any and every obstacle.

Where he could conquer death itself.

And even though he had made himself immortal, had pushed himself into immortality, he didn’t really think like she did. Not short term, certainly, but he didn’t look out into the dizzying eternity and wonder where he would be on ten thousand years.

He didn’t wonder just where he and his original soul piece would stand when that time came.

And, ultimately, it wasn’t his fight.
This was Eleanor Lily Potter’s destiny, and no one else’s.

(Why was that so haunting?)

Down the pipes they went, down and down, further than Lily had thought could be possible from the dungeon level. Down, turning left and right then left again, finally until they came into a large, open, chamber with the face of a man carved into the stone.

As they stepped in torches on the wall lit themselves, casting shadows as their green flames danced, and Lily and Ginny said nothing as they stepped onto the platform.

It was so large, perhaps the largest single room Lily had ever been in, and as she stared up at the great vault of a ceiling, and caught sight of her own pale and bedraggled reflection in the flat lake which they had emerged from, she felt so terribly small.

A single dust mote lost in the eye of God.

“So, what now, Lily?”

Lily looked down from the ceiling, stared across at Ginny who was staring back, that too sharp look back on her face.

Lily blinked, tried to pull herself back together, and pointed back the way they came, “Now, you climb yourself back out of here before you get eaten by a giant snake.”

Ginny grimaced, but it was more than a grimace, a gritting of the teeth to prevent it from turning into something worse, “I am not going to be devoured by the basilisk.”

(Had Lily ever told Ginny that it was a basilisk?)

She certainly would, or at least was very likely to, if she kept staying down here chatting waiting for the thing to show up. However, that said, Lily had yet to hear any sign of its movement, there was only her in this chamber and Ginny herself.
And that feeling that Lily had missed something far too important.

“Are you really going to slay it though, Lily, the basilisk?” Ginny asked, and while Lily didn’t nod she also didn’t deny it.

“And what about the heir? Do you intend to compromise with him, or will you slay him too, just like everyone expects you to?”

Ginny waited though for the answer that didn’t come, breathing heavily, her skin pale again, clutching at her clothing. Looking at her Lily wondered if this was what it was like to watch someone fall apart at the seams.

“You said… You said that you’re caught in an infinite game, one where you have to compromise to win… But you never were capable of compromising! You never asked for my opinion, not when it mattered! Always, always you walked away, not even letting me chase after your shadow!”

Lily stepped back, her hands held out, instinctively summoning a great sword, Gryffindor’s sword, to protect herself.

(There was something terribly wrong with Ginny Weasley.)

Ginny tilted her head back and laughed, “Look at you, you don’t even remember any of it!”

“Any of what?”

Ginny’s eyes widened, her face grew slack, and for a moment she just simply stared at Lily as if Lily had stabbed her through the heart.

Then, “It hasn’t happened yet, I keep forgetting that… I… Don’t look at me like that!”

Lily took a step further back.
Something seemed to go out of Ginny then, drifted from her and left her dazed and wilted, forlornly she stared across at Lily as if Lily was something untouchable, “I have no quarrels with you. Truly, Lily, I wouldn’t have involved you at all. But I… I need to be real, Lily. More than anything in the world I want the ability to be… something, again. Do you understand?”

“You’re not human.” Lily finally stated, licking her suddenly dry lips, but Ginny, whatever was playing at being Ginny, made no move towards her.

“No, not anymore.” Ginny closed her eyes, stood perfectly still, as if she wasn’t in this place at all.

“What are you supposed to be, if you’re not human? You’re not Voldemort.” Lily said, raising her sword, but Ginny didn’t open her eyes or make any movement towards her.

“No, no one’s Voldemort now, you saw to that, Eleanor Lily Potter.” Ginny opened her eyes, stared across at Lily with something close to contempt, then said, “I suppose this will make us even, Lily.”

“What will make us even?” Lily raised a hand, readying herself to throw Ginny against the walls, to throw her back into the lake to…

“I will ruin you if I must just as you will ruin me. Just as you did ruin me, eleven years ago.” Ginny didn’t move, didn’t even look at Lily, instead a string of hissing noises came from her lips.

Without thinking, without giving herself time to think, Lily threw Ginny to the side, paralyzing her limbs for good measure, forcing her to curl in on herself as she lay on the slick stones of the floor.

At the end of the hallway the mouth of the carved face slid open with a grating, aged, sound and Lily turned to face it, heart beating rapidly inside of her chest. She gripped the sword tighter, all at once too aware of how alone she was down here, how neither Wizard Lenin, Death, or even Rabbit were standing beside her.

A great shadow grew in the entryway, shifting rapidly closer, and as she unsteadily breathed out Lily forced herself to focus.
The World Keeps Spinning

In which Wizard Lenin and Lily have a rather long argument that results in perhaps the worst idea they've ever had, Luna Lovegood proves once again that she's Lily's favorite, and for the moment everything is almost eerily calm and there is the feel that something is missing.

It was the kind of morning Lily had more or less come to expect out of her life, perhaps not the morning after having defeated a giant snake, but none the less her life did seem to periodically head in this bizarre direction.

That said, she still wasn’t entirely comfortable with any of it, at all. In any way shape or form. Period.

Judging by the look on all of her comrades’ faces they weren’t either. Which was entirely understandable, except for maybe Rabbit’s narrowed eyed look of… something, definitely not nothing which was what should be on his face. Where was that wonderful eggplant impression when you wanted it?

This plan, she felt, had combined the worst parts of both her and Wizard Lenin, and would no doubt lead to both disaster and embarrassment.

“Why do I have the sudden feeling of déjà vu?” Hermione asked, rhetorically, because it was completely clear why she was having the sudden feeling of déjà vu.

Because there was Lily, standing next to a far too symmetrical, white-haired, stranger trying to think of a way to possibly convey just why he was here and what was going on without really saying anything at all.

And, with that in mind, she decided she might as well just cement that feeling of surreal repetition in and hope that everyone just rolled with it like they did everything at Hogwarts. After all, it worked out last time… So, it probably would be fine this time… Maybe.

“Everyone, this is Lenin Rabbitson, Rabbit’s Albanian refugee half-brother… He, surprisingly, is actually not an extra-dimensional reality eating abomination; but he is a communist.”
The introduction of Hogwarts’ second Albanian transfer student had begun the night before after Lily had managed to drag herself through Hogwarts pipe system once again and made her way back to the common room.

(And it had been so cold, even dashing above the line of the water, and it had been so dark…)

Lily, covered in both dried and still dripping blood, her clothing still torn, her knees still scraped, clutching the stained blade of Gryffindor in one hand, and doing her best to seem perfectly in control of the situation in spite of the fact that she was feeling more than a little… dazed, stared at Wizard Lenin with a confident expression that a victorious hero should wear.

At least, that she thought a victorious hero should wear. On television the hero, even the truly haggard hero, had always had a particular look on his face. Something worn, yet triumphant, streaked in dirt yet hopeful for a future they couldn’t quite see on the horizon. Luke Skywalker, he’d had that expression more than once...

But then, Lily couldn’t remember having ever worn that expression, not in Albania, and especially not the year before inside of Hogwarts.

She wouldn’t be surprised if her face looked, in those crucial moments, far emptier, like she too was waiting for something, anything to happen, and had not quite processed that it was over. Just like that.

(A knife in Lily’s hand, the smell of blood, and Quirrell’s body just lying there, empty.)

Perhaps such expressions of valiance were truly only found on television.

Wizard Lenin, dressed in clothing that tried a little too hard to be formal, abandoned his newest book on magical theory (dutifully stolen from the library) in favor of staring back at her, eyebrows raised beyond the point of dubiousness into straight disbelief, finally asked, “Lily, what did you do?”

Only, it wasn’t in Wizard Lenin’s usual suave contemptuous voice, the voice that every James Bond villain would have loved to have when they told Mr. Bond that they expected him to die. No, this was the voice of someone who was both resigned and alarmed to the situation and who was praying that their imagination had failed them and that they weren’t seeing what they were seeing.
Which, honestly, it hadn’t gone that badly…

Well, from what Lily could remember, the end had gotten a little… fuzzy. She probably hit her head in there somewhere. It wouldn’t exactly be surprising considering what did happen, it was probably perfectly natural that Lily’s recollection of fighting a giant snake was a little unclear.

(That, and, well, there was always that feeling…)

Lily smiled awkwardly back, “Well… I can tell you what I didn’t do. I did not go to Potions this morning.”

For a moment it looked as if Wizard Lenin was on the verge of telling her that he didn’t care what she didn’t do, then he looked like he was on the verge of asking her if she hadn’t gone to Potions because she’d massacred the entire class, then he put his head into one hand and started rubbing at his temples.

“Is anyone dead?” Wizard Lenin finally asked.

Lily inspected herself, looked back at him, and asked rather blankly, “Do snakes count?”

For a moment, he gritted his teeth, probably forcing himself to stop from snapping back that snakes were people too, “…Goddammit, Lily.”

“What?” As far as Lily was concerned this was his problem. He should have known not to leave his giant pet snake in the basement, that was just asking for trouble.

“Did I truly have to explicitly detail everything you’re not to do without my express permission or else supervision?!” Whatever control he’d had over himself snapped, and all that sharp tongued rage was unleashed on her, “Do you really possess so little common sense?! Any common sense at all?!”

“I’m not the one who lacks common sense.” She replied, quite pointedly, perhaps a little too sharply, “I’m not the one who left a giant snake in the dungeons of a school to terrify school children at my own convenience.”
There was a moment of silence, where each took the measure of the other, the unspoken question of whether this was Wizard Lenin’s responsibility hanging in the air between them. As well as the thought that this wasn’t the first time Lily had been stuck cleaning up his messes like an overworked janitor.

And she knew, she knew that he would never once thank her for it. She’d never expected him to, at least, not until now.

“That, Lily, is hardly the issue.” Wizard Lenin finally settled on, neither confirming nor denying his own responsibility, “The issue, aside from the fact that you just placed yourself in mortal peril for no need whatsoever, is you’ve just played your hand far too early. Now he knows, Lily, that you know. He knows, further, that you know something that you should have no way of knowing. You know where the Chamber of Secrets is, you knew it was a basilisk this entire time, you’ve just killed his greatest weapon. Congratulations, Lily, you’ve just forced his hand.”

Well, good, personally Lily was damn tired of sitting outside of restrooms cataloguing each person who walked in and out and having frankly alarming conversations with Ginny Weasley. Much better to have it over and done with and move on with both of their lives.

Surely he had better things to do too.

Besides, that wasn’t even getting to the real issue at hand, “So what?”

“So what?” Wizard Lenin repeated, almost in shock that she’d even said it.

“So what if he knows? It’s not like I can die.” Lily pointed out, perhaps a bit petulantly, but she was in that sort of a mood. Enough of a mood to ignore Wizard Lenin’s swiftly rising temper as they went down this path of conversation.

“He doesn’t have to kill you.”

He shouldn’t want to, he should realize how pointless it would be, he should come to the same realization that Lily herself did.
“But he can kill your friends, he can destroy your reputation, he can close every door against you.” Wizard Lenin’s glare intensified and his voice grew just a touch colder than it had been before, “Just because you’ve taken his most decisive weapon away from him don’t make the mistake of thinking he, that I, am not dangerous.”

They let that hang in the air for a moment, neither commenting on it, and eventually Wizard Lenin relented, his posture softening slightly and his eyes dulling as he looked at her. He looked disappointed but also resigned, like he’d known that she’d fail him, like it was unavoidable.

Lily decided that she hated that expression.

Wizard Lenin sighed, raked a hand through his hair, and all at once looked quite exhausted, “Well, I hope you at least know whose body he’s wearing.”

Lily, felt for a moment, completely blank, like there was nothing in her head at all, only this dazed fuzziness and the thought that she was thinking about nothing. Or, that there had been something there, but that it had… slipped, fallen sideways, but the point was that it was no longer there.

“Lily, don’t tell me you went and slaughtered the basilisk and didn’t even find out who was behind it.”

Lily didn’t answer, just felt herself falling further, and further away, finally she gave out the small unsure answer of, “…Lockhart?”

For a moment Wizard Lenin’s rage was almost palpable, a dark, weighted, bitter taste to the air, and then, breathing out and visibly trying to control his temper before something lit on fire, he grudgingly said, “Well, I suppose it could be worse… I’m not entirely sure how, but I’m certain it could be worse.”

“The school could be on fire.” Lily helpfully pointed out.

“Yes, the school could be on fire.” Wizard Lenin dully repeated, “There’s always that.”

Finally, slowly, he stood, looking up towards the stairs to the trap door with a contemplative expression, “Well, Lily, thanks to your thoughtless need to barge on ahead without thinking we have very few options left to us.”
She didn’t see where the ‘we’ was in all of this, so far it had just been the ‘I’, Lenin’s half of the ‘we’ had been entirely useless and had spent most of his time complaining about what the productive half of the equation had managed to accomplish.

Still, that didn’t stop Wizard Lenin from talking now.

“The first, and perhaps the easiest, is to simply leave Hogwarts. You could hole up inside of your vampire lair, I could regather what’s left of the Death Eaters, and leave it to him to come and find you again to regain the stone.” He said it so simply, like there was no question that they’d leave together, and she honestly hadn’t thought that. She’d thought she would stay in Hogwarts and he would go, she hadn’t realized not attending Hogwarts was even an option…

“However, I would rather it not come to that. Abandon the school and you abandon all of your territory and all of those whom you call allies. I guarantee, that if you leave, every single person you call a friend inside of this castle will die. Not to mention, if I simply leave him at large, and he realizes I am reorganizing the Death Eaters… Well, let’s just say that’s a complication I would not appreciate.”

And wasn’t it amazing how easily he said that as well. As if, if it were him in this situation instead of the other fragment of his soul, then he would consider slaughtering Neville, Luna, Hermione, and everyone else without question.

But of course he would, he’d never hesitated to imply that before.

“That said, leaving you to your own devices inside of this place seems to be just as catastrophic.”

“Hey, that’s not…”

He interrupted before she could even finish. “Considering everything that’s happened so far, if I left you alone for another month, Hogwarts would be set on fire.”

Considering that Hindenburg now had one less giant snake in his disposal Lily thought she had done fairly well. Also, Wizard Lenin was really one to talk, he’d left a giant snake under the castle.
“Well, it’s not like you’ve been much help! You just sit in here all the time pretending not to be a cripple.”

There was the glare, full of contempt, pride, “I am not a cripple.”

But Lily was too tired and covered in blood and frankly offended to take that kind of anger seriously. He had no idea the trouble she had just saved him, her own realization that this thing, this game, would go on forever without ever stopping. He didn’t know he was trapped, just as she was trapped, and he should be goddamn grateful for it.

Because she didn’t think Wizard Lenin could handle that sort of vision of eternity.

“Oh, really, let’s see you walk up those stairs, Lenin.” Lily said motioning to the stairs up to the trap door.

“I have no need to walk up those stairs…”

“Right, because you can’t.” Lily finished, because they both knew he would have been long gone if he could.

“Why, in the world, do you think I should be humoring you right now?”

Lily scoffed, “It’s not about humoring me, it’s about walking up those stairs, which you can’t do, because you’re a cripple.”

“At least I don’t go out challenging basilisks, risking death, for no reason whatsoever when everything was perfectly in…”

“Oh, what you talking about, Willis?” Lily interrupted before he could finish that rather damning sentence, “It was not in hand, it has never been remotely in hand. There have been petrified cats, little boys, some Hufflepuff girl was eaten by Rabbit, not to mention this whole quidditch ridiculousness. And then Ginny Weasley, let’s not get started on Ginny Weasley.”

“I don’t care about Ginny Weasley.” Wizard Lenin cut in, like that was a reasonable thing to say,
which clearly showed how out of the loop he was.

“Oh, I don’t care he says, have you met Ginny? Have you ever had a conversation outside of a bathroom with her at midnight? It is alarming, I will tell you that and…” And there was that damn fuzzy headed feeling again, something about Ginny slipping away from her, something just out of reach…

But Wizard Lenin was still in pointed finger, glaring, argument mode leaving no room for lapses in memory, “And while you’re caring about Ginny Weasley, the other half of my soul is lurking behind Hermione Granger, plotting some way to incapacitate you.”

“Oh, right, because the Hermione theory makes perfect sense.” Lily said, throwing her hands in the air in exasperation, beyond the point of thinking rationally about any of this, “Because I know, if I was you, then I’d want to be Hermione Granger.”

“I would pick Hermione Granger.” Wizard Lenin insisted, rather forcefully, “Out of everyone you’ve ever met, everyone you’ve ever seen, I would pick Hermione Jean Granger as my vessel.”

“That doesn’t mean he would!”

He leveled her with a cold, hard, stare, “Yes, Lily, it does.”

Well, when he put it like that, there really wasn’t anything for her to say. She sighed, felt herself deflate, all of that exhaustion catching up with her. Too much, really, considering what had happened. Christmas with Quirrell should have been worse than this, did feel worse than this, and yet…

That empty slipping feeling.

And a deeper, darker, feeling that in spite of being in this same room with Wizard Lenin she was entirely alone.

“I’m not going to go off… killing Hermione.” Lily said, ending it with hesitation, because he’d never said kill but that’s what that really meant. She’d known that, she’d balked against it, and she’d hoped that he could be made to see reason and balk at it too.
Because it was madness to keep going like this, forever.

He sighed as well, rubbed his face with one hand, and stared at her as if she both baffled and exhausted him in the same moment, “You make everything exceedingly difficult; it’s exhausting.”

It was, exhausting, that is.

She offered him her own, rather worn, smile, “So, then, what do you want to do?”

“I don’t want to do anything, but it seems you’re forcing my hand as well. It’s clear that you can’t function without adult supervision.”

“That’s nice, but there’s not much you can do about that.” Lily said, which seemed to make him only more exhausted, “I mean, it’s not like you’re going to climb back in my brain again or like you can pose as an Albanian transfer student.”

She liked to believe that neither of them really considered those words at first, all too willing to brush them off, but then neither of them said anything. They just remained there, thinking about it, thinking about Rabbit appearing out of nowhere and how easy it had been to just write him off as an Albanian refugee.

Oh, Rabbit, why he’s from that war torn country Albania. Terrible place, filled with vampires you know. Curse the Albanian Liberation Front and all their dastardly blood sucking members. May they rot in hell.

Of course, this was a bad time for someone new and mysterious to be showing up, Dumbledore would certainly take interest. Of course, he so far hadn’t seemed to have taken interest in Rabbit, and it wasn’t like Rabbit had arrived at a great time either. Rabbit had gained human form, after all, in the middle of that whole stone fiasco.

No, Dumbledore was very… hands-off, particularly recently, and maybe she should be worried about that but…

It wouldn’t be too much different with Wizard Lenin, right?
“No, that’s... I mean, you’ve already been to Hogwarts once. No one should have to suffer through that twice.” Lily said, a small laugh, but even so she thought, had thought, wouldn’t it be nice if someone who really knew her, truly knew her, actually interacted with her.

Then Hogwarts wouldn’t be so much a cupboard as it would be... Well, just like any other place where it was her and Wizard Lenin palling around like old times.

Not to mention, Wizard Lenin actually liked Hogwarts for some inexplicable nostalgic filled reason. He’d probably be delighted to wander its hallways again, even in crutches.

Wizard Lenin, meanwhile, was growing drastically paler by the moment as the implications, and the idea, was properly sinking in.

“And besides, Rabbit’s one thing, making Rabbit have some... twin, half, brother who just made it out, crossing half the continent to find the only remaining member of his beloved family... Well, that’s just...”

Wizard Lenin wasn’t looking at her or anything else, just staring ahead, that thousand-mile stare, nothing reflected back in his eyes.

“I mean, you don’t even look remotely like Rabbit...” But he could, with a bit of tweaking, a bit of glitching, and it would explain his inexplicable gimpiness. Nothing like a vampire revolution to make it hard for you to walk across a room without needing a break.

And all Wizard Lenin could say, as he stared ahead, was, “This, Lily, is perhaps the worst idea you’ve ever had.”

And it was, the worst idea they’d ever had, but as the night had trudged onwards, as they’d sat there together (Lily’s eyelids drooping and that ever present exhaustion creeping up on her), neither of them had said anything against it. By the morning, waking up with her head on his shoulder, it seemed they were in silent agreement to just screw everything and go for it.

So here they were, regretting every decision they’d ever made.
“...So, you found an Albanian in the Chamber of Secrets.” Zabini concluded, eyebrows raised, not looking quite disbelieving but also not openly refuting Lily’s claim. Which was good, she needed Default behind her on this one.

“Well, it was filled with secrets, like Rabbit’s secret half-brother, from Albania.” Lily explained as she sat down at the table.

She turned to fix Wizard Lenin, Lenin Rabbitson, with a desperate almost pleading glance, hoping he’d read in her eyes that now was the time to shut up, sit down, and look goddamn Albanian already.

Not that he didn’t, with his newly white hair he actually looked vaguely similar to Rabbit, in that they were both rather symmetrical. Wizard Lenin’s features, even his deaged twelve-year-old features, were a bit more aristocratic than Rabbit’s and his eyes still that pale blue. But they looked similar enough to pass as half-siblings.

The crutches Lily had crafted (and Wizard Lenin had grudgingly accepted) also suited his war-torn refugee image.

With raised eyebrows, a silent look of affront, Lenin slowly made his way into his seat looking like he was pulling his teeth out with pliers as he did so. Especially since it involved a lot more maneuvering to get into that bench than he probably would have liked. Wizard Lenin, filled with doubt and regret about this plan but apparently too paranoid to leave Lily to her own devices, was not a fan of this latest scheme.

At all.

“I thought Rabbit was a cosmic, ineffable, horror who would one day devour us all.” Daphne pointed out, once again proving that her Slytherin recruits were entrenched in solidarity when it came to doubting Lily’s plans.

For all that Hermione was the cynic most of the complaints really came from Greengrass and Zabini.

Even now they were sitting on the same side of the table, glancing at each other, as if waiting for the other one to tell them how they were supposed to handle this latest development.
“…Lenin’s from the Albanian side of the family.” Lily not-explained with a carefully blank expression. Lenin Rabbitson, for his own part, said nothing in response.

(She wondered if it was too weird for him, after all, it’d been a while since he’d talked to anyone besides her. And even then, he usually only did it when he needed to, or for commentary, they weren’t actually conversations… How long had it been since he’d had to introduce himself to someone? How long had it been since he’d put on a show?)

“So then… Lenin, is half-cosmic ineffable horror who will devour us all?” Zabini asked, eyebrows raised as he observed Wizard Lenin, who just as coolly observed him back. Perhaps a little too coolly, most twelve-year-olds couldn’t manage an expression like that.

“…Yes.” Lily said, and was met with the blank stares of everyone at the table.

For a moment no one said anything, Lily hastily ate her breakfast, trying to pretend everything was perfectly normal, and why should they question the existence of Lenin Rabbitson. Really, there was nothing odd about him at all.

Finally, Hermione looked over the pages of her book, eyes both somehow dull yet sharp in the same moment, as if she couldn’t quite bring herself to be invested in this situation, “And his first name is Lenin, as in Vladimir Lenin?”

“He is very communist.” Lily said, earning a sideways glance of reprimand from the communist in question, but no actual verbal rebuke.

“Well, Lenin Rabbitson, welcome to Default. Quidditch games are on the weekends, you’re now on the team, don’t even think about skipping out.” Hermione finally said, reaching over the table without glancing at him.

Tentatively Lenin took her hand, shook it slowly in his, and offered her a somewhat derisive smile, “Charmed.”

It was at that point that Lily remembered that Lenin wasn’t supposed to know all of these people, and that she probably had to introduce everyone, in spite of the fact that he secretly knew all of them perhaps even better than she herself did, “Right, uh, Lenin, this is… everyone. Everyone being our lovely second in command first year, Luna Lovegood, the defaultest of us all, Blaise Zabini, the one who actually cares about quidditch, Daphne Greengrass, the former Slytherin ice queen, Hermione
Granger, our terrifying bookworm cynic, and uh…”

Rabbit was staring, not passively either, not even with a hint of emotion, there was something deep in his eyes, something that burned. His lips, instead of that thin neutral line, were curled downwards into a scowl, and his dark eyes seemed to blaze as he stared back at Lenin.

“…Well, you’ve met your demonic half-brother before.” Lily supplied weakly, earning another silent pair of raised eyebrows from Lenin, as he glanced at Rabbit (seemingly unaffected by that haunting stare, which really, he should know better).

“It’s good to see you, Lepur, you’ve grown.” Lenin commented, perhaps too drily for someone who had just crawled his way through a revolutionary warzone to find his only brother, but apparently no one was holding it against him.

Rabbit gave no response, no sign of movement, his eyes just kept burning.

Right, Lily was going to… deal with that later.

“So, glorious captain, you were victorious in the chamber?” Luna asked, “Is Lenin the personification of your victory over the beast?”

Well, yes and no, that was actually a pretty apt description, at least in the metaphorical sense. “Oh, right, yes, giant snake is very dead. So, yay, we don’t have to worry about that anymore.”

“Oh, that is good, great, I am… thrilled to hear that.” Blaise Zabini supplied, “Beyond imagination, really.”

No one else said anything and in that moment Lily realized that the atmosphere was still somewhat strained. Or, maybe not strained but… They still thought it was her, maybe she went and killed a giant snake but to them… To them this didn’t make any difference, and maybe it didn’t, maybe Wizard Lenin was right, because it didn’t really get to the root of the problem. She’d just taken away the current artillery, that was all, she hadn’t…

“So, Lenin, are you actually from Albania?” Hermione asked, in her most Lenin-esq tone, the one that was rhetorical and used only to cut and watch the opponent bleed.
“Why wouldn’t I be from Albania, Hermione Granger?”

“…You’re being introduced by Ellie Potter the day after she said she was going to go off and kill a giant snake. Why would you be from Albania?”

“Fair enough, however, that doesn’t change the fact that I am from Albania.” Lenin eyed her, cut through her, and for a moment Hermione stiffened in her seat, perhaps reminded of eyes all too similar from the year before.

Neither said anything but an unspoken threat hung in the air, suspending itself on the tension that had already been building and maintained. Or, well, now mostly between Hermione and Lenin Rabbitson… And Rabbit, who was still staring, he really needed to stop doing that (he was starting to look like Ginny).

“So, how was everyone else’s day yesterday? Since I kind of bailed on everyone.” Lily asked, interrupting the silence.

“It was very Tuesday-esq, captain.” Luna responded, dutifully as always, even as she kept dazed blue eyes on the staring match between Hermione and Wizard Lenin.

But Hermione and Wizard Lenin apparently weren’t done. Or even close to being done. Hermione’s face had paled about ten degrees, to the point where Lily wondered if she knew, if she looked at him and knew exactly who he was and where he’d come from. But she didn’t say anything, just kept staring, trying to get a grip on herself, tightening herself from the inside and shutting the blinds on her expression.

Wizard Lenin merely stared back, not even phased, not even distracted for a moment.

“…Is he, Rabbit, even related to you?”

“Of course, he’s my beloved brother. I travelled my way out of a war torn nation ruled by vampires in order to find him.” Wizard Lenin supplied, far too easily, with a crooked thin smile, “Would I do that for just anyone?”
Well, he could tone it down, for Lily, if he wanted to. Because that might be kind of nice. As it was he was all but screaming predator who wouldn’t hesitate to eat Hermione’s heart and force her to watch.

“…Ellie, why do you surround yourself with… weird people?” Blaise Zabini finally stage whispered, eyes darting from Hermione to Wizard Lenin to Rabbit…

Thinking on Ginny Weasley, even, who had glommed on to Lily in the recent weeks, Lily really couldn’t refute it. Even though she really would like to.

“I… It is not intentional.”

“No, really, do you have this factory of absurdly pretty pale white-haired adolescents that you spurn out at your own discretion?” Blaise asked, motioning towards Lenin as well as Rabbit.

“…No.” Well, yes, but not really. If Lily had known she would get up to this sort of thing she would have gotten into the boy band business years ago.

“You know, if Daphne and I weren’t… really sure that you’ll probably end up a dark lady someday, I wouldn’t be anywhere near here. Seriously, Ellie.” Blaise said, motioning to himself and the entirely irritated and unamused Daphne Greengrass.

She had wondered why they’d been so easy to win over, beyond disenchantment with Slytherin. Lily felt her face fall for a moment, the events and feelings of the day before catching up with her, that feeling of… barren loneliness.

Only, no, Wizard Lenin was here now, and everyone else too, and she’d just killed a giant snake. Surely that counted for something?

Lily shook off the feeling and gave Blaise and Daphne her own rather irritated glance, “Is that really why you joined?”

“Well, it wasn’t for the quidditch.” Daphne said, still irritated with Zabini for just letting all of their secrets loose like that, but not apparently enough to actually deny it.
“Lame.”

“I believe the word you’re looking for there is pragmatic.” Daphne supplied, which really, not at all. If Lily did end up taking over Britain, which why would she ever, then she sure as hell wasn’t giving command to Greengrass and Zabini.

Although Luna herself would make a noteworthy general.

Still, “Lame.”

Hermione interrupted, her voice cold, attempting to be solid but failing only slightly, “You know you’re going to have to speak with the headmaster. You’re going to have to convince him that you’re a legitimate student.”

Oh, right, Lily had almost forgotten about that. Well, she had brought it up, but apparently Wizard Lenin considered her so reckless and untrustworthy that he was willing to risk Albus Dumbledore’s scrutiny just to keep an eye on her.

That or, he’d finally just reached the tipping point with his boredom.

After all, if it wasn’t for this heir business… Well, Lily would completely understand. When Hogwarts wasn’t lethal it was excruciatingly dull.

“I doubt that will be a problem, as I am a legitimate student. Isn’t that right, Ellie?”

“Oh, yeah, perfectly legitimate. Lenin Rabbitson is the most student-like student you’ve ever seen in your life.”

Wizard Lenin offered her a completely unimpressed look, one that mirrored Hermione Granger’s. “Thank you, Ellie,” he said drily, “For your undying support.”

“A default student then?” Luna asked, her eyes practically lighting up. God bless Luna Lovegood and her ability to just go along with all of Lily’s explanations all of the time. She needed a medal, Lily should make her a medal, Lily really should give Luna her own subcommand and set her loose
on the world.

“Yes, the defaultest of us all!”

(But even as she cried this out, there was still that haunting feeling, that feeling of slipping, of having missed something and…

And the feeling that no one had even noticed and could not even pretend to be bothered to care.)
The Origin of Lenin Rabbitson

In which Wizard Lenin remembers that he hates children, the new transfer student tells his rather graphic and horrifying tale of woe, and Ginny Weasley decides to take another health day.

Lenin Rabbitson, symmetrical, pleasantly smiling, leaning on the wooden crutches Lily had made for him earlier, looked out at the captive audience of the second year Gryffindor, Slytherin, Default Defense Against the Arts class, who all just stared helplessly back.

Of course, in Wizard Lenin’s defense, he’d expected interrogation from Dumbledore or else Snape, and true there’d sort of been a brief impromptu meeting at breakfast. Where Dumbledore had summoned her, Wizard Lenin, and Rabbit to the head table, sort of smiled at them all with a twinkle in his eyes and declared that Lily was being docked ten points for smuggling in immigrants but was being given twenty points for aiding war refugees in need.

And he’d left it at that, in spite of Snape’s spluttering, McGonagall’s spluttering, and Wizard Lenin’s glare of utter doom and bafflement.

And of course as Wizard Lenin hobbled away, under his breath to Lily, he muttered, “He is planning to stab me in my sleep; that underhanded, manipulative, son of a whore.”

So he was probably distracted by asking himself what Dumbledore was planning, over and over again, and why he hadn’t jumped at the chance to interrogate Lenin or at the very least throw him out of the castle for appearing literally out of nowhere in the middle of a monster hunt.

That or he’d completely forgotten how to interact with people.

“…You know, I really don’t know why I’m surprised that this is happening. Because really, we’ve been overdue.” Blaise commented under his breath, more to Daphne than to Lily, but loud enough that Lily could hear him and wonder if she agreed with him or not.

“Wasn’t that what the Chamber of Secrets thing was for?” Daphne whispered back, still staring up with raised eyebrows at Wizard Lenin, who wasn’t fidgeting, in fact was worryingly not fidgeting, was instead spending his time glaring at Lockhart with enough force that Lockhart should probably be on fire right now.
“No, no that’s legitimately terrifying, we’ve been overdue for… weird.”

Lily didn’t know whether she should feel insulted or not, but she did feel that she should probably have something to defend herself with, unfortunately she did not.

“Hello everyone, my name is Lenin Rabbitson, and I’m Lepur Rabbitson’s half-brother. I recently... moved, I suppose, from Albania and decided to transfer to Hogwarts and reunite with Lepur…. I was sorted into Default this morning. That’s it.” Wizard Lenin stopped then, still with that too pleasant look on his face, which usually meant he was pissed as hell, and hobbled his way back to his seat on the left of Lily.

Which was all well and good except that Hermione Granger was sitting on the other side of Lily, which would be fine if Hermione and Wizard Lenin weren’t insisting on spending every second staring each other down into submission, which would be fine if Lily wasn’t sitting in the middle of their staring contest.

Not to mention, since everyone was turning their head to stare at Lenin Rabbitson, it meant they were also staring at Lily.

Luckily Gilderoy Lockhart, while looking slightly unnerved, also had stars in his eyes and seemed to have decided that this was a great opportunity, “Albania? Such a dangerous place these days, you were very lucky to get out while you did, Mr. Rabbitson. You and your brother. Of course, I myself have been to Albania on numerous occasions.”

“Oh, really, professor?” Lenin Rabbitson, his eyes lit up delight, asked Gilderoy Lockhart. This caused certain populations of the classroom to stare just a little bit harder, in even more disbelief than before, because only certain portions of the classroom actually took Gilderoy Lockhart seriously anymore.

“It has always been a place filled with dark creatures and untold dangers; this recent vampire revolution has done nothing to change that fact. Albania, I think, has always had something of a heart of darkness.”

Judging by the slight gritting of Lenin Rabbitson’s teeth, as he smiled pleasantly back at Gilderoy Lockhart, he found something in that statement really grating. Although it was hard to tell exactly what, because frankly there was a lot grating in that sentence.
It was great for A.L.F.’s publicity though, which in turn just increased Riddle Inc.’s publicity, so it was all good news for her. She should probably check in with Frank, now that she thought about it, see how the Albanians were doing and if they were still holding the country. Last she’d heard it was a complete shit show still, with all of these wizard revolts springing up, but then a lot of the wizards were already dead so she doubted the new regime was that unsteady.

“‘Yes, well, at least before it wasn’t overrun by vampires.’ Lenin pointed out, again a bit too pleasantly, although now there was an undercurrent of danger in his childish voice that would put any observant person on edge.

An observant person such as Hermione Granger who was gripping her wand with white knuckles. Which was probably fair since Wizard Lenin was convinced she was a puppet dangling from the thin, brittle, fingers of his better half.

“Oh, but it was, you see when I was in Albania, as you may recount from your required reading, I had not only numerous run ins with hags but also with several vampires.”

Lily blinked, blinked again, and she just couldn’t help herself, “What?”

“It was perhaps one of my most dangerous adventures to date, certainly one I will never forget. See, I had taken to wandering the countryside, and had come across a village overrun by…”

Lily really couldn’t help herself, “No.”

Now that she thought about it she remembered some vaguely Eastern Bloc adventure with vampires being mentioned somewhere in this class but she just couldn’t handle it. Claiming to be attacked by vampires was Squirrel’s thing. You just didn’t do that anymore it was too… It was too Squirrel.

Gilderoy Lockhart’s grin became a little tighter, “Ten points from Default, for interrupting, Miss Potter. Remember, that while you may have…”

Lily threw her hands in the air, past her limit already, which was really far too early in the day to be past her limit in anything, “And you may not stutter but I have heard enough about vampire adventures in Albania to last me three life times.”
For a moment he blinked, then looked a bit horrified and then strangely chagrinned, a rather odd and
unnatural expression on his face, “Oh, yes, of course, I forgot that you yourself… spent time in
Albania.”

And now people were really staring.

Right, Lily had almost forgotten about that. Not the spending time in Albania bit, but that Quirrell
had supposedly kidnapped her to Albania before suffering a terrible death, she had really just been
referring to Squirrel’s stuttering explanation of why he had a speech impediment and wreaked of
garlic, which was more than traumatizing enough for anyone.

She had also forgotten that she’d sort of wriggled her way out of explaining that to anyone by
conveniently joining Default. Not to mention the whole Chamber of Secrets fiasco had managed to
distract everyone from what Ellie Potter did or didn’t do the previous summer. Unfortunately, it
looked like she had just inadvertently reminded everyone.

And that now it looked like everyone truly expected an explanation, “…Yes, yes I did. It was…
extremely violent.”

For a moment the good professor Lockhart, and the rest of the class, just stared at her. Then, slowly,
Professor Lockhart said, “Bottling up your feelings will do you no good, in the end, Miss Potter.”

What did he know? Lily had been bottling up her feelings for years and she was perfectly fine. Well,
most of the time, she was fine most of the time. And really, who could ask for any more than that?
Lily was great at compartmentalization; she was perhaps the master of compartmentalization.

She did not need tips from Lockhart of all people.

“Think I’m good.” Lily said, and Lockhart just pityingly shook his head in response, as if there was
so little about the world Lily knew.

“Perhaps now, but one day your own feelings will overwhelm you and you will have to deal with
them.”

“…Sure, alright.” Lily said, hoping that this would be the end of that, and whatever it was that
Lockhart was up to, but apparently it wasn’t.
“I had planned to spend today, on this special occasion of receiving a new transfer student, to speak of my own adventures in Albania in a lighter age, but you’ve all read about my adventures. Perhaps it’s best I pass the torch, so to speak, onto the next generation.”

Oh, well, shit.

“No, you know what, you can talk about your communist vampire adventures, I…”

“No, no, you’re right Miss Potter,” he said motioning for her to rise and move to the head of the classroom, “More, you’re in need, as no one has heard your tale yet.”

Then Lockhart’s eyes landed on Lenin Rabbitson, “Perhaps you would like to join your friend, Mr. Rabbitson, as you yourself were recently in Albania.”

Now, knowing Wizard Lenin as well as she did, Lily knew that this was a terrible idea and at this point and that if he wasn’t masquerading as an alarmingly symmetrical twelve-year-old Gilderoy Lockhart would probably be on fire.

“Oh, no sir, I couldn’t possibly… I’m much to traumatized.” The pleasantness was heavily strained, almost gone, and instead Wizard Lenin’s routine dry, frustrated, and displeased tone was seeping in.

Professor Lockhart still looked extremely expectant, the entire room looked extremely expectant…

Lily glanced at Wizard Lenin, he didn’t even bother to look back at her, well they could just leave, skip class, she’d already skipped… Well, frankly a lot of classes. It was actually surprising that no one had done anything about that, of course she had detention pretty much every night and weekend, but still you’d think at some point there’d be some threshold that would get her suspended or just expelled. Shouldn’t Dumbledore be talking to her about that, actually?

(Actually, shouldn’t Dumbledore be talking to her about a lot of things? He’d been surprisingly hands off, even for Dumbledore. Maybe she should be concerned about that…)

Wizard Lenin seemed to have made the decision for her, because he stood, looked down at her in silent expectation. She looked back up, clearly portraying silently that she had no desire to… Make
up a lot of bullshit on the spot to get through this class.

According to Wizard Lenin’s face, he did not accept this excuse.

Awkwardly, she sighed in the dead silence of the room, and wandered up to the front, Wizard Lenin hobbling up with her.

She then stared out at her audience, marking faces here and there.

Well, there was Hermione, staring at both of them blankly and with an edge of panic, still gripping that wand with all of her might. Which, again, fair enough, because if she did give him half a reason then Wizard Lenin probably would try to kill her… Less than half a reason, actually, he could kill anyone with only half of a reason and he already seemed hell bent on suspecting Hermione which was reason enough for him.

He was probably thinking less, ‘why kill her’ and instead ‘what’s stopping me from killing her’.

On second thought Lily should also make sure that Wizard Lenin and Hermione were never left alone together.

There was also Neville, looking oddly torn and completely out of his element, just as he had the day before with the snake. And she’d promised she’d talk to him, and she would, just…

Then there was everyone else who looked more or less as stunned as Zabini and Greengrass, except for some of the girls, they looked extremely interested in Wizard Lenin, more than extremely interested… The kind of interest they usually gave professor Lockhart or else Rabbit.

Which, glancing at Wizard Lenin’s expression, he did not at all appreciate.

And they were all still staring at her and Lenin.

“Lenin, I think you should go first.” Lily finally started, shifting the focus to him.
“No, Ellie, having only just crawled my way through the vampire infested countryside I think you should go first.” He said, that strained pleasant smile breaking at the edges, his eyes boring holes into hers.

“Well, to be honest, the utter trauma of having been kidnapped by Squirrel all summer while also traversing the vampire infested countryside has left me way too traumatized to go first. So you should.” She smiled back, perhaps a little more pleasantly, but also with that same intensity to let him know that she wasn’t doing this first. Hell, he was actually good at this stuff, or said he was anyways, perfect time for him to prove it.

“Alright, fine, I’ll go first,” he paused, then started, looking frankly a little terrifying standing there next to her, “Twelve years ago my father made some very interesting life choices which haunt us all to this day…”

“Uh, Lenin, that’s kind of a long time ago for Albanian adventures.” Lily interrupted.

“No, no, Lily, you said that I should go first. I’m going first,” his pleasant tone had become decidedly less pleasant as he cheerfully smiled at her, worse he had even slipped and called her Lily, and didn’t even seem to mind, “You see, Albania is indeed filled with dark and dangerous creatures. You must always watch your step and watch yourself lest you become the victim of calamity, as my father found himself, shortly after the death of my mother. My mother was a beautiful woman, but she was fragile, and died in childbirth leaving my father devastated. He passed me off to my uncle, who with took me carefully into his arms all while asking just what my father was thinking, and wandered alone into the forest where he would not return until a month later. And in that time, in his rage, his grief, his utter despair, a great and terrible being came upon him and seduced him. He wandered home shortly after, something integral missing from him, like a central piece of a jigsaw puzzle had been taken and lost somewhere in the ether. A few months after that Lepur was delivered to our doorstep, small, pale, and looking like the spitting image of my dead mother and I.”

This was, not what Lily had been expecting, at all. Also Wizard Lenin was getting eerily into the story, to the point where Lily wondered if this really had happened to him, she was pretty sure it hadn’t from the pieces she did know of his past, but he was getting ridiculously passionate in this rather gruesome tale.

She also had the feeling that this was his passive aggressive way of telling her that she really should have gone first.

“No, we were all quite happy for some time, or as happy as one can be when their father’s soul has been devoured by a demon, their brother is some sort of reality devouring abomination, and their mother is long since dead. However, we got by, and I didn’t mind it. That is, however, until my father became very unlucky one day and wandered across a desperate Russian vampire travelling
swiftly west. He looked as if he had crawled out of a gutter, covered in grime, eyes glowing like stop lights, and when he saw my father he didn’t even seem to notice my brother and I following only a little way behind. The vampire ripped out my father’s jugular, and like a young man in a university’s fraternity, guzzled him down without hesitation or stopping for a breath. He then dropped my father’s corpse, my father’s neck bent at an unnatural angle, and stumbled off drunk towards the west, leaving my father staring at us with the glazed black eyes of a cod at market. And then we no longer lived with my father.”

Why did Lily have the feeling that this was only going to get worse as it went on.

“We then went to live with our uncle, a much more reasonable sane man, for some time. I liked my uncle, liked him more than I had ever liked my virtually absent father, and while I lived with him I was quite content. However, my uncle also had certain opinions about our government, and trusting me and my brother he felt safe to tell us that he harbored these opinions. He shouldn’t have. There was a local school in our village, where Lepur and I would go daily, and they had told us that if our parents or anyone espoused certain ideas then it was our duty as Albanians to tell our teachers so that they might see the error of their ways. And so one day, I did, and they gave me a medal, had a celebration for me, I was declared the hero of the class. And my uncle, that night, boarded a train to Siberia and was erased from every single photograph ever taken of him. And then we no longer lived with my uncle.”

Did Soviet wizards do that too? Also, Lily was pretty sure that was a Stalin thing but Wizard Lenin was on a roll and the student population, and Gilderoy Lockhart, looked horrified. Now that she thought about it, in spite of having encountered many dangerous foes, Lockhart’s stories really weren’t as gruesome as they could have been.

That probably should have been a sign from the beginning that it was all bullshit. Having been in Albania herself Lily remembered it being quite gruesome from time to time.

“But we had a second cousin who was still alive and in the country, so dutifully my brother and I packed our bags and went to live with him. He wasn’t a terrible man, he was a drunkard, he clearly saw me and Lepur as an imposition, but he took us in. He unfortunately also gambled, and by the end of the year, had failed to pay his debts to the goblins. And then we no longer lived with my second cousin.”

“Oh, Lenin, you just have the worst luck when it comes to relatives.” Lily commented rather awkwardly, which did nothing to distract the audience from the pit of despair that was Lenin Rabbitson’s tragic Albanian past.

“Life has never made any pretense at being fair,” he commented, side eyeing her with those, too sharp, and too pale, blue eyes of his, “You of all people should know that.”
Of course she knew that, she had known that for a very long time, perhaps since the very beginning she had known that.

That didn’t make Wizard Lenin’s story any less ridiculous though.

“Having no relatives left in the country, no friends, Lepur and I had no choice but to enter one of the few magical orphanages in the country. There, if we were fortunate, we would be adopted by a childless wizarding couple searching for an heir. But Lepur and I were already too old, and though clearly gifted, were too unsettling for adoption. But we lived, and we survived, at least until the orphanage burned down in the first vampire revolt.”

Here he finally paused, but not stopped, no he had a wistful look on his face as if he was looking back and back into his dark memories. A look which only added to his extremely violent tale, “Long before the blood thirsty A.L.F. made a name for itself, long before the English noticed anything wrong with my country, there have been vampire rebellions. And while the wizards, my countrymen, will tell you that we won each and every time until this past year, the orphans and I can tell you a different story. Because do you know who has been feeding the revolution? It isn’t Riddle Incorporated, no, it’s the blood of orphans, those who have nowhere else to turn and might as well disappear. But my brother and I did not disappear, for years we survived, and gathered slow but sure plans to leave the country. I did not realize Lepur would leave first…”

Here he paused, you could practically see the betrayal and devastation in his eyes, “It was by luck I ran into Eleanor Lily Potter last summer, as she herself traversed the country to return to England, as well as her friend the abomination Lepur Rabbitson. And I too realized that I must leave, make my way by any means necessary to England and Hogwarts. And this proved rather prophetic, as I made many decisions that I am not proud of, sacrificed perhaps far too much to crawl my way here. But I am here, and my brother is here, until of course this castle burns down with all the rest I have ever inhabited.” He took a deep breath, then glared over at Lily, “And that, Ellie Potter, is why I am far more traumatized than you are and should not have gone first.”

Oh, was that the point of that, was that… A joke? A really bad Lenin-esq joke that nobody was getting. As it was half the audience had tears in their eyes, from Pansy Parkinson to Neville Longbottom, and even Hermione looked more than a little ruffled (if still terrified).

“…Yeah, I guess I should have gone first after all.” Lily just settled on.

“Well, it’s too late for that now. As all of my relatives discovered, regret is the most useless of all emotions.”
Made Lily wonder what had happened to his actual relatives. She was pretty sure he’d mentioned something now and then about killing his father as well as the rest of his paternal relatives and that he’d framed his maternal uncle for the murders but beyond that… Actually, that was probably most of his relatives.

“Um, well, as you all know I was kidnapped by Squirrel last year… I, uh, ended up stabbing him in self-defense as he tried to concuss me to death?”

This seemed like the right thing to say, it was true after all, if a little out of context… And she’d never told anyone before, and even as she said it, and the memories flashed behind her eyes with surprising clarity, she felt a little lighter for being able to say it out loud.

But only for a moment, because then staring out at her stunned audience, still staring at Lenin Rabbitson, she wondered if any of them had listened to or believed a word she’d said. And even if they did, did any of them care at all?

After all, none of them truly cared about Lily’s confrontation with the basilisk and the heir.

(And why had she, for a single instant, expected a different reaction from them?)

“Right, well, that’s that then.” Lily said, shoving her hands into her pockets, feeling a little more flustered than she probably should, and stalking back over to her seat with Wizard Lenin hobbling behind.

No one said anything, which was rather surprising as usually this was the part where people talked, they just kept watching Lenin Rabbitson’s pitiful progress over to his seat. And then even as he sat down, picked his quill back up, and stared attentively at the board, they kept staring.

And kept staring.

And clearly they weren’t going to have class today, even a Lockhart class, which was usually beyond useless anyways.

After battling a basilisk, turning Wizard Lenin into an Albanian transfer student, Ginny, the heir
thing in general, Hermione, coaching Default into not dying, quidditch, and more, Lily decided that she had more than enough of a right to bail.

“Right, well, Lenin and I are also too traumatized for class.” Lily said, grabbing Wizard Lenin’s arm, and then said, “So, bye everyone, see you later.”

Then hauling ass, with hobbling Wizard Lenin in tow, she ignored all shouts behind her and began to head towards the one place where no one would be around in the middle of class. Even with Wizard Lenin bickering in her ear.

“Was that really necessary, Lily?”

“Are you serious? Are you really necessary?” She tugged him down the stairs, perhaps harder than she should have, given that he had a bit of difficulty with them, but she wasn’t in the mood to humor him either.

“I forgot how much I detest children.” Wizard Lenin offered, as if this was enough of an explanation, “Besides, now they won’t ask about Albania.”

Because that made it all perfectly reasonable and didn’t top Lily’s already, frankly, surreal and unpleasant morning.

“Well, you could just tell them everyone you knew there ever died. Oh wait, no you already did that.”

“Oh, no, I could have been far more graphic. I didn’t even describe how I got out of Albania.” He offered her a rather thin smile, grimacing as he almost stumbled down the steps, clutching at the hand rails along with his crutches.

“Let me guess, you fed the vampires orphans.”

“Am I that predictable?”

No, no he wasn’t, because she never would have pictured him doing this, “I thought you were good
at the people thing!”

“I am great at the people thing.”

“Really?” Because Lily never would have guessed after that performance.

He then gave her a look, a narrow eyed glance as if she was missing something completely obvious, “Do you think Dumbledore will refuse to see me after something as glaring as that?”

Well that was… Not exactly surprising but still the worst plan ever, and she’d think it was something of a tangent if it wasn’t Wizard Lenin obsessing about Dumbledore. Because she had almost managed to forget how much he seemed to enjoy doing that, “You want to talk to Dumbledore? Why do you want to talk to Dumbledore? You hate Dumbledore.”

“I find his silence far more unnerving than his high handed lectures.” He said before adding, “Don’t you find it odd, Lily, how he doesn’t seem to look at you all? In spite of everything that’s happened, in spite of my own appearance in the middle of a fifty-year-old crisis, nothing. And after that last time he truly spoke with you…”

“What?”

“There was once a time when he stopped talking to me altogether, where he stopped offering moral advice and instead became almost unnervingly polite.” He paused, assessed her, and then said, “Let’s see how far he’s willing to push this recent bout of neutrality.”

Well, that was certainly Lenin-like logic if there was any, but he could have gone about it… better. She was abruptly aware that Wizard Lenin hadn’t talked to anyone besides her in over a decade and maybe that was starting to show.

“I think you just didn’t want to sit through class.”

He grimaced, “I was barely in that class Lily, you hauled me out before he even started lecturing.”

And that just showed how few Defense Against the Dark Arts classes he had attended with Lily this year.
“…Lenin, that was the lecture.”

For a moment he looked a little stunned, “Oh, you know, it’s a wonder you aren’t all dead.”

It really was, but by that point they were already there, at the one place no one would ever think to look…

Except for Ginny, because somehow she had forgotten that the dungeon bathroom was Ginny’s favorite place, even when class was going on. There she was, staring ahead at the wall, leaning against the entry way, looking a little paler and thinner than she probably should have, but also looking like there was nowhere else in the world she’d rather be.

“Shit.” Lily uttered, almost turning around, with Wizard Lenin still in tow and looking more murderous by the minute but it was too late.

Ginny’s eyes caught on her and they widened slightly, and for a moment there seemed to be no emotion there at all, or rather something far too complicated, conflicted, and strong for Lily to parse correctly.

Then she grinned, stepped forward, her eyes lighting up from the inside with excitement.

“Oh, Lily and…” Ginny trailed off, her look of excitement falling and replaced by an oddly blank look as she and Wizard Lenin made eye contact.

Wizard Lenin’s eyebrows rose, but then his look of dubiousness vanished and was also replaced by that oddly blank look, one she also couldn’t really manage to read.

And Lily’s day somehow got worse.

“So, Margarita, this is Lenin Rabbitson. He’s Rabbit’s half-brother, also from Albania, he recently watched every single relative he had die and made his way here to reunite with Rabbit. Uh, Lenin, this is Tequila… She goes to school here.”
The look on both of their faces faded and Ginny thinly smiled back at Lily, “It’s Ginny, Lily. And it’s nice to meet you, Lenin, I’m sorry about your family.”

“Don’t be, that was years ago.” Lenin certainly didn’t sound too hung up over the death of his hypothetical Albanian family.

Ginny seemed to take that as a sign to move on, “You know, Lily, I was hoping you’d stop by today. I was wondering how you were doing after…”

For a moment Lily couldn’t quite grasp what Ginny was talking about, there was that slippery feeling again, the feeling of missing something important, then the chamber came flooding back and she remembered that Ginny had been… Somehow involved with all of that, Lily vaguely recalled her being in the bathroom at the time, or maybe she just talked to Lily after the speech. Still, it felt like she’d talked to Ginny and that Ginny had been concerned, and weird, like always, “Right, yeah, I’m um, super. Never better. Sort of busy with Lenin though at the moment. War made him a little crippled.”

“Right,” Ginny said, her eyes flicking to Wizard Lenin then dismissively back to Lily, “Well I’m glad you’re alright, I was worried, you know. I doubt most people could live after slaying whatever it is the heir keeps locked in the basement.”

Lily really doubted most people could slay a basilisk, or at least, she’d like to see them try.

“Of course, I never doubted you.” Ginny then insisted, as Ginny always did when her respect for Ellie Potter was in question, “If anyone could do it, should do it, then it would be you, Lily.”

“Why are you calling her Lily?”

And then there was Wizard Lenin, staring at Ginny with a little more focus than he had before, and for a moment Ginny’s look of ease disappeared and there was that cold assessing look again. But it was gone in a moment, and that pleasant, chagrinned expression was back, “Well, I’ve always thought she looks more like a Lily.”

It was at this point, where the two just stared at each other, that Lily noted that Ginny really didn’t look good. She was paler than usual, her hands shaking slightly, and it looked like there were bruises beneath the sleeves of her robes if Lily stared long enough. She looked… Well, almost as bad as Lily herself probably did.
Lily could think about that, could wonder what it was Ginny got up to in her free time, but frankly Lily didn’t really want to know. Frankly, the less she knew about Ginny the better.

“Right, Ginny, don’t you have class or something?”

Ginny smiled, “You’re very concerned about my schedule, Lily.”

Lily grimaced, and ground out her poor excuse which probably didn’t fool anyone at all, “Well… your education is important.”

Ginny nodded, clearly not fooled at all, and then shrugged stating, “I needed a health day.”

“A health day?”

Ginny sighed, “There’s only so much Severus Snape one can take in a week. I’m afraid I’ve reached my limit. Besides, you seem to be here too, along with your Albanian friend.”

Lily had absolutely no reason to attend class though, plus she’d been skipping classes regularly for two years now, Ginny had no right to comment on Lily’s own attendance problems.

“Right, well then, I guess Lenin and I will just head back upstairs then.” Lily said, since Ginny didn’t appear to be going anywhere.

“Oh, no, you don’t have to leave.” Ginny said, flushing and raising her hands in defense, “Really, I didn’t mean to interrupt, even though you sort of snuck up on me.”

“No, no, it’s cool… Lenin probably shouldn’t be hanging around a girl’s bathroom anyways.” Lily said, which was one of those things she thought about in retrospect, although if the entrance to the Chamber was in here, and he’d opened it when he was younger, then he’d probably spent an unnatural amount of time in this bathroom.

“No, really, it’s alright…”
But Lily had already turned around, dragged Lenin with her, and whispered, “Just keep walking, don’t look back, it will just encourage her.”

“Please, don’t go.”

And Lily was sprinting, dragging Lenin behind her, him barely managing to hold onto his crutches and he sprinted and panted behind her as they made their way up the stairs, “Jesus Christ, Lily!”

But Lily didn’t stop until she reached the seventh floor, panting herself, staring down the stairs to where Ginny was still waiting. And as she breathed, hunched over, and Lenin stared at her, she wondered why she had been so…

Panicked, in that last second, with those last words she had been terrified.

Not of Ginny, not necessarily of Ginny but…

“Well, I can see why you call her unnerving.”
The Breakfast Club

In which Lenin becomes alarmingly popular with the ladies of Hogwarts, Neville asks a rather thought provoking question, Lily isn’t quite sure how she feels about all of this, and Default has breakfast.

It was not quite yet time for the ominous Christmas decorations to bestow themselves upon the castle walls, that sense of goodwill and cheer towards men to adorn each hallway in the form of holly leaves and crimson ribbons, and the half-remembered smell of death and murder in the air, unnoticeable perhaps to everyone except for Lily herself, but certainly as they entered November they were drawing closer to it.

And perhaps, as expected, no one was in a good mood.

Of course, no one had been eaten by a giant snake, no more petrifications had occurred either, and Ginny had been curiously absent only really being glimpsed in the hallways with a strangely haunted look on her expression or else that unnaturally charming smile she sometimes wore (which always failed to be charming).

So, for Lily, the week had been going great and it seemed that the crisis was over and well… Lily was actually still trying to get over that. The year before everything had just kept culminating, and then it had... sort of gone down the drain completely. It was as if, as if the confrontation with Squirrel had gone well, and she had stayed behind and had a whole half of a year left to do whatever normal people did at Hogwarts.

Except not really because Wizard Lenin’s other half was still prowling around, he just no longer had giant snakes at his disposal, which he really shouldn’t have been using anyways because that was not only cheating but also far too dramatic for this sort of a thing.

So, the guillotine was still hanging over everyone’s head, there was just no giant snake, which was nice.

This also wasn’t helped by the daily Hogwarts antics, such as the sudden rise in popularity of Default, and, more importantly, the resident Rabbitson brothers.
“Ellie, why are all these losers at our table?” Blaise asked, not for the first time either, since this wasn’t the first time it had happened.

Lily’s eyes darted to the line of adolescent school girls, and many girls who were beyond adolescence, now crowding the table with hearts practically stamped in their eyes, several laughing at every other word out of Wizard Lenin’s mouth and ignoring his look of growing irritation and budding rage.

(Despite being there only a week or so, and barely trying to conceal his own personality, it seemed that most of the Hogwarts population hadn’t caught on to the fact that Wizard Lenin was terrifying.)

It really made Lily wonder about them and the local water source, because something had to be blamed for their complete and utter lack of self-preservation.)

“Lenin, I bought you this protective amulet the other day, and I know it won’t help the pain of your past but I hope it makes you feel more secure now…”

“Oh, Lenin, I got you candy from Hogsmede! I just know that you might not have had candy in the Albanian orphanage and…”

“Lenin, you and your brother Lepur have been through so much, if you need anyone to talk to, either of you, you know you can always find me during…”

“Lenin, I just wanted to thank you for the wonderful diary you gave me and…”

“These losers are always at our table,” Hermione responded as she flipped through yet another book on spell theory, blatantly ignoring Wizard Lenin’s glare in her direction as well as the now daily morning clamor.

Except, it was a Saturday now, which meant that the clamor wouldn’t be interrupted by class, which meant that they could well be stuck with Lenin and Rabbit’s combined fangirls all day.

“Yeah, see, what I meant was, why isn’t Ellie Potter throwing these losers out of our table?”
“Why is this my responsibility?” Lily asked, eyebrows raised, because the way she saw it this was Wizard Lenin’s problem, if he wanted to go and make up tragic backstories that would have every girl drooling all over him, then he could damn well deal with the consequences.

Lily, after all, was not a janitor.

“When isn’t this kind of thing your responsibility?” Daphne asked, inspecting her manicured fingernails with pointed interest, “Although I must say, our newest house member is rather attractive. If unnervingly intelligent.”

“Yeah, about that, Ellie, is that our Default thing? Being unnervingly intelligent or powerful but not getting any house points for it?” Blaise said, “Because the way I see it we have you, Granger over here, now Lenin Rabbitson, and hell even Luna and Rabbit junior I hear aren’t bad in things like Transfiguration, but we have negative house points.”

Lily perked up at that, looking over their heads to see that the Default hourglass, undecorated and unadorned, was filled with strange translucent black sand, “Really, negative? When did that happen?”

“You mean you aren’t even counting how many house points you lose anymore?”

Honestly, it hadn’t really been a priority this year. She’d been far too busy with other things, like giant snakes, and Lenin’s body… And giant snakes.

“Hey, I have been busy… With snakes… And besides, now if I lose the house cup I don’t get to rub it in Snape’s face.” Although she would get to rub it in Dumbledore’s which… Well, wasn’t as satisfying and would probably be ten times as surreal. Plus, she had the feeling that Dumbledore cared about the cup about as much as she did.

Considering that he still refused to meet with Lenin, after Lenin’s tragic Albanian backstory reveal, not to mention Lily’s almost constant skipping of classes, then Lily really doubted he was all that concerned about a house cup.

Besides, it’d probably dampen Hogwarts morale. If Default could win the house cup, with only seven members, all of which were under the age of thirteen, without winning a single quidditch match, then they’d have no choice but to commit suicide out of shame.
On second thought, maybe Lily did want to get into this whole winning stupid house cup trophy things…

“…That was why? Merlin, Ellie, we didn’t manage to break even by the end of the year even with you missing!” Blaise shook his head, groaning, and saying, “We even won the quidditch cup!”

Which Lily thought went to show that ultimately quidditch was useless, even for other useless things like house points.

“I think the fact that we’re in Default is a testament to how little we care about materialistic things such as the house cup.” Hermione quipped casually, flipping to the next page in her text book.

“So, we’re the house of people who give zero shits then.” Blaise said, looking around at his housemates who appeared to be entirely indifferent to the prospect of losing the house cup, “Just making sure I’m getting this clear.”

“No, it’s not that we don’t care, but perhaps that we care too deeply,” Luna said with a musing expression, sitting next to Rabbit, musing with her eyes glancing at the ceiling as she did so, “We care for bigger and brighter things, for Hogwarts itself and all it represents, rather than a hollow victory of castles build upon colored sand.”

“…Luna, that was inspired and beautiful as always, but I’m going to keep our official motto as the house that does not give shits.” Blaise said, crossing his arms with a huff, sighing, and then continuing to observe the long line of girls all clamoring for Lenin’s attention and interest, “Why am I not this popular?”

“You aren’t nearly as pretty, smart, or tragic,” Daphne explained, once again casually, and to Blaise’s apparent dismay as his expression stiffened when she said it.

“You’re also rather rude, and are suffering an unfortunate infestation of wrackspurts.” Luna added with a frown, “We should all be concerned about greater things than sand in glasses. Right, Rabbit?”

Rabbit gave Luna a rather blank, emotionless, and wholly Rabbit look before he tilted his head back towards Lenin, that spark of something dark and displeased still lingering in his expression. As if Lenin’s very physical presence was a nuisance to him.
That had also become a recent thing.

And it was about this point that Lenin finally appeared to lose all his patience, he slammed his hand on the table just as Pansy Parkinson had approached him, his eyes burning, and he said in a slow and almost stilted manner, “Thank you, Miss Parkinson, however I’m afraid I can accept no more gifts at this time…”

Hermione snorted, “Is that right?”

Lenin offered her a quick and rather scathing glare, “As you see, since my adventures in my home country, I find myself rather claustrophobic at times and cannot be held responsible for what I might do when crowded. Do you understand?”

Pansy Parkinson, blinking, looking on the verge of tears, holding a colorful box in shaking hands, did not understand. Being Pansy Parkinson, she felt the need to say this out loud, “But… But I got you a gift Lenny-poo.”

Lily, having made the unfortunate decision before that point to drink orange juice, began choking, then coughing and spluttering over the table, with everyone staring at her with raised eyebrows and Luna dashing over to whack her on the back repeatedly.

Wizard Lenin stared at Pansy Parkinson for a few moments, for once actually looking marginally related to Rabbit, his face perfectly blank and no emotion showing through those pale blue eyes.

Then there was a great cry from the Slytherin table and Lily turned to see all of Slytherin (well, the boys from Slytherin as most of the girls had joined the line for Lenin’s attention), jumping backwards as the table caught fire.

“Oh look, it seems your table’s caught fire, you’d best help your housemates deal with that,” Wizard Lenin said pleasantly, as if he hadn’t just wandlessly lit a table on fire.

Pansy hesitated, everyone hesitated, the Slytherin table continued to burn, and in that hesitation Dumbledore’s voice boomed out from the staff table, “Twenty points from Defualt for arson, Miss Potter, and detention with professor Lockhart!”

Lily threw her hands in the air, standing up from her own seat, “What? That is bullshit, sir! This
clearly wasn’t mine…”

“Ten more for foul language.” Dumbledore added, sounding as if he was torn between sounding cheery and sounding disciplined, not that Dumbledore knew which to side on these days, he always was caught between one or the other.

“At least assign the detention to him too! You know, since I didn’t actually set the table on fire!” Lily said, motioning to Wizard Lenin, who offered her a silent look of disapproval for throwing him under the metaphorical bus.

“Miss Potter, Lenin Rabbitson is a troubled Albanian refugee, and hardly in any condition to wandlessly set tables on fire.”

Wizard Lenin’s eyebrows rose slightly, and he muttered under his breath, “Now, that’s just racist…”

Dumbledore continued, “You, however, Miss Potter, have repeated history of arson as well as many wandless incidents.”

Well… That just wasn’t fair. Why was it that Lily was blamed for everything? Sure, she was responsible for some things, but she never lied about that, she usually would outright tell people what she was responsible for. First the heir of Slytherin thing, now tables on fire, Lily had somehow just become the convenient explanation for everything!

Lily threw her hands into the air, sitting back down with all the dramatic frustration she could muster, and glared across at Wizard Lenin, who was just starting to look patently amused by all of this, “Well, aren’t you going to light the other tables on fire too?”

“You’re right, it wouldn’t behoove us to show favoritism,” Wizard Lenin agreed with a cockeyed lazy grin, and soon enough Hufflepuff, Gryffindor, and Ravenclaw joined Slytherin in flames.

There was a great cry from the assorted collection of girls as many scurried back to their own tables, casting confused and rather alarmed glances at Wizard Lenin, slight glares at Lily (because really, of course they were blaming this on her somehow), and a great yell from Snape about one hundred lost points from Default and a week’s worth of detentions for Lily and her blasted Albanian friends.

“And yet still no trip to the headmaster’s office…” Wizard Lenin said, crossing his arms as he
surveyed the aftermath with an expression that was a cross between amusement and his chronic irritation, “Ellie, I think you’ve raised the bar too high. At this point I’m going to have to set the entire school on fire if I want to see that man.”

“Is this blame Ellie Potter day?” Lily said, “Because goddammit I’m not going to become responsible for Dumbledore’s actions too. Can’t you people just accept that sometimes I’m not at the center of the latest and greatest conspiracy?”

“Considering you found him in the Chamber of Secrets, Ellie, you actually are the center of this latest and greatest conspiracy.” Hermione said, still not even bothering to look up from her book.

“My father’s writing about it in the Quibbler, actually, the great Albanian Cthulu Devourer of Dimensions Conspiracy.” Luna chimed in, with a cheerful grin, the Quibbler being her father’s newspaper and the equivalent of a magical Tabloid.

And then they seemed to run out of things to say, as each of them kept staring at the fires which were only just now being doused, students still panicking around the room, professors yelling at them to all calm down as they put the tables back together.

“So, that happened.” Blaise summarized after that truly tense and awkward silence, “I guess we’re also the house that lights shit on fire, because we can.”

“They were crowding,” Wizard Lenin said, like this should somehow explain everything, even as he grabbed a piece of toast from the table and began to coat it in butter. Funny, Lily had never thought about how Wizard Lenin might eat before, but in a way, it was very much him. It was a precise, efficient movement, not mechanical but not delicate either, rather the movement of an craftsman who had long since mastered his work.

“Right, Lenny-Poo, whatever you say man.”

Blaise seemed to revel in making terrible decisions, because he should have known what would happen then, or suspected it at least, as one of the pies from the table launched itself into his face.

“As I said earlier, they were crowding, I don’t do well being crowded,” Lenin said before sparing Lily a glance, “Ellie, would you mind passing the tea?”
Lily wordlessly passed him the tea.

And there they were, sitting in silence, Blaise shuddering slightly as he cleaned himself with a spell, Hermione glaring over the cover her book at Wizard Lenin, and Wizard Lenin glaring back as if he knew all her secrets (still being relatively unconvinced of Hermione’s innocence, even if he was convinced of things like Ginny’s inherent creepiness).

In other words, it was sort of like every other breakfast they’d had so far and every breakfast they were likely to have for the foreseeable future.

Lily didn’t know if she was looking forward to it or not.

On the other hand, having Wizard Lenin around, in person, while a bit surreal was also somewhat relieving. She hadn’t realized how much she’d missed his sheer presence, not simply his voice or conversation, but just him being in her vicinity. It was like for the first time in weeks she could stop holding herself on edge and just relax, she hadn’t realized how exhausted she’d been without him around.

On the other hand she wasn’t really looking forward to dealing with Wizard Lenin’s rabid fangirls on a daily basis, or Wizard Lenin’s complete inability to act like a normal twelve-year-old, or Lily apparently being blamed for anything remotely troubling because that was the entire school’s new hobby or something.

Lily sighed rubbed at her forehead, and couldn’t help but think that Albania had been so much easier… Maybe she should give Frank a call, see what was happening over there.

“Uh, Ellie, you said I could sit here?”

Lily turned, a piece of toast now in her mouth, and found herself staring at Neville, “Jesus, Neville, how long have you been there?”

Neville fidgeted, eyes darting to the other members, lingering on Lenin for a moment, then gave an awkward smile, “Well, uh, I was sort of trapped in the mob for a while… And then you know, all the tables were lit on fire. But you said I could…”

“Right, yes, sit down.” Lily said, motioning to the open seat next to her, “How are things in the other
normal houses?"

Neville graciously took his seat, if somewhat nervously, then slowly said, “Well, you lit our table on fire.”

Lily jerked her head at Wizard Lenin, “Correction, Lenin is the asshole that lit your table on fire.”

Neville glanced over at Wizard Lenin, nodded slowly, “Right, uh, Lenin… I’m Neville, by the way, I don’t think I’ve actually introduced myself yet.”

Wizard Lenin set down his food, wiped off his hands, and stared at Neville’s out reached hand for a few speculative moments, his eyes burning, and then with a creeping attempting to be charming smile, he took it, “Charmed, I’m Lenin Rabbitson.”

Neville shook the hand slowly, his eyebrows raised and a look of uncertainty crossing his features, then just as quickly the two removed their hands as if they’d never touched in the first place.

“Uh, right, I uh… Well, I was in class for your whole… story. I’m sorry about your family…”

“Don’t worry about it,” Wizard Lenin said shortly, “It was years ago and hardly your fault.”

“I know but… I meant to say that I wish that hadn’t happened to you, or Rabbit. I guess that’s why Rabbit doesn’t talk much, isn’t it?” Neville offered Wizard Lenin an awkward smile, one that was stretched a bit too thin.

“No,”

And there was Rabbit’s sentient moment of the day, him staring at Neville, critically. Normally Rabbit would leave it at that eerie one word answer, but apparently, to Lily’s growing frustrated horror, he was feeling a bit more feistily sentient than that today, “I say what is necessary, nothing more, nothing less, Neville Longbottom. The abomination has nothing to do with it.”

And that wasn’t alarming at all.
Lily shook her head, placed a hand on her forehead, and said, in a much more calm tone than she deserved to be using with her rather frayed emotional state, “Rabbit, please… Just don’t talk, ever.”

Rabbit, thankfully, chose not to respond to that. Unfortunately, Wizard Lenin did, as his eyebrows lowered, “Lepur, did you just call your own brother an abomination?”

And there was a grin hidden in Rabbit’s still lips, stretched behind his emotionless expression, as if whatever higher power that played at being Rabbit was delighted, “You are an aberration, at the end of things. After all, how can you be anything less when you are nameless yet still so pitifully human, Lenin who is nothing?”

“Rabbit, please, I am not in the mood for your alarming developing sentience today!” Lily said, pounding her hand on the table, the dishes all clattering and everyone looking at her in alarm.

“Now, comrades, I’m going to tell you how the rest of breakfast is going to go. First, Lenin, we are not going to light anything else on fire, even if we’re getting crowded. Second, Rabbit, we’re going to stop speaking in full if alarmingly cryptic sentences about aberrations and or abominations. And we’re going to eat food like normal people, not get eaten by giant snakes, and listen to whatever it is Neville came all this way to talk about!”

Finally, Lily looked over at Neville, “Now, Neville, how is Gryffindor aside from the damaged table?”

Neville blinked, then shook himself, and said, “Uh, right, it’s… good. Tense, you know, with the heir. Did you… Did you really do it, Ellie?”

“What?”

“Well, take care of the heir and the monster?” Neville asked, before holding up his hands in defense, “I mean, nothing’s happened for a week or so, and no one else has been petrified but… Well, you kind of just skipped class and then came back the next day with Lenin and… And I guess everyone was expecting something more dramatic.”

What a thing to say. He was… He wasn’t wrong, Lily herself expected something… Something from that whole situation. But, all the same, she opened her mouth and said, “Real life, true heroics, are often quiet desperate things. They take place when we aren’t looking and are uncelebrated… I
took care of the snake though, the heir, well… I removed his greatest weapon at the very least.”

But not him.

Lenin’s eyes didn’t dart to Hermione Granger, or to Ginny Weasley for that matter, but all the same she could feel his wordless attention settle on the pair of them, as if they were lit under two separate spotlights, and beneath it both burned.

He hadn’t said yet, in the middle of the night, what he wanted to be done about them.

If Lily was more open to it, if the consequences wouldn’t be too great, then she had no doubt that Lenin would simply advise her to cut Hermione Granger’s throat along with Ginny Weasley, regardless of whether they were the heir or not.

Perhaps, Lily unwilling or hesitant, he’d even do it himself.

For now, he said he was thinking, waiting for more of a sign, a slip, and until then…

Until then the guillotine hung over all their necks.

“Well, that’s good then. I mean, I’m glad it worked out.” Neville hurriedly added with a flush, “I uh, I’m looking forward to your quidditch match.”

“Neville, you don’t have to be that polite,” Hermione said, finally setting down her book with a sigh and paying Neville her full attention, probably because Neville was her greatest friend and because of the bond they shared over the summer, “Really, we’ve lost every single match we’ve played.”

“I know but, well, the Default matches are always the most entertaining.” Neville said, “And the shortest.”

“I know, it’s so embarrassing.” Blaise said with a groan, “We’re worse than the Chudley Cannons.”

“Yes, well, quidditch is dumb.” Lily said in her own defense, being Default’s quidditch captain, and
at least partially responsible for their incredible losing streak thus far.

Blaise, as the only Default member who actually cared about quidditch, apparently wasn’t willing to put up with that, “No, Ellie, you make quidditch dumb! You don’t even know any of the rules! And you’re the captain!”

“I know the important ones like the seeker seeking the snitch or whatever,” Lily said, because really, since that was all you needed to win it seemed like the most important one.

“And yet, not once has that helped us win a single game!”

Hermione spared Blaise a withering glance, “I have to admit, Blaise, I don’t care if we win a single quidditch match. And more, I don’t think anyone else does either.”

No one else, certainly, raised their voice in protest at the thought of their losing streak and Lily’s glorious quidditch themed leadership. Lily had to say, maybe Blaise was onto something with the idea of Default’s general indifference to everything.

Neville laughed at that, and from the conversation seemed to slip into less interesting topics, certainly less memorable ones and Lily just found herself thinking how strange this all was. Everyone, Lenin included, here eating breakfast together liked they all belonged in the same room, more, as if there was nothing in the world that could break this sort of thing apart.

When it had every right to be dashed to pieces.

And it was thinking on that that Lily ended up wandering back by herself to the Default common room, Lenin citing his desire to see the library again or else subtly observe Hermione Granger for that lethal slip, and Luna taking Rabbit for a walk around the lake to calm him down after his latest alarming bout of words.

Just… How fragile everything seemed.

So perhaps it was only natural, that just outside the Default common room on her first walk by the painting entrance, she found herself almost stepping on a brightly wrapped green package, with the name Lily inscribed in elegant writing on the front.
Tearing it open and discarding the wrapping paper she found a thin, rather beaten up, looking notebook. Except… Except this wasn’t what it was supposed to look like, it was supposed to be black, except, she didn’t know why it was supposed to be black. Instead the cover was the same bright green shade as the wrapping paper, a color that was quite attractive under normal circumstances, but in this case seemed to almost have a poisonous tint to it.

The pages were empty, yet worn at the edges, and in them was a feeling of power and almost overwhelming presence.

And there, written on the front page, was a single message in that same elegant handwriting as before, “I’ve gotten bored, Lily. Let’s say you and I play a new game. It’s called hide and seek, you look for me, and I hide among all these smiling eager faces. Only, you’ve got a time limit, because nothing lasts forever. The longer you take the more pieces I collect, the more pieces I collect, the higher that collateral damage of yours goes. Winner takes the castle.

So, how bout it, Lily? The clock’s started, it’s your move.

P.S.

If you need a hint, write in the diary.”

Lily stared at the words, stared at them again, slammed the notebook shut, and in the middle of the hallway screamed, “That overdramatic son of a whore!”
The Scent of Christmas

In which Lily begins to wonder if their mysterious enemy was ever after the stone in the first place, Wizard Lenin, in an effort to infuriate Hermione Granger, embraces his communist roots, and Ginny and Lily share a disconcerting conversation in the rain.

On the day of the last game of the Default quidditch season before the new year, a bleak November Saturday, the sky was not simply overcast, but looming, giving the land an almost claustrophobic feeling to it. Cold sheets of rain pounded down into the grounds, the grass sodden and soaking through the shoes of any who dared step on it.

Inside her soaked robes, pressed against her skin, it almost felt like the green notebook was burning.

Of course, like always, she’d tried to deal with it before it had gotten out of hand, and just like every other time, it was difficult to tell just how successful her preemptive measures would prove.

That inconspicuous Saturday, when Lenin Rabbitson had been hounded by just about everyone and Lily had gained her mysterious new gift, Lily had walked briskly all the way from the seventh floor to the library and finally right to Wizard Lenin himself, sitting in his own secluded corner and practically buried in multiple towering stacks of books. Lily, on reaching his table, slammed the notebook down in front of his face with a satisfying smack that rattled the towers of books and caused one to collapse entirely, “What’s the hell is this supposed to be, Lenin?”

Lenin blinked, and for a moment Lily was struck by the odd duality of his face, how at one moment he could look just the same as Wizard Lenin had always looked but also look like the strange Albanian transfer student Lenin Rabbitson who Lily barely knew at all.

For a moment he said nothing, merely gave her a dull and unimpressed stare, and finally he said (as if this said everything he needed to say), “I leave you alone for thirty minutes.”

He then glanced at the notebook, at its almost garish green cover, and then back at her with complete and utter disinterest, “It looks like a journal.”

Lily said nothing, merely flipped open to the front cover and the message Wizard Lenin’s better half had left behind. And as he took them in his expression changed from one of bored irritation to a
dawning almost wary interest.

“It’s your handwriting, isn’t it, Lenin?”

Wizard Lenin didn’t say anything though, took the notebook, idly flipped through its empty pages, feeling each one, then back to the message, finally he said slowly, “This isn’t the diary…”

But whatever that was supposed to mean was cut off as his confusion only grew deeper, as if by staring at the journal he was being pulled further and further in, without any means of clarification, “Why would he bring something like this…”

His eyes snapped up to her, then their surroundings, and he stood up while his hands tightly gripped Lily’s latest ominous Christmas present.

“Lily, we need to talk privately,” Lenin then grabbed her sleeve with speed and coordination he’d been lacking earlier, and with more dexterity than he’d shown in months they slowly but surely made their way back to the Default common room, walking in strained silence the entire way.

Finally, when they were in Wizard Lenin’s familiar room beneath the room, Wizard Lenin admitted, in a strangely alarmed and anxious tone, “I have no idea what game he’s playing at.”

Wizard Lenin picked up the notebook, “This, is a rather strange, nerve rackingly accurate in all ways that matter, replica of the horcrux diary I created fifty years ago.”

“It’s a different color, it doesn’t bear my name, but strangely it has a similar feel to it, a hint of the same aura, that the diary always possessed after the Spring of 1943.” Wizard Lenin said as he stared at it, as if merely by looking at it he was transported back into his own childhood, “Not quite as strong, of course, but there’s a… taint to it that’s very familiar.”

Lily stared at the notebook, her brow furrowed, then looked across at him, “So, it’s a message.”

Wizard Lenin said didn’t nod or shake his head, he just stared, and slowly said, “I would never so casually reveal, even hint at, the secret of my immortality to anyone, let alone you, you who killed Quirrell and took the philosopher’s stone out of my reach and returned twice from the dead. Yet, the
notebook itself is that very message, there is no other message to be had from it…”

Lily interjected, pointing to the notebook, “What about the one inside, you know, this ominous… declaration thing? The game he talks about playing?”

But Wizard Lenin was still staring at it, finally, he concluded in an almost horrified voice, “Either, he has decided to take new risks, after you disposed of the basilisk and remembered he could not dispose of you, he has decided on a new approach of, something, I don’t even know what… Or… He knows.”

“He knows?”

He turned to stare at her, a blank look of horror dawning on his features, “He knows what you are, what I am, he knows you’re a horcrux.”

Lily paused, tried to put that together, and it was strange because she’d never thought of it like that. She’d always known she was a horcrux, or at least, when Death had explained it, but it hadn’t seemed to matter. It seemed like, well, lumping her and Wizard Lenin together in ways they shouldn’t be lumped. Technically correct, but only ever in the technical sense…

Then Lily remembered that Wizard Lenin took this very seriously, even in the form of Lenin Rabbitson as he stared at her with child’s eyes and a strangely childlike overpowering fear (how did he look so at home in that face). To him this was the first step on the road to oblivion.

“I… Really?” Lily asked, looking at it again, flipping it open to that message, the one that hadn’t seemed to be about that, about anything relevant at all. Not the stone, not last Christmas, not Hermione, not anything that Lily would have thought he’d bring up if he brought up anything at all.

Wizard Lenin didn’t respond, just kept staring at that notebook, the gears in his head jammed as he kept looking as if by staring he could wrap his head around what his other half might want.

“We have to leave Hogwarts,”

Wizard Lenin stood, taking stock of the room, eyes casting each article of clothing, every book, everything in there to the side as unnecessary.
“What?” Lily asked, “But we’ve still got a few weeks before the holidays and he’s still roaming around the castle, snakeless granted, but…”

“This castle, Lily, no longer matters! Don’t you understand?” Wizard Lenin hissed, turning towards her and pounding his hand down on the table, on top of the diary itself, “It was all well and fine when he wanted to kill you and gain the stone, regrettable, yes, but it wouldn’t have given him what he wanted even if he did manage to get it. But he’s not looking to kill you, us, Lily. He knows what we are now and what he’ll do to us will be worse than death.”

Wizard Lenin grabbed her by the shoulders, staring her straight in the eyes, “I know him, Lily, like I know myself. He will shut your body down, immobilize it, leave you hanging paralyzed in limbo for all eternity and he will shove me back inside of you. And we will lay there, for all eternity, dead but not dead, instead dreaming of living and affecting the world around us. And no one will come for us, no one will even remember to come for us, and those who are foolish enough to wander in and try will suffer the agonizing death that we will never be granted.”

“We’ve defeated him before…”

Wizard Lenin laughed, “Defeated him? Certainly not, he killed you first, Lily. And believe me, he remembers that. Plus, time has just run out, if he’s giving this message it means he’s almost done here, that there’s nowhere in the world we can run that he can’t find us and make this message a reality.”

His smile faded into something grim, anxious, yet still determined, “We leave tonight, wait for the goddamn Rabbit and head to London, we’ll stay in that vampire infested building you own, and I’ll draw in my followers and retake the mantle of Voldemort before he gets his chance to.”

“And just leave everyone here…”

“I doubt he has any real interest in this place,” Wizard Lenin cut in, “But even if he does… Yes, Lily, we leave these people here. After all, we have never owed them anything, have we?”

No, when he put it like that…

What did Lily owe these people? What had she ever owed these people? As a whole, nothing, after all every time she went out of her way for them she seemed to get burned by it. No one had thanked
her for ridding them of Quirrell, thanked her for ridding them of a basilisk, in fact no one appeared to have noticed at all!

But, as individuals…

Luna, Neville, even Hermione… For all that they failed her on occasion, grew distant to her, doubted her, she owed them something at the very least. She’d owed Hermione her parents’ memories, and she’d delivered on that, but more she owed them Hogwarts. The Hogwarts they had all been promised, the one without murderers and basilisks.

And more, this game, the game Wizard Lenin was so ready to ignore, a game of hide and seek with children as collateral…

“No, Lenin, I don’t think he knows,” Lily said, still holding the notebook, feeling an echo of something different that was familiar and all at once entirely new.

“Then what on earth do you call this?”

As Lily looked at him, his dismissive glance and barely concealed anxiety, she felt her own confidence grow as the thoughts all fell together, “He would have mentioned it, mentioned something, it’s not just subtle it’s… Not there. He didn’t say anything about Hermione, he didn’t say anything about Quirrell, nothing about Albania, about dying, the stone, and even about horcruxes really… In fact, I don’t think he’s after the stone at all.”

“What other reason does he have to be here?”

“I don’t know, but… Don’t you find it odd that he hasn’t even tried? It’s November, he could be found at any moment, but other than the basilisk, which I went out of my way to confront, he hasn’t made any move towards us at all. If that was even a move towards us at all and not something else entirely.”

Wizard Lenin’s fingers were tapping with impatience, but all the same he didn’t demand they leave, he waited and responded, “If he wanted to stay discreet he’d wait just before the holidays before moving or else in late Spring, so that his disappearance would not be marked for a few weeks.”

“But we would have expected that, and he did make moves earlier, far earlier, with a basilisk
roaming the pipes he had every reason to disappear. Whoever he’s possessing could have been written off as a victim at any time. So why wait?” Lily shook her head, staring down at the notebook with narrowed eyes, “No, he wants something else, something that has nothing to do with us at all, and… And if we leave now, he’ll get it, and… And he cannot get it, Lenin.”

(And as always, the memory of Death, out of context and out of time played inside of her head, “… But Lily, that stone has no right to exist, it will only attract violence and death as it is doing at this very moment. It must be destroyed.”)

Lenin’s narrowed eyes said more than he ever could, but he felt the need to say something derisive and cold anyways, “Do you even hear yourself talk?”

“Yes, Lenin, I hear myself talk! And it’s too early, we can’t abandon them yet! I’m not leaving Neville, Luna, and Hermione to whatever it is your bastard of an original soul has planned!” Lily breathed out, feeling all of the exhaustion that she’d been trying and failing to combat over the year slumping on her all at once, finally she said, “Just… Until the holidays, if we leave then people won’t look for a while, you’ll have time to get the band back together and no one will blink if you, me, and Rabbit disappear again, they’ll only notice when we don’t come back. That’s the cutoff, if I don’t find him, deal with him, by then, we’re out no questions asked, just like last year.”

“You remember you died last year and murdered your professor, don’t you?” Wizard Lenin reminded her coolly.

“Just until the holiday break,” Lily repeated, rather than answer his question, “Then I suppose it doesn’t matter much anyway.”

He stared at her silently for a few moments, and then said, almost casually, “You know, Lily, if I am correct (which I undoubtedy am), then you’re the one that’s going to have to kill Hermione Granger.”

Lily looked up, eyes wide, “What?”

“His puppet, Hermione, he can’t know I’m not still inside your head, and so when you admit that it’s her, that it’s been her this entire time, you’re the one who’s going to have to kill her. Not me.”

They stared at each other in silence for a prolonged moment, the events of last year echoing into the future, so that it was so easy to envision Hermione with a knife through her heart.
“And if it’s not Hermione? If it’s some else, like Lockhart or Ginny?”

“Then you kill her anyway, because I am unwilling to gamble on those odds.”

(Sometimes, it was so easy to remember what a ruthless man he truly was.)

Finally, Wizard Lenin said, “But fair enough, Lily, you have until the holiday break to dispose of her, before I start getting desperate.”

But the holidays crept closer on silent feet, and everything remained as deceptively and horrifyingly normal as it had been the week before. There was no basilisk, the petrifications stopped, people started to wonder if she truly had defeated the heir like she’d said (or the heir’s monster as she insisted).

Neville thanked her, in Transfiguration one day, with more certainty to his gratitude this time, “I guess I just wasn’t sure, it seemed so… fast. But, I really am, we all are, grateful, Ellie.”

And Lily just smiled thinly in response wondering why he hadn’t noticed she’d only said the basilisk was dead but that the true menace had been left untouched. Strange, wasn’t it? That his gratitude felt so very shallow.

As for the rest of the castle, well, Lenin and Lepur Rabbitson’s popularity continued to skyrocket and Lenin’s even further than Rabbit’s. After all, Lenin Rabbitson would at least look at you when you spoke to him, had taken the lead as the smartest in the class, Rabbit while he now said words was still mostly an alarming eggplant of a human being.

And it seemed as if the girls in Lily’s year were fully aware and enthralled by Lenin’s intellectual charms.

One rather alarming example was in Defense Against the Dark Arts, in their rare moment of free time as Lockhart set yet another wild creature loose upon them in the name of learning self-defense, Pansy Parkinson approached Wizard Lenin with stars practically shining in her eyes.

“Lenny-poo,” Pansy said, eyelashes fluttering, somehow managing to ignore the fact that all of
Default with the addition of Neville were all crouched behind Lily and Wizard Lenin’s overturned table, behind Lily’s rather intensive shields, as the brownie tore through the classroom tearing apart textbooks and desks as students shrieked and did their unsuccessful best to get out of dodge.

The Lenny-poo in question looked extremely put off by that name alone and all too willing to set Pansy on fire this time. Especially as she had interrupted his stream of cursing at Lockhart for somehow, inexplicably, managing to be the worst Defense professor he’d ever seen.

She blushed as she stared at him, continuing, “I just wanted to thank you for the lovey Christmas present, I really liked it.”

Needless to say, Wizard Lenin looked very alarmed by the prospect of this and immediately went out of his way to correct her, “I don’t celebrate Christmas, Pansy. It is considered bourgeois and anti-revolutionary, to celebrate such holidays.”

“Anti-revolutionary?” Hermione asked, eyebrows raised, as she gave Wizard Lenin a toned-down version of his own trademarked dubious glance.

“As a product of the capitalist pigs, Granger, I wouldn’t expect you to understand,” Wizard Lenin responded with a rather thin and strained smile, probably because he was defending his own communism with such vigor, whenever he and Lily talked about it he went far out of his way to have nothing to do at all with communism. It was almost inspiring to see him embracing his roots like this while fending off wild beasts in the Defense classroom.

(Of course, to Wizard Lenin, this was a veiled insult. Because in his eyes Hermione’s guilt was all but assured, and only his own trepidation in confronting the main soul, the fact that revealing his knowledge and striking out would be revealing the fact that he had left Lily altogether, stayed his hand now.

Hindenburg, of all people, should be expected to understand, and to be a product of anything, of capitalism or muggles, was perhaps one of the gravest insults one could throw at him.)

Pansy, however, either inspired by Lenin Rabbitson’s devotion to a failing system, or else ignoring it completely, blushed an even brighter shade of red, even as Ron Weasley booked it past her and out the door as fast as his gangly legs would carry him, “Oh, you don’t need to be shy, I’ll write in it every day, I promise!”
If Pansy had stopped there then she probably would have been saved by Hermione and Lenin’s constant bickering. Or rather, Lenin and Hermione’s constant attempts to unravel the truth about the other, for Lenin to admit in his own words that he’s anything but Albanian, and Hermione to reveal her puppet master.

But Pansy didn’t stop, “And I’ll be sure to get you the finest chocolates for Christmas, Lenny-poo, and of course we can visit Madam Puddifoot’s tea shop!”

And that was about when Pansy’s shoes were lit on fire, which of course attracted the brownie directly to Pansy, which ended up being ruthless enough to put her in the hospital wing, which of course resulted in Lily earning detention with Snape (because apparently Lockhart was starting to catch on to the fact that everyone kept assigning all the Lily detentions onto him), and the whole place just flooded into the usual sort of chaos they saw on a day to day basis.

It was turning into something of a bizarre theme though, that Wizard Lenin had gotten ‘insert name here’ some sort of present before the holidays set in, not everyone, not all the blushing girls either (and the ones who didn’t were very clear that their feelings were upset that he was showing favoritism to their peers), but a fair number of them usually used it as a method of introduction.

“I just don’t get it,” Lily confessed at one point, truly well and thoroughly confused after having been confronted by yet another girl idling up and thanking Lenin Rabbitson for his famed Albanian generosity, “I mean, you didn’t really get them anything, is it a conversation starter or something?”

“Lily, do I look like I understand adolescent school girls?” a rather harried Wizard asked in response, watching as the most recent girl (whose name Lily should probably remember, what was it, Camilla, Lavender, something floral like that) was sent off crying after Lenin repeatedly insisted that, no, he didn’t get her a gift, and he had absolutely no inclination to do so, and that she’d probably been given one by Ron Weasley trying to sound more impressive by pretending to be Lenin himself.

“Yes?”

Somehow Wizard Lenin’s death stare managed to look intimidating even on Lenin Rabbitson’s adorable face, “No, Lily, I do not understand adolescent school girls, and this whole experience has only cemented that fact. In fact, though it pains me to say this, you might understand these people more than I do.”

Other than that, the only notable if mundane event was that the flu seemed to be spreading around the castle, a fair number of people a little paler and shakier than usual, though nothing too out of the norm with winter fast approaching and nobody sick enough to truly do anything about it.
All in all, without dead roosters, blood on the walls, stones in the basement, or the stiff bodies of petrified cats it all seemed too mundane for comfort.

Such that, walking in the rain to the quidditch game, Lily felt all these facts sliding around in her brain desperately attempting to connect them into some pattern before the ever-loom ing holidays descended upon them.

“You know, Lenin, I think I’m beginning to understand why you hate Christmas so much,” Lily commented as she and her Defaultian peers marched through the muddy grass, something that had taken on all the joyful optimism of a death march, particularly in the heavy rain that for all reasonable people would have meant a rescheduled match but not for quidditch, only the apocalypse itself would cancel a quidditch match, “There’s just this ominous feeling of dread, something jarring when contrasted with all the festive lights, gifts, talk of friendship, love, and hope for the new year… Murder, if it had a smell at all, I think would have a scent of Christmas to it.”

“Ellie,” Wizard Lenin said slowly as he slogged through the rain and the mud, the only one of them looking slightly less miserable as he used magic to ward off at least some of the rain, but still miserable enough, “That’s not why I hate Christmas.”

“Oh,” Lily said, trying to think back if Wizard Lenin had ever given a reason for his distaste, “But it’s a good reason to hate Christmas, isn’t it?”

“No, Ellie, it’s a bizarre reason to hate Christmas,” Wizard Lenin spat out, “And one only you would come up with.”

“And yet Christmas being anti-revolutionary is a perfectly adequate reason,” Hermione interjected, her bushy hair plastered to her face and back except for those few stubborn strands that insisted on frizzing out everywhere.

“Yes, Granger, I’ll have you know that it’s a perfectly acceptable reason!”

“Why do I just get the feeling you’re throwing out buzzwords like ‘capitalism’ and ‘anti-revolutionary’ when you barely have any idea what they mean, Lenin?” Hermione asked, which would have been far more intimidating if she and Wizard Lenin hadn’t been doing this non-stop since Lenin Rabbitson had arrived in Hogwarts and if both weren’t completely soaked and in quidditch robes.
“They are not buzzwords, Granger, they are a philosophy, one that’s rather apt with the approaching holidays. Tell me, what is the Christmas season except an excuse to overspend and celebrate the joy and love of useless things for the rich?” Wizard Lenin said, because it seemed that even though he himself didn’t prescribe to communism, he was more than willing to play the part of the communist to its full potential if it meant shaming Hermione Granger.

“That’s not what it is! Christmas is a time of celebration and love and family…”

“Not in Albanian orphanages, Granger,” Wizard Lenin interjected, “And not here either, isn’t that right Ellie?”

“Hm?” Lily asked, not entirely sure why she was getting pulled into this debate.

“Murder, you said, smells like Christmas,” Wizard Lenin said, “I take it that means you doubt the Christmas season centers around goodwill to men.”

“You’re seriously looking to Ellie Potter to back up your points?” Hermione asked before Lily could even get a word in.

And then they were off, bickering at full speed, as they seemed to have transformed into professional bickerers on any topic at all from Christmas to Potions assignments. Lily, at this point, decided to completely stop paying attention. If neither tried to kill each other out in the open, and they kept it at veiled and not so veiled insults, then Lily honestly didn’t care anymore.

She had much larger things to worry about after all.

Of course, this left her to listen in on the other mundane and rather repetitive conversation that was going on, Zabini and Greengrass caustically whining, like always.

“Merlin, are they still fighting about that muggle political thing?” Zabini asked, “Do they ever shut up?”

“Don’t be cruel, Blaise, it’s their form of flirting with each other. They can’t help that they’re so socially inept and backwards that they can’t manage it in any other way.” Greengrass said before
adding, “Besides, I’m far more disappointed that we have to play quidditch today. What’s the point? Since we’re going to lose and everyone knows it.”

“Flirting, please, Daphne, don’t joke, you’ll make me ill,” Zabini said with a shudder, “You’re right, the quidditch part’s going to be even worse. I don’t even see why we have a team, we still don’t have enough people even with comrade Leninski over there.”

Daphne wiped blonde hair out of her eyes with an expression of distaste, “Like I said, I don’t even care about that, I just care about the fact that I have to walk here, through this rain, sit on a broomstick for however long it takes us to get disqualified or just lose, and then walk back, when everyone already knows the outcome. It’s an exercise in pointlessness!”

“But at least then I won’t have to hear Hermione and Lenin talk,” Zabini said, even managing a slight, derisive smile at this.

No, in their own special former Slytherin way, they were even worse than Lenin and Hermione. Did they think no one else had noticed how pointless Hogwarts was, quidditch was? Did they think that Lily was blind? Lily had noticed that long before anyone else had, and yet here they were, talking about it as if it was a revelation that made them superior to everyone else.

As if life, itself, was not a series of ultimately pointless tasks with no hint of inherent meaning to them.

“Perhaps we’ll win this time, captain,” Lily looked over to her side to find the only two tolerable members of Default, Luna Lovegood, and Rabbit (and the fact that she was including Rabbit in that mix just proved how long of a month it had been).

“We won’t.” Lily admitted casually, “But that’s not the point of these things, you have to push boulders up hills even when you know they’ll fall back down again. So, even though we’re going to lose, we still have to play… Also, Dumbledore would just assign us all detention if none of us showed up again.”

They had tried that once already, and apparently the entire quidditch team bailing on a match for ‘a health day’ was dreadfully forbidden.

As it was, even if it was Zabini and Greengrass whining, they did have a point. Lily had much better uses of her time than a quidditch match, such as finding Hindenburg’s puppet before the holidays
and she, Rabbit, and Wizard Lenin left Hogwarts for good, leaving whoever was left to whatever uncertain fate Wizard Lenin’s other half had in store for them.

Luna, at least, didn’t seem to mind too much, or Rabbit (not that Rabbit minded much at all, except for Wizard Lenin for whatever inexplicable reason).

Which was why Lily didn’t really bother with a speech after they huddled together on the pitch, or talk about the goals of the game, but just flew upwards in the pouring rain hoping that the Cedric Diggory managed to find the thing decently fast before Lily had to take drastic measures that would dismay any true quidditch fan.

And then, of course, ten minutes in, with the oversized balls flying themselves through Default’s goal posts with Lily’s help, and the snitch appearing in front of Diggory’s face with a convenience also aided by Lily, the game was officially lost and Lily’s one academic obligation on a Saturday officially over.

“Good job everybody,” Lily said as Blaise and Daphne practically sprinted back to the castle, Hermione not far behind either, while Lily, Wizard Lenin, Luna, and Rabbit all stared at their retreating figures.

Wizard Lenin’s only comment was, as the other Default members disappeared from sight, “…I really detest this game.”

Then with a sigh he looked at her, “I assume we’re done here then?”

Lily spared a glance to the fans, most retreating, with only one fan seeming determined to stay, the unsurprising and infamous Ginny Weasley’s with incredibly damp hair and a soaked cotton scarf of red and gold, “I’m going to investigate a little, if you don’t mind.”

Wizard Lenin gave her a rather patronizing smile, far more patronizing and certain than he deserved to be, and shoved his hands into his pockets and began the long trek back to the castle pulling Luna Lovegood along with him, conveniently leaving Rabbit behind.

“…That bastard,” Lily said as she stared at Rabbit, realizing that she was stuck with him, since her usual Rabbit babysitter was being dragged off to the castle.
“Well, Rabbit, let’s go talk with Ginny for a little bit. I’m sure it will be… barrels of fun.”

Lily grabbed onto Rabbit’s arm and floated them up into the stands, navigating through rows until they came to Ginny’s. And there, well, Lily hesitated. She really hadn’t wanted it to come to this, tried to avoid Ginny at all costs except… Well, Ginny had been oddly out of action for the past week or so, she no longer appeared outside of the restroom, and Lily hadn’t seen her since that last incredibly awkward meeting with Wizard Lenin.

It was as if the one time Lily legitimately looked for Ginny she disappeared entirely. And that, even though Ginny seemed altogether too odd and un-Lenin like to be worth considering (but wasn’t Hindenburg not acting like Lenin at all, wasn’t he playing some other unknown game she couldn’t place, couldn’t predict), combined with Lily’s general unease around her was worth at least trying to investigate.

If only to convince Lenin that pushing Lily to kill Hermione just because he was a paranoid mess was not a viable option.

It didn’t make this any easier, or any more enjoyable though. Lily grit her teeth, her hand instinctively tightening around Rabbit’s, and forced the words out of her mouth, “Hi, Ginny… How have you been? I haven’t seen you around the restroom… Since that seems like your favorite place in the castle, you know.”

Ginny looked up, startled, “Ellie! I, um…”

Ginny blushed, looked back down at her shoes, continued to look at her shoes… This was a new technique for her, normally Ginny was all about the unnerving intense eye contact until Lily was forced to look away.

Somehow, this was even more disconcerting.

Suddenly, Lily had that very familiar yearning she always got around Ginny for that mystical but never achievable five o clock on the shores of Margaretville.

“Yes, I know, me approaching you is… new.” Lily said with a shudder as she realized that Ginny would hold this over her head until the end of time, “Don’t take it personally, please.”
Ginny muttered to her soaked shoes, “Oh, I uh… No, was there… Did you want to talk to Ron? He’s not here right now and…”

“Why the hell would I ever want to talk to Ron?” Lily blurted, because even more than Ginny she did her best to avoid conversations with Ron Weasley, because as she’d told Ginny before, she was sort of over the snake thing for the time being.

Ginny at first looked somewhat insulted (which was kind of odd as Ginny never was insulted by proxy whenever Lily said anything about Ron), and then somewhat blank, and finally a dash hopeful.

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“Oh, so you really do want to talk to me…” Ginny trailed off, looked up, and smiled hesitantly at Lily in an extremely unfamiliar way. Now, Lily had seen a fair number of Ginny-smiles, some were almost like Lenin’s some were entirely foreign, but none were so benign and genuine looking as this one was.

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“As if Gin...
Lily brought a hand up to her forehead, rubbing at her scar, almost wishing she had a migraine because at least that was something familiar if just as unpleasant, “No, I’m fine I’m just…”

Light headed, a little dizzy, flashes of memories she’d never had in front of her eyes of Ginny, blood, darkness, a feeling of futility and despair…

Lily sat down, numb to the rain and just staring at Ginny and trying to put the pieces of her together.

“I’m fine.” Lily finally repeated, with false assurance in her voice, and she cast an eye up to the sky and the steadily falling rain, “But you should probably get back inside, before you start getting sick like everyone else in this castle.”

“Right,” Ginny stood, flushed, then spared a look for Lily, “Aren’t you coming?”

“No, I’ve got a lot to think about… The rain helps, I think.”

(Lily blinked, Ginny’s wand was in her hand, moving back to her side as if it had just been pointed somewhere, her hand was shaking, her skin seemed paler than it had been before, and she looked so very exhausted, Lily blinked again.)

“Lily, how are you really doing?”

Lily blinked again, realized she was still sitting in the rain after the quidditch match, everyone else seeming to have long since gone back to the castle, feeling a little out of it and ridiculously cold…

She tried to put the last few minutes together, she’d come to talk to Ginny, it had been terrible as always, she’d been stuck babysitting Rabbit and…

Well, here they were, her, Rabbit (although Rabbit was staring at Ginny almost with disapproval, with pursed lips and an unholy light burning in his eyes, which really, she did not have time to deal with), and Ginny Weasley.
“Not too well, to be honest…” Lily said, and then paused, glancing at Ginny, and couldn’t help the words that tumbled out of her mouth, “Ginny, if you were planning on putting me into a magical coma and locking me inside of a warehouse for all eternity, would you tell me?”

Ginny blinked, looked genuinely confused and uncertain for a moment, and then burst out into mad hysterics.

“Honestly, I think I would, yes, if only because it’s so very absurd.” Ginny said, genuinely amused, and strangely light hearted, “Where do you come up with these ideas?”

“Raiders of the Lost Ark,” Lily said, to which Ginny just nodded, clearly not having any idea what Indiana Jones even was.

Ginny then said with a soft and bemused smile, “If it helps you at all, I have never intended, nor will I ever intend, to place you into a magical coma and lock you inside of a warehouse for all eternity.”

“Oh, good… I… I wanted to talk to you about something.” Lily then started, because that was very clear in her head, that there had been a very large reason… The ultimatum, yes, she had until December and she’d thought that Ginny was a lead, that Ginny was this haunting piece of a greater puzzle she couldn’t quite together.

Only, no, that didn’t seem right either…

“School, you said earlier?”

“Right, school, you said… You said something about a bully?”

Ginny nodded and then with a sigh explained, “I have decided, I’m afraid, that I no longer give any shits about Severus Snape,”

Lily blinked, blinked again, “Oh, that’s… good? But…”
But that wasn’t what Lily had thought Ginny had meant, it hadn’t seemed like she was talking about Snape, but that she was talking about someone even more worthless. Someone who she had gotten rid of, somehow, except…

“But things aren’t always that simple, I know, especially when they seem like they can be. After all, I doubt we’ll ever truly be rid of him, in fact, I’m sure he plans on it.”

Lily had the alarming feeling they weren’t talking about Snape anymore.

Finally, tired, wet, shaking and feeling on the verge of getting sick herself, Lily asked, “Why is it, Ginny, that we always have such terrible conversations? Can’t we ever talk like normal people, just once?”

Ginny smiled, and shrugged, “Well, I can’t help that, Lily. I am that I am, and I have no intention of changing for anyone, not even you.”

Ginny then held out a hand to Lily to help her up on her feet, “But I can help sitting outside in this god-awful weather.”

Lily reached out tentatively, but a flash of something crossed her senses and she snatched it back, grabbing onto Rabbit’s hand instead with an awkward smile, “Thanks, Tequila, it’s been… fun.”

Ginny’s smile dimmed and a haunting emptiness took its place, something cold and exhausted and grim, “Right, fun… Yes, it’s always fun, isn’t it Lily?”

Ginny paused then, searching for something in Lily’s face, and finally said, “You know, I am… sorry, about everything.”

“Sorry?”

“I…” Ginny offered a bitter, impromptu, smile, “Things run away with me sometimes, and I was unfair to you, and I’d forgotten that… Well, for one thing you haven’t done anything yet, for another, I don’t think you ever truly intended for it to hurt. Not really. So I… I’ll still do everything I have to, and you’ll understand that in the end, but I wanted you to know that I am sorry.”
And with that, Ginny seemed to decide their conversation was done, as she slowly, on shaking legs, walked away from her and Rabbit and into the rain.

And Rabbit, as soon as Ginny had disappeared into the rain and fog, whispered in Lily’s ear, “He has some nerve for an abomination, doesn’t he?”

So, watching Ginny’s departure and standing alone with Rabbit in the rain, perhaps it was inevitable that when she returned, Lily opened the notebook and began to write.
Trotsky's Soliloquy

In which Shakespeare is quoted repeatedly, Lily goes on what might be the most awkward and terrible date in the history of the universe, and the heir of Slytherin shows his hand.

“Well, Rambo, it seems it’s just you and me,” Lily remarked to the painting. John J. Rambo, atop his glorious oversized unicorn, did not seem concerned in the slightest by Lily’s words, or if he was, then his response was so slurred in the Sylvester Stallone accent that Lily had absolutely no idea what he said.

Then again, Rambo’s enemies weren’t quite her own enemies…

No, this was more up Wizard Lenin’s alley, had he subscribed to any brand of heroism, and hadn’t been too busy… Doing whatever it was he was doing right now. Probably trailing Hermione, given his worryingly one-track mind. Still, probably best that he was, because he wasn’t going to approve of what Lily was about to do.

Well, what she was going to do, once she decided to stop stalling.

And if she had any idea at all what she was going to open with. Short and to the point, “there can only be one lord of the rings”? Something with a western twang, “this town ain’t big enough for the both of us”? Or perhaps even more brusque than that “get off my lawn, brazen upstart”?

Somehow, sitting by herself in the common room, staring into the fire and Rambo’s cold, war torn eyes, her fingers lingering on that cheap, poisonous green, cover of the notebook.

“Am I losing my nerve?” Lily asked herself aloud, of course, no one answered back, but none the less the question bared asking.

To tell the truth she had no idea what she was feeling, lingering apprehension, a sort of nervous prickling in the back of her head like she was missing something, and she’d been feeling off for weeks now. Really, ever since the Chamber of Secrets Lily had been… Well, she didn’t know what except she didn’t like it, and wasn’t really feeling the “all hail the conquering heroes” vibes that she would have expected.
“Maybe I’m tired of these backstage battles,” Lily said to herself with a sigh, maybe that was it, the fact that no one cared, that no one even noticed the difference, they hadn’t last year after all either. Well, Hermione clearly had but Hermione didn’t appreciate it either.

And she was still stalling.

“Right, well, Lily, what’s the worst that could happen?” Lily asked herself, and the answer seemed clear enough, magical coma… Still, that didn’t seem all that likely, and nothing risked then nothing gained. So, if she was going to track this guy down in less than a month then Lily had to get cracking.

Lily had to give him enough rope to hang himself with after all.

Before she could lose her nerve, again, Lily opened the notebook to the first empty page and brought down a ball point pen, hovering above the white pristine surface for a moment. And for a moment she had the haunting feeling that as soon as one drop of ink hit that page she’d be in his territory then and every advantage she ever had would be lost.

But then, was he really in her territory now, or did Hogwarts belong to him too?

“Get a hold of yourself, Lily.” Lily said to herself, and without any more delays pressed her pen to the page and wrote the first thing that came to mind.

Strangely enough, the first thing to come to mind, for whatever reason, was Shakespeare. Not Hamlet either, strangely enough, or Macbeth, or even The Merchant of Venice, no, instead, the musings of As You Like It drifted idly from her pen, without introduction, forewarning, or any reasoning behind it.

“All the world’s a stage, and all the men and women merely players; they have their exits and their entrances…”

She stopped herself, paused, regarded the words, the dark ink on the pages, somehow looking starker and more jarring than ink had any right to, before continuing with her own words, “It appears, my friend, that we’re at an impasse, or rather, that we’re both still locked in our cells for yet another round of the prisoner’s dilemma.”
It came easier then, the blunt matter of fact statements of their situation, and Lily’s pen finally began to truly move across the page with an ease that should have been there to start with, “I’ve removed your greatest weapon but I also haven’t managed to find you yet. That said, you’ve failed to eliminate me and you will never find the philosopher’s stone while I have it. So, here we are, on opposite ends of the chess board with no way to get what we really want. Except the chessboard is Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry and it has already taken quite a beating... I don’t think Hogwarts can last as long as we can.”

No, already it was crumbling, wasn’t it? Just how long could the school have stayed open with a giant snake on the loose, with Squirrel on the loose for that matter? Hogwarts turned a remarkable blind eye to the safety of its students but surely there was some sort of limit... If people started dying, well, people other than Lily...

But there was more than that, more than these cold stated facts that weren’t facts at all, but rather assumptions she’d made from the beginning, assumptions she could no longer really bring herself to believe in, “Of course, I don’t think you’re after the stone at all, I don’t think it’s even on your radar. You probably wouldn’t say no to it landing on your plate but going after it? No, you’ve had too many opportunities and have put in way too little effort. You aren’t even pretending to try. No, you want something else, something that has absolutely nothing to do with me, except even with that I’m still getting in your way. So, given our current impasse, maybe it’s time we have a frank conversation with one another. What do you say?”

For a moment, nothing happened, the notebook stayed a notebook, the room a room, and Lily was sitting there staring at a page and looking like a complete idiot. Then it changed, it started with a slow vibrating tingle in her fingers as they gripped the notebook, small shocks of static electricity striking at her fingertips, Lily’s written message disappeared, flooding together towards the spine of the book, and then, replacing this, jagged, unintelligible, dark scribbles flooded from the center of the book and outwards, almost dripping in ink.

Lily dropped it, stepped back, but the notebook didn’t stop, and peering at it closer Lily could almost make out words as they tumbled over top of one another, almost like they were fighting for dominance.

“I knew it, goddammit I knew it…”

“If you prick us, do we not bleed?... And if you wrong us, shall we not revenge?”

“I knew it!”
“Goddammit!”

“I had something for this, I know I did…”

“…I swear if I have to listen to another word from Pansy Parkinson I’ll…”

“Of course, I knew it. I’ve always known it.”

“No, I didn’t.”

“Now, what was it? It couldn’t have been Macbeth, was it Shakespeare at all?”

“No, I did, of course I knew it, well, when I saw her…”

“You had me at hello? Was that it, no… No, that’s just…”

“And what’s with all the Albanians? Since when does Hogwarts even accept transfer students? And why do they all hang around her like fleas on a rat? Don’t they have anything better to do with their time?!”

“No, it wasn’t Shakespeare, it wouldn’t be Shakespeare. But what was it?”

“Goddammit!”

Lily, for her own part, staring down at the thing with raised eyebrows, had concluded that the diary was having some sort of a magic epileptic fit, apparently brought on by Lily’s own monologue (which, really, she’d had better ones, this was nothing to go into seizures about). Just as she was considering leaving it there and washing her hands of the whole thing the pages cleared to white once again, like nothing had happened, and then a short, simple, sentence appeared, almost polite, “Of course, Lily, I’d be delighted to meet you face to face.”
Lily blinked, stared down at the notebook, now blank as the ink faded back into the pages. She looked back up, at the empty room, then back at the notebook. For perhaps the first time in her life, or, one of the few times in her life, Lily had the distinct feeling that she was about to make a terrible decision.

And that there would probably be grave consequences.

Another, slightly more jagged, almost nervous sentence appeared, “Lily? You are still… here, right?”

Slowly, with a grimace, Lily picked up the notebook and the pen once again. Only, only as she looked around, Lily realized that if something really did happen to her this time then even Wizard Lenin wouldn’t know. She’d just… disappear.

(And why did that make her feel like such an island of a human being?)

“Oh, stop that,” Lily said to herself, “You’re immortal, it’s embarrassing to have this much trepidation.”

Especially since she’d spent most of the past ten minutes talking herself out of that fear. No, it was time for desperate measures, it was time to take the plunge and hope for the best. That was, after all, when Lily herself was at her finest, “Yep, still here and… sure.”

“Excellent,” the diary responded, and was she just imagining the smug smile, but before she could consider what kind of expressions one could gather from a piece of paper it said, “And, ah, this might be a little bit uncomfortable but I’m afraid it’s the best way to go about this.”

And it almost felt a bit like dying, dying a little death rather, like the world tilted backwards, gravity spun on its head, and the room faded into black as Lily fell forward through time and space itself, until, finally, she found herself crash landing in what looked like the Slytherin common room.

Only, it wasn’t quite the Slytherin common room of Lily’s first year, or at least, not that cold and frankly irritating place that Lily had never paid too much mind, there was a lighter air to it, the colors brighter than Lily remembered (the greens encompassing more shades, the silver almost metallic), there was a roaring strangely friendly fire in the fireplace, one which cast benign shadows on her surroundings and gave things softer angles.
Getting to her feet though, she found herself staring at the unfamiliar faces around her, some of them almost familiar, holding traces of people she knew (Malfoy’s pale blonde hair, Crabbe’s bloated features…), but even as she looked at them they didn’t look at her, rather they seemed frozen, caught inside of this moment and unable to even realize they were trapped inside it.

Not paying Lily any mind at all.

But then her eyes caught something, the one familiar face in the room, and the only one looking directly at her. There, standing there by himself, with a ridiculous grin on his face, his pale blue eyes almost sparkling in the firelight, was a younger, teenaged, Wizard Lenin dressed in prefect’s robes.

“Lily, good, you’re here,” he said, and was it just her or was his voice unnervingly younger than it should have been, pushing the others out of the way, and at his lack of attention they faded into wisps of silver smoke, dissipating into the firelight, “Here, sit down, do you want tea?”

When he reached her, he put his hands on her shoulders, strangely warm even through the layers of clothing, and he steered her cheerfully towards the couch before sitting her down in it and, with a wave of his hand, summoning one of the great arm chairs to sit directly across from her.

“Oh,” Lily started only to be interrupted by the youthful, rambling, Wizard Lenin doppelganger.

“Of course, you want tea, you always want tea, I’ll get you some tea,” He said, and with a slight wave of his hand a table appeared, complete with a small lit candle, a vase of roses, and a tea set which he immediately began to pour for both her and himself.

There was an odd, alarming, and frankly horrifying sense of romance to the whole atmosphere. That, or it was the Slytherin common room getting to her once again. Since, frankly, Lily had been quite glad to see the back of it.

“Forgive me if I’m overeager, Lily, but I’ve been waiting for over fifty years and expectations well… They build up.” He paused as he sat down, offered her a smile, a soft, strange, and more than a little alarming smile that Lily had never imagined seeing on Wizard Lenin’s features and yet here it was. However, he didn’t pause long enough for Lily to even take a breath, let alone start talking, “Of course, I wasn’t sure I was going to see you again, even in the far-off future, I’d almost given up on it entirely… I thought about it though, more often than I’d like to admit, I thought about how we’d meet again.”
Lily tried to focus on what he was saying, she really did, but mostly she felt herself lingering on how surreal this all was, and then wondering if she’d ever been in a situation that’d felt this absurd before. She thought she had, with the Dursleys, even with Hogwarts, but this was blowing all of them right out of the water.

He paused again, considered her, and Lily took that moment to open her mouth, but once again he cut her off without even seeming to notice, “Of course, I’d hoped you’d be a little older… legal age would have been… nice. Still, I thought about it, and of course, everything else in my future too, and yet here we are, after all these years, and I have no idea what to do with myself.”

No, she was wrong, it could get more surreal.

He stopped abruptly, looked at the full tea cup then back at her, “Do you not like your tea?”

Lily looked down at it, looked back up, and with trepidation picked it up and took a long deep sip. It had the bitter taste of unreality to it. Finally, now that he seemed to have paused for more than thirty seconds, Lily took it as her chance to interject, “You’re not Voldemort.”

And it seemed so obvious, meeting him face to face, that this man, this Lenin doppelganger, wasn’t the same one who had possessed Quirrell the year before. And that alone, perhaps, was worth this trip, whatever consequences it might bring.

The room almost seemed to freeze, and with it the shadows became stark, darker, more jagged against the wall. Finally, slowly, and rather curtly, a cold far more Lenin-esque smile painted on his lips he said, “I see no reason why I shouldn’t be, Lily. I have every right to be, just as much as anyone, perhaps more as I know exactly what was sacrificed to become him.”

Now she could see Wizard Lenin in him, more than she had seen before, that eerie cheerfulness was gone and the bitter edge remained only… Only it was more ragged than Wizard Lenin ever let himself become, it had a rawness, a powerful rawness that Wizard Lenin always disguised in suave and dry wit.

There was no dry wit here as he continued, his hands now curling in on themselves as he snarled, “More, I didn’t go and get myself blown up, picking fights with the one person I could never hope to defeat in battle! So, surely, I’m the better candidate for Voldemort.”

Lily could only nod slightly and give a slight, “Hm,” a sound that neither agreed nor disagreed.
That seemed to jar him out of his mood, because the fire began to dance again, the lighter atmosphere returned, and he sighed, staring her directly in the eye and started in a far easier tone, “If you’re asking whether I have any vendetta against you, specifically, then no, Lily, I don’t.”

Abruptly the winds of his mood changed before Lily could agree or disagree with this statement as he spat out, “Not that I’m not bitter! Just that I’m not particularly burning for revenge either, right now… After a fair bit of thought and contemplation. I… Have put us both in a bad position, as you yourself have pointed out repeatedly.”

Good lord, Lily had never realized how little Wizard Lenin talked. Compared to Quirrell, Wizard Lenin had been a chatterbox of dramatic monologues and fits of rage, but good god, whoever she was dealing with now rambled… Not only did he ramble, he was all over the place, the emotional whiplash was almost unreal.

Frankly, Lily wasn’t sure what to think about it, just repeating to herself the conclusion that this couldn’t possibly be Hindenburg. Not unless he’d hit his head repeatedly or suffered brain damage upon exiting Quirrell’s corpse.

Still, while this answered a part of, it wasn’t what Lily had come here for. So, while she still had the chance, and while she still had the nerve, Lily asked, “What do you want?”

He almost didn’t seem to know how to take that, he blinked, faltered, and then he let out a dry barking laugh before an amused smile settled on his lips, “I want what anyone wants, meaning, significance.”

He motioned to their surroundings, to the empty faces of their peers, the fluid walls, the evanescent atmosphere, “You see, we are not in any real place at the moment, rather we’re in my kingdom, my memory, perhaps my very soul.”

Without a twitch or any movement at all, as if to demonstrate this, the roses turned to a pure and blinding white before settling back into their romantic red.

He continued with a sigh, his voice wearier and for a moment, his pale blue eyes almost resembled Death’s more than they did Wizard Lenin’s, there was such eternity inside of them, “But, that said, having complete control over your existence, over your entire reality, being a god, loses its appeal rather quickly. There is no meaning in this place, no time, no matter, no existence, just Tom Marvolo Riddle and the endlessness of eternity.”
He brought his hands together on the table, looked at the way his pale fingers interwove with another, and said softly, “I used to pretend. I lived in fake memories I built for myself, dreams of my glorious future… But when I stopped being able to tell the difference, between what really happened and what I imagined, it became dangerous. There were consequences, now, now it takes me too long to reflect on what occurred and what didn’t and just how long I’ve been trapped in here.”

The walls, for a moment, became transparent, and Lily could almost see these bitter fantasies roaming inside of them before they gained their opacity.

Wizard Lenin’s youthful doppelganger didn’t even blink, his rage returning, as he ranted, “I wasn’t even supposed to be real anyway! There wasn’t supposed to be a Turing test, not for me, nothing I’d be able to pass at any rate. I was supposed to be a memory, a memory of Tom Marvolo Riddle, this glossy magical machine that might mimic human thought but never truly possess it! It wasn’t even supposed to be a sacrifice, and yet here we are, here I am, forever, in this endless potential, slowly going mad…”

Lily, for her own part, wasn’t sure how to take this, both the highs and the lows, or for that matter the question of his sanity, and what sanity can mean for something like him… Or her. Because, Lily had those thoughts too, didn’t she?

The shadow of eternity forever looming overhead, breathing down her neck and whispering that nothing had consequence, nothing had meaning, and any attempt to prove otherwise was nothing more than an exercise in angst.

And that was when it finally clicked together, that third, unspoken, missing piece of the puzzle, the one neither she nor Wizard Lenin had ever considered, “You’re the first horcrux, the diary.”

For a moment, a cold alarm appeared on his face, but then it drifted and he responded, “Yes, I am.”

And it was then, that Lily realized exactly what he wanted, because he wanted the same thing Wizard Lenin had wanted from the very beginning, “You want a body.”

Everything shattered, the walls fracturing around them, the people crumbling into dust, everything gone until it was only her sitting across from him inside of his very being as his pale eyes dissected her. For a moment, there was nothing but the unspoken threat, the invisible knife overhead, but then, he conceded, “Yes, I’m the first and only horcrux Voldemort created, through patricide.”
A smile on his lips, a dramatic pause, then, “Anyone else would have been dead, Lily, long before they put two and two together. As always, you’re entirely too clever for your own good, but then, that’s why we’re such good friends.”

Abruptly, and he always seemed to abrupt, this other half of Wizard Lenin’s soul, he remarked with that overly cheerful smile, “It’s good to see you, Lily, even if you are twelve, and could have had the decency of being at least sixteen. Twelve is such an awkward, prepubescent stage of life and just makes all of this so much more difficult.”

“Why is my age important?” Lily asked, and she could be asking many different things but suddenly she seemed caught on that, alarmed by that, “You keep bringing it up.”

His face was blank for a moment, a second too long, the Slytherin common room reasserting itself awkwardly while they waited, and he responded, “That’s not important.”

She had a feeling it was very important, to him, but he just didn’t want to admit why.

The diary… She’d always wondered when she’d meet him, it had seemed inevitable, and she supposed it was because here he was right now. There was Wizard Lenin in him but also an awkward uncertainty, the flying emotions, things that didn’t belong to Wizard Lenin at all. His goals though, his dreams, those weren’t so different from Wizard Lenin’s, closer than Hindenburg’s had seemed.

Was this what Wizard Lenin had been like, when he was young?

She shifted awkwardly in her seat, eyes drifting to the roses and back, then asked, “Since you don’t really seem to care about me specifically…”

He interjected, calmly, with a cool confidence, “I care very much for you specifically.”

“…Can’t you go and do whatever you need to do outside of Hogwarts?” she finished, taking a moment to stare him directly in the eyes, searching for something.

She paused, tasted the rest of her words before she spoke them, “If you get off my lawn, then I don’t
have any issue with you doing whatever it is you think you have to do.”

For a moment, he almost seemed to flicker, but it was just a moment, before he sighed and stated, “No, no I’m going to do this right here…”

He considered her, a small grimace appearing on his face and his eyes narrowed in judgement, “The truth, Lily, is that I’m a little put out with you at the moment. You, after all, appear to have chosen them, your peers, been corrupted by them.”

One of his hands reached out for hers, taking it in his, turning it this way and that in his hand, “I’ve always liked Hogwarts, but I can’t help but wonder if they’ve poisoned you against me, and more, you’ve left me little other choice.”

His nails dug into her palms but Lily didn’t flinch or look away, even as he leaned closer, his face inches from hers, “You were willing to kill me for Ginny Weasley, you were willing to die for her, for that red headed little bitch with a hopeless crush, someone who can’t even see you for what you really are, a being of great and terrible power wrapped up in this package we call Eleanor Lily Potter.”

His nails broke skin, the pain a sickly sharp thing, but not nearly as sharp as his eyes, “More, you abandoned me, you left me over fifty years ago for these people. And I’m taking it very, very, personally.”

He leaned back, released her hands, and smiled at her as if there was nothing wrong at all, “There’s no comprise here, Lily. I’ve already made my decision, and I’ll just keep doing what I’m doing, without any way for you to stop me or find where I really am in this castle. Then, when I’m done with that, you’ll reconsider everything, and it will all be the way it should have been.”

With a small amount of concentration, she healed her hands, slowed by the fact that there were no true cuts, only the idea of them in this Not-Lenin’s head, and then she said carefully, slowly, a dagger in her voice, “You just admitted that it was Ginny, now I know exactly where you are.”

He offered her a charming, pleasant, smile, “Well, you did, but I took care of that.”

He waved his hand as if his next words were inconsequential, “Which is all the worse for Ginny Weasley, since she’ll likely forever exist in limbo, some part of her Tom Riddle another part Ginny, but such are the consequences of her foolishness.”
She wondered then, as she thought back of every meeting she’d ever had with Ginny, if there was anything left of the girl after all. Suddenly, feeling a bit more petulant than she had earlier, she remarked, “I think you’re going to be Trotsky, because you’re the horcrux that none of the horcruxes can stand, and you’re the most likely to end up with an ice pick lodged in your brain.”

She smiled at him, equally pleasantly, and added, “That, or if you’re feeling in the ‘Animal Farm’ mood, we can always just call you Snowball for short.”

He just smiled, pleasantly, “Best of luck, Lily.”

And then, without leaving her room to get a word in edgewise or even make a move towards him, Lily was booted out of the diary and back into her body, which apparently had collapsed on her bed in the Default dormitory.

A glance around showed the sleeping forms of Rabbit, Luna, Hermione, and all the others… One of them must have moved her to the bed after finding her passed out on the floor.

Groaning, she pushed herself upright, a headache plaguing her, almost as bad as some of Wizard Lenin’s old rage headaches. Still, she pushed herself to her feet and began her unsteady but determined journey to wherever the hell the Gryffindor common room was. It was eerily empty, she didn’t know how long she’d been trapped in a diary, clearly it was the middle of the night, but all the same she felt like she was running out of time.

All she could do was follow the vague trail of Ginny through the castle, leading her to one of the towers on the side and through the portrait of a fat lady, up the stairs again moving past the red and gold décor until she found herself staring at the sleeping forms of the first year Gryffindor girls.

And for a moment all she could do was stare at them, stare at their proximity to Ginny, and then without a word she silently began digging through Ginny’s belongings, fruitlessly, as it made no appearance, then without a word, she moved onto the next girl’s belongings, then the next, until finally the room itself had been ransacked and breakfast only half an hour away.

She rubbed at her face, collapsing onto the floor, her back against Ginny’s trunk, and with a wave of her hand put things back into her original order. And for a moment she just contemplated sitting there, just staying there forever, remaining perfectly impotent while Ginny was eaten alive.
But there was still Wizard Lenin to tell, there were still classes, still exams upcoming, still that ever looming deadline of the holidays.

So, she got up and trudged her way down the stairs, until she was at the Default table, sitting with her head in her hands, feeling more exhausted than she had in weeks, stabbing at her piece of toast, and wondering why she was even bothering with any of this.

Well, for one thing, it was the principle of the matter, it was an insult to her person that he thought he could get away with it. But if Wizard Lenin had asked… If he’d asked for someone like, say, Ron Weasley to disappear so he could exist instead, would she have been so morally opposed? And besides, if she couldn’t manage to track him down by Christmas then it was game over anyway.

Next to her Wizard Lenin was still bickering with Hermione about Communism again, the words bourgeois, capitalist, and pig flying about in tandem, Lily lacking the energy to parse it. She felt like she lacked the energy for anything, especially a very in depth and serious conversation with Wizard Lenin about the rogue half of his soul.

She’d just talk to him about it later.

“I’m just so done with this place,” Lily stated as she dropped her head onto the table, eliciting raised eyebrows from her Default peers but no actual comments, probably figuring this was akin to Lily’s usual weekly rant about how she was so done with Hogwarts.

“Don’t you say that every week?” Hermione asked, as if on cue.

And Lily briefly looked up, nonplussed, “I really mean it this time,” then before she put her head back down she added, “Also, Lenin, you and I have to talk… Later.”

“We can talk now,” Wizard Lenin commented with raised eyebrows, clearly not grasping the sensitivity of the upcoming conversation.

“Later,” Lily stated with authority, frankly not in the mood to deal with anything serious.

Of course, perhaps because of that thought, something dreadfully serious decided to occur.
“Lily,” a voice said from behind her, and Lily turned not to see Ginny Weasley, but instead an eerily smiling Pansy Parkinson, who wasn’t acting at all like Pansy Parkinson, and who didn’t seem to mind the fact that everyone was now staring at her and her deliberate defiance of all that was Pansy Parkinson.

“I just wanted to check in, you know, before the grand finale,” Pansy asked, before she tilted her head and asked, “Are you feeling alright, you look a bit peaked?”

Lily felt the color drain from her face as slowly, perhaps too slowly, Lily put the pieces together, “Oh you son of a…”

“Now, there’s no need for that kind of language, I was only trying to be polite,” Pansy said, before reaching out and giving Lily’s shoulder a brotherly pat, “We’ll be in touch, and, hello Lenin.”

Pansy then strolled away from the Default table, back to Slytherin whence she came, and then all the sudden Wizard Trotsky seemed to disappear from her completely and Pansy was back, shaking herself, and then cooing over Draco and making faces at Lenin from across the room.

And the rest of them just stared, Blaise finally asking, “What the hell just happened?”

“I have no idea,” Daphne responded, “… But I think I prefer it, to the normal Parkinson at any rate.”

“True, there was no Lenny-poo, or things on fire,” Blaise offered, which only caused Wizard Lenin to further grimace but write it off, just like the rest of them.

Lily though was still staring, wondering if… If he’d just shown his hand, but why, and why so blatantly, and why did he think that this didn’t matter at all? That Lily would somehow not act on this information and… Throw him out of the castle or something?

“What the hell is she doing?” Hermione asked, and Lily turned to see Pansy climbing on top of the table, just as Lily had done earlier that year before killing the basilisk, and Pansy’s eyes searched the crowd until they met Lily’s, and she smiled, “To be or not to be, that is the question. Whether ‘tis nobler in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune or to take arms against a sea of troubles and by opposing end them. To die, to sleep…”

Pansy picked up a knife from the table, inspected it, held her wand against it and caused it to grow
sharper, and then without a word to her stunned audience Pansy Parkinson began to press the knife against her wrist.

“Oh my god,” Hermione whispered even as Lily lunged across the room, even as Tracey Davis and Millicent Bullstrode struggled to get Pansy to drop the knife, blood already starting to drip down her wrists.

Dumbledore was already headed towards her along with Snape, but before they could even reach her, another girl, this time from the Gryffindor table, stood on top of the table, took a breath, and picked up where Pansy had left off, “…No more—and by sleep to say we end the heartache, and the thousand natural shocks, that flesh is heir to. ‘Tis a consummation devoutly to be wished. To die, to sleep—to sleep – perchance to dream…”

Another knife, another desperate struggle, a spell, the girl brought down, and another girl at another table rising to take her place, the heir of Slytherin undefeated, living in the spirits of everyone and anyone, “…Ay, there’s the rub, for in that sleep of death what dreams may come when we have shuffled off this mortal coil, must give us pause. There’s the respect that makes calamity of so long life. For who would bear the whips and scorns of time, th’ oppressor’s wrong, the proud man’s contumely the pangs of despised love, the law’s delay, the insolence of office, and the spurns that patient merit of th’ unworthy takes, when he himself might his quietus make with a bare bodkin?”

A fourth, “…Who would fardels bear, to grunt and sweat under a weary life, but that the dread of something after death, the undiscovered country, from whose bourn no traveler returns, puzzles the will, and makes us rather bear those ills we have than fly to others that we know not of?”

A fifth, “Thus conscious does make cowards of us all, and thus the native hue of resolution is sicklied o’er with the pale cast of thought, and enterprise of great pitch and moment with this regard their currents turn awry and lose the name of action.”

And then, turning around, a sixth, clapping slowly, clapping at the sight of a good chunk of the first and second year population either restrained or else collapsed twitching on their tables, nothing seemingly left inside of them, each one no doubt to be sent off to the hospital wing.

And Eleanor Potter nowhere close to having defeated the heir of Slytherin.
So Long, Frank Lloyd Wright

In which Lily desperately impersonates The Dread Pirate Roberts, Dumbledore’s suspicions come to light, and Lily and Wizard Lenin have both a heartwarming and heart-wrenching moment.

“What did you do?!”

There was a distinct feeling of déjâ vu to Wizard Lenin asking her that question.

Lily, Lenin Rabbitson, and the girl’s dungeon bathroom with the privacy wards turned all the way up when all good Default second years would be rotting inside History of Magic. In other words, after Wizard Trotsky’s decision to perform Shakespeare in the park via a quarter of the female first and second years, Lily and Wizard Lenin were having their much needed pow-wow in about the only place someone could expect any privacy in this school.

The bathroom that nobody liked.

Except for Tequila, who turned out to be Wizard Trotsky wearing Ginny Weasley’s eleven-year-old body like a hand-puppet. Still, after that show and the aftermath of too many little girls carted off to the hospital wing while suffering epileptic fits, Lily doubted he’d make an appearance here.

Or, well, he might, she was having a very tough time predicting his train of thought. But it would be a little overdramatic, even for him.

“What did I do?” Lily asked before pushing Lenin Rabbitson slightly, causing him to totter on his unstable Albanian adolescent limbs, “No, no, what did you do, that’s the real question!”

“What do I have to do with this?” he motioned to himself before motioning to her, “I find you, passed out on the floor, then you disappear in the middle of the night and show up at breakfast, drowning in your cereal…”

“It was toast,” Lily corrected, but Wizard Lenin was having none of that as he sneered the twelve-year-old version of his famous sneer, that wasn’t nearly as intimidating on his Albanian twelve-year-
old face.

“… And then we get ritualistic Shakespeare festivals featuring Pansy Parkinson and company! So, tell me, Lily, how you aren’t involved in all of this.”

“Well, I don’t know, Lenin,” Lily balked, too tired to stand here bickering with Wizard Lenin when… Well, when she didn’t know what would happen, “He’s your soul, isn’t he?”

Then breathing out, cutting him off before he could even get started, she said, “It’s Trotsky, I mean the diary, he’s not Squirrel or Hindenburg or the original you, but the original horcrux, and he wants a body.”

For a moment he paled, eyes darting everywhere, as if in search for a lurking Dumbledore, “Don’t go talking about horcruxes in…” then he paused, eyebrows raised, “Trotsky? Lily, Trotsky? Of all the communists you could have picked, Trotsky? How does that even work thematically and... Oh, you call him Snowball for short, don’t you?”

Then, appearing to reach his usual limit, rubbing at the bridge of his nose, he said, “It’s not the diary, I left that in safekeeping, in the safekeeping of one of my sane and relatively sober minions. Malfoy would never dare risk setting something like that loose in a school with his own son…”

Lily barreled right over his words, “Well, never trust a crack head, Lenin, because he’s here…”

Only, of course, for Wizard Lenin to start loudly muttering over her own words, “Honestly, not really a crack head, he was actually fairly well behaved in the late 70’s considering…”

Leaving Lily to speak even louder over him to cut him off, “He’s here and he wants a body, and for whatever reason, he kind of wants to blow up Hogwarts.”

This, finally, seemed to stop Wizard Lenin in his tracks. A sharp disbelieving laugh from Lenin Rabbitson as he leaned against a sink decorated with snakes, “Blow up Hogwarts? Do you have any idea how absurd you sound?”

He motioned with pale thin fingers to the stonework and foundation, “This is… This is the only true home I’ve ever had, Lily, the only place in all the world that I have ever belonged. No iteration of me would ever…”
“Yeah, well, he will,” Lily said, eyes anything but uncertain as she stared across at her greatest friend and advisor, “He made that very clear, and Lenin, I don’t think you’re the bluffing type.”

Granted, Wizard Trotsky did seem like the type to radically change his mind or opinions on a mere whim, but bluff, no, that seemed… To not be his style. Any iteration of Wizard Lenin’s style. It reeked too much of cowardice and incompetence, not to live up to your own deadly threats.

Oh no, Hogwarts would be made an example of, Lily was certain of it.

“He told you?” Wizard Lenin asked, “When did he tell you all of this?”

“While you were out stalking Hermione,” Lily said, “Which, by the way, it was Ginny, the whole time, well I mean, not now, now it’s… everyone but can we just admit that I was…”

“So, while I was out ‘stalking’ Granger,” Wizard Lenin said, a hand in the air to stop her rant, “You decided to meet with your greatest enemy, face to face, knowing how undeniably stupid that was, after I have told you multiple times how undeniably stupid that was, and he tells you that he’s the diary and that he’s going to blow up Hogwarts.”

“And that he wants a body, yes,” Lily said before grudgingly adding, “There might have also been some weird things about dating, and looking forward to things, and me being inconveniently twelve but that was creepy and much less interesting.”

For a moment he just stared, pale blue eyes, light frame and pale white hair, and then, “…There are no words.”

“But there are words, and the words are, we’ve got to do something before he infects the whole school with… weird Shakespeare seizures!” Judging by the expression on Wizard Lenin’s face, he was unimpressed by Lily’s impassioned call to action.

“I thought you liked this place!”

Because really, if any of them should desperately fighting for the survival of Hogwarts, it should be Wizard Lenin. This strange role of Lily having to care if the school stayed open, well, more than she
did about the few acquaintances she had becoming Trotsky sock puppets, was more than a little surreal for comfort.

“God forbid I leave Hogwarts to be infected by Shakespeare seizures, of all things,” Wizard Lenin said with a small shake of his head, rubbing a hand through his hair, then asking, “How is this my life?”

Then with a great sigh and giving her a dull look as he tried to gather his sense of balance and pragmatism, he said, “You’re right, of course, the original or the diary, if anyone dies in this mess, Hogwarts will pay for the consequences.”

“So… Planning, we should plan, things.”

“I told you,” Wizard Lenin said, “You have to take care of…”

“Clearly,” Lily said, “Hermione Granger is not the issue… And that I was right the whole time.”

For a moment, he just looked at her, a spark of indignation in his eyes but Lily just stared back, because dammit, she was going to listen to him admit it out loud.

Finally, like pulling teeth, he grudgingly said, “You may have had a point, Lily, and perhaps a traumatized Hermione is just eerily reminiscent of my own personality… In a far inferior form.”

“If by ‘may have’ you mean ‘did’ then yes, yes I agree… Only now I have no idea who the hell he is anymore. I mean, he’s kind of still Ginny, or at least, has the ability to become Ginny, but he can also become a bunch of people…” Lily paused, considered Lenin Rabbitson with raised eyebrows, “Wait a minute, could you have done that? Possessed a bunch of different people all at the same time and quoted scary Shakespeare?”

“No, Lily, if I had the ability to be anything other than a nattering voice in your head that you spent most of your childhood ignoring, believe me, I would have taken full advantage of it.”

“…He’s much better at this horcrux thing than you are,” Lily couldn’t help but point out, which, judging by the murderous rage on Lenin Rabbitson’s face, he did not appreciate.
“Thank you, Lily, for your undying support,” Wizard Lenin spat, “Regardless, I’m honestly not sure how he’s doing this. Possession is old, dark, and deep magic that cannot be done quickly or even easily, horcrux or original he’d have to invest both magic and time into this to be able to take over even one of them let alone six or more.”

Then, a shadow passing over his face, a dark and sober thought, “And if it’s true possession… Then he holds a piece of all of them and all of them a piece of him, he has become a hydra, there is no longer a singular head to cut off.”

“That sounds bad,” Lily noted, to which he just offered her a tight, thin smile, and there they sat, in silence for a moment, Lily knowing what he’d say if he opened his mouth again, that if they really wanted to get rid of him, they’d have to somehow root out everyone he’d possessed and… Well… Kill all of them.

Lily may have been responsible for a not small number of deaths in Albania, killed Squirrel with her bare hands, but even she paused at the idea of a massacre of a bunch of eleven and twelve-year-old girls.

“We’re in deep shit, aren’t we?” Lily finally summarized.

“Well, Hogwarts is in deep shit, you and I, I imagine we’ll abide,” he offered back with a smile.

Lily sighed, threw her hands in the air, and, for a moment just looked across at him, somehow the same as ever yet so very different from how he’d always been immaterial and inside of her head.

“Remember, Lenin, when we worked together on everything?” Lily said, “The little things, the grand things, and everything in between?”

She scuffed a dark shoe against the stones of the floor, looked at the grooves there, and wondered if, staring at the cracks in between, she could stare all the way down into the chamber itself, “I’m not very good at being independent, Lenin. I can’t… I can’t do this alone.”

She looked up, reached out a hand towards him, offered him her best encouraging grin, “I need your help, he’s you more than he’s me, and I can’t predict him, not without your help. If we’re going to beat him, well, I think we’re going to have to do it together. Just like old times.”
For a moment he simply stared, then a slow and soft smile crawled its way onto his lips and his hand reached out to hers. “Just like old times... You sound like one of your heartwarming Christmas specials.”

“‘Tis the season,” Lily responded, squeezing his hand perhaps a little too tightly.

“‘Tis a bit early for the season,” Wizard Lenin said back, “All the same, let’s hope that this time around I’m a little less impotent than a bodiless wraith inside your head and that you’ve managed to gain some common sense.”

And then they just stood there, smiling at each other like idiots for perhaps a moment too long, until Lily remembered to let go of his hand and dropped hers awkwardly to her side, “Right, well, what now?”

“… Don’t we have class?” Wizard Lenin asked.

“History of Magic,” Lily said with a wave of her hand, “That’s not a real class, besides, don’t we have your evil and or crazy twin to catch?”

“If we had a professor he’d be so disappointed,” Wizard Lenin scoffed, already moving out the door, “I need to think, that’s why you asked for my help, isn’t it?”

“Well, yeah, but we’re sort of on a time limit here…”

“An hour or two won’t kill us all, and if Hermione Granger isn’t the mothership, so to speak, then I need time to rethink things,” Wizard Lenin shoved his hands into his pockets, waltzing out the door with a smirk, as if he hadn’t a care in the world, leaving Lily to gawk at him and then stumble after him.

“You’re taking this obnoxiously well,” Lily said.

“I don’t know, it feels strangely good to clear the air,” he didn’t even look at her, just started on climbing the stairs, one at a time, gripping the handrail too tightly even as Lily glared at him.
“You do realize we’re heading to History of Magic, right?” Lily said, “Arguably the most useless class ever.”

“Oh, no, that title belongs to Defense Against the Dark Arts,” Wizard Lenin scoffed, “I’ve never been attacked by so many rogue magical pests in my life.”

“But we do something in Defense, at least, I mean someone is there, what the hell even is History of Magic?”

“Well, when I took it, we had a professor,” Wizard Lenin said, “Granted, Binns was so boring he could put the dead to sleep, but none the less, there was a curriculum.”

“Great, what happened to him?”

“Oh… I think he died somewhere in there,” Wizard Lenin said with shrug of his thin Albanian shoulders, pausing on the stair landing to catch his breath while he looked murderously up at how many they still had left to climb, “Why did I let you talk me into a clandestine meeting in the dungeons of all places?”

“I believe the question you’re looking for is, ‘Why doesn’t Hogwarts have an elevator?”’ Lily said instead and then paused, “Wait, so the professor just died and they never replaced him?”

“Well, when you put it like that, it does sound a bit bizarre,” for a moment Wizard Lenin had a thoroughly confused look on his face, but then he seemed to decide this wasn’t important, “Either way, point being, it wasn’t always a complete waste of time.”

Lily highly doubted that, either way, she felt an almost unwilling optimistic smile creeping along her face, goaded on by Wizard Lenin’s own unusual optimism… Perhaps, like he said, it was the clearing of the air or him finally admitting he’d been barking up the wrong tree, or maybe it was just the acknowledgement that together there wasn’t anything they couldn’t defeat.

“Do you think we’ll have to exorcize him from the castle?” Lily asked, skipping a few steps ahead of Wizard Lenin and looking back over her shoulder at him.

“It’s a possibility, not my forte, if I’m being honest,” Wizard Lenin said and then with a frown, “And, if that’s what we’re doing, you do know that shouting ‘the power of Christ compels you’ and
standing under a lamppost with a brief case will get you nowhere.”

Dashing all her hopes and dreams, as always, he added, “I told you, give me time to think of something, and I guarantee it will be better than us reenacting ‘The Exorcist’ in front of the live studio audience of Hogwarts.”

“I wouldn’t mind reenacting ‘The Exorcist’, Lily pointed out, but the flat expression on his face was all she needed to know, to know that he was well aware of the fact that Lily was more than fine reenacting any of her favorite films.

With that she left him to his labored journey up the staircase, stopping every once in a while on a platform to catch his breath, and her own mind wandered to Wizard Trotsky. Or rather, this unseen plan of his, the diary he’d given to her, and the strange diaries that had been floating around the school…

Eventually, they reached the classroom, where, under normal circumstances, half the class would have been sleeping, Hermione Granger would have actually been reading through the text book, Lily herself would stroll in late or not at all, and the rest would be idly chatting.

This time though, a good number of seats were empty, and there was a deathly tense silence to the room as Lily entered and all heads turned towards her and Lenin Rabbitson. And they just… stared. Not quite accusing, but there was a fear and need of explanation in their eyes as they looked at her, assuming somehow that she had all the answers and all the information.

“So… How are you all doing?” Lily asked, with a painfully awkward grin, when the silence became too unbearable for comfort.

You could have heard the sound of a pin dropping.

“That well, huh, well, sorry Lenin and I were late, we were discussing communism, and things... It’s his favorite topic,” Lily then, ignoring Wizard Lenin’s glare and look of disapproval, made her way to one of the empty tables in the back, and did her best to ignore all of the eyes on her by placing her head into her hands and closing her eyes, letting herself drift off to sleep, remembering that she hadn’t really gotten a chance to sleep in…

Well, she didn’t really remember when, weeks since she’d gotten a decent night sleep, time travel was really getting to her.
There was a wretched sound of scraping against the stone floor, Lily’s eyes flew open, she jolted into an alert state, flailing hands connecting with Neville’s baby-fat heavy cheeks, “Oh, Neville, what are… Why are you sitting here?”

That was, perhaps more accusatory than was needed, but to be fair, he’d interrupted Lily’s much needed nap. Glancing over a few tables, she could see that Wizard Lenin had taken up his own empty table, and was busily staring at a wall, thinking… He’d probably been doing that for a half hour at least.

“What’s up?”

“This morning, I…” he paused looked at her, looked at her as if he was seeing her for the first time in his life, or rather, like he had been given all the pieces of her before now but was only now putting them together, “Headmaster Dumbledore says that this has all happened before, you know, fifty years ago.”

“The chamber of secrets was opened fifty years ago, and it attacked muggle born students just like it did this time, and they arrested Hagrid for it, broke his wand and everything… But Headmaster Dumbledore didn’t think that Hagrid did it.”

“…Alright,” Lily said, not entirely sure what Neville was getting at with all of this. Although, Wizard Lenin had been decidedly vague on that whole episode of his life, she was pretty sure he’d never explicitly mentioned blaming Hagrid for setting a giant racist snake loose in the school but then, he’d never gone out of his way to hide this fact either.

She also just failed to see what this had to do with anything.

Or why Neville was looking at her like…
Like he was trying to intimidate her, or else interrogate her subtly, by dropping hints to events to fifty years ago which very few should have any relevant details of. Dumbledore, had told him this, he’d said.

Dumbledore had told him.

“What exactly, do you want, Neville?”

Seeing her blunt response for what it was, Neville summoned whatever courage he had inside of himself, his knuckles white as he gripped his hands together, and said, “You know things about all of this that no one else seems to know, things even Headmaster Dumbledore doesn’t know. You found the Chamber of Secrets, you fought the heir, you found Lenin Rabbitson… How come you know all this stuff that even Headmaster Dumbledore doesn’t know? Just what are you hiding from everyone, Ellie?”

She shouldn’t be surprised, not really, and in the end she wasn’t she was just… Disappointed. Not betrayed, not really, she didn’t… She didn’t have enough faith for that, and even then, this wasn’t really a betrayal, he had every reason to think what he was thinking. Especially if Dumbledore, who knew a fair share of Wizard Lenin’s dirty secrets, was whispering in his ear.

“I had hoped, Neville,” Lily finally said a sigh in her exhalation as she stared at this determined little boy, “That there was one person in this castle who didn’t think I was the heir of Slytherin.”

But apparently, that person was not Neville Longbottom.

“If I was the heir, Neville, then you realize that this would be unbelievably stupid of you,” Lily pointed out, “To confront me like this.”

He didn’t respond, just kept trying to piece her together and… And there was something so exhausting in that, that he was trying so hard, but he still couldn’t do it and probably never would be capable of it. So few people had ever seen Lily in her entirety, and Neville Longbottom wasn’t one of them.

She wanted to add more to this, say something, even opened her mouth to with no idea what words would come out of her mouth, but that, of course, was when everything decided to take a suicidal leap off a metaphorical cliff.
“I am the Dread Pirate Roberts!” There, in an ominous dark cloak, shadows swirling beneath her bare feet, stood a small figure in the doorway, whose voice while ominous and otherworldly was also painfully familiar.

Painfully familiar, because it was Lily’s own voice.

“Oh, shit,” Lily said, even as Wizard Lenin’s head disbelievingly turned towards her.

Well, apparently Lily was going to time travel at some point today… She wasn’t really looking forward to it.

Dread Pirate Lily, come back from the future continued, a pale hand pointed towards her confused dreadfully confused and somewhat horrified audience, “There will be no survivors! My men are here! I am here! But soon, you, will not be here!”

And with that timely and ominous declaration, the Dread Pirate Lily promptly burst into flames. Now, why would Lily come back from the future, to reenact The Princess Bride, in front of her already jittery classmates was beyond her entirely. As it was, sitting here, watching herself be burned alive, listening to the screaming of her classmates, she felt no real desire to go through all of this.

But Lily didn’t seem to have any choice, even less of a choice than the rest of her fellow audience members, as Dread Pirate Lily stepped forward, still on fire, towards the back of the classroom.

“The Dread Pirate Roberts takes no survivors!”

Neville scrambled out of his seat, forward to join the mob of other scrambling students even while his wand shakily pointed at fire Lily, in the back only Hermione Granger, her own wand pointed at the figure as she narrowed her eyes (probably realizing this was probably Lily), while Wizard Lenin just sat there, staring at the past Lily, with an extremely unamused and nonplussed look on his face.

“All your worst nightmares are about to come true!” Then reaching Wizard Lenin’s desk, fiery hands melting the metal of the table, she leaned in close to Lenin Rabbitson and screamed into his face, “The Dread Pirate Roberts is here for your soul!”
And then…

Then immolated Lily grabbed Lenin Rabbitson by his lapels, threw him onto her back, and sprinted out of the classroom… Still on fire.

And Lily of the past, sitting there dumbly, was left in their wake.

Slowly standing, looking at the rest of her stunned class, then back towards the door that future Lily and Wizard Lenin had disappeared through, she offered them all a polite smile, “If you’ll excuse me.”

And with that, Lily herself, was sprinting out the door after them.

“You!” She shouted turning down the hallway and towards the staircase and good, there they were, somehow a flight down already, Wizard Lenin half hanging off the other Lily and clearly displeased by all of this.

He looked up at her, at her call, and she could practically read the words in his gaze, “The things I put up with.”

Lily just kept running quickly moving down the stairs and gaining on the pair, “Lenin, I’m sure there’s a perfectly good reason for why I lit myself on fire and kidnapped you!”

Granted, Lily didn’t know what that reason was yet, but it had to be damn important, Lily was sure of it. Just as Lily hit the first platform, was forced to take a running leap onto the next moving staircase down she heard the sound of footsteps and spotted… Spotted Gildery Lockhart a few flights up, pointing down at dark cloaked future Lily with Lenin on her shoulders and then taking off at a decent pace, clearly giving chase.

“Oh, hell,” Lily said, now thoroughly confused on what was going on, except that she was guessing her future motives must have something to do with Gilderoy Lockhart…

And, following just a few feet behind Lockhart, Albus Dumbledore, Albus Dumbledore who apparently was convinced that Lily was the heir of Slytherin, or trying to convince Neville that Lily was the heir of Slytherin.
“Oh, shit!” Lily made an effort to double her speed, practically flying after herself and the future Lenin, jumping from one staircase to another when they moved at inconvenient times (future Lily, it seemed, had somehow timed them all perfectly right for her descent), all the way down to the dungeons and then tearing off down a corridor to Lily’s least favorite bathroom in the world.

“Seriously, why would I bring us here?!” Lily asked but future Lily came to a dead stop, just outside the bathroom, causing past Lily to practically barrel into her. Future Lily, without a word, only a meaningful and frighteningly sober glance, then dumped Lenin Rabbitson off of her shoulders and pushed the past Lily inside of there with him as she stood to block the doorway.

“Lily, I shouldn’t have to ask this question more than once in one day,” Wizard Lenin started as he brushed off his school uniform, “But what is wrong with you?”

“I… Don’t… I don’t know!” Lily cried, “I haven’t done all of this yet, I mean, Dumbledore’s involved somehow so…”

The future Lily cut her off, “Lenin, you need to get out of the castle, the jig is up.”

“I need to what?” he asked, but the future Lily didn’t budge, and in that moment, staring at herself, Lily could see more than a little of Uncle Death in the future Lily’s imposing, black robed, figure.

“Lenin, they know, they know who you are,” and then, endless green eyes boring into his, “And they’re coming.”

Footsteps sounded, a grinning Lockhart, wand forward and trained on them, appeared, “Quite right, Miss Potter, myself and Dumbledore not so far behind me.”

And there he stood, a gleam of, of something almost madly joyful as he took in the trio before him, “We have figured out your game, Mr. Lenin Rabbitson, or should I say, Mr. Tom Marvolo Riddle, who was once not so long ago You Know Who himself?”

Lily’s wand surreptitiously appeared in Wizard Lenin’s hand as he eyed Lockhart, even as he offered a calm, “I’m afraid, sir, that I have no idea what you’re talking about.”
“Albanian, that was clever of you, but you see I remembered that Quirinus Quirrell had been to Albania, and that, as Dumbledore later imparted to me, had been possessed by He Who Must Not Be Named’s wandering spirit there. Fifty years ago, give or take a few months, the chamber of secrets was opened by one of the students, thought to be Rubeus Hagrid. But, there were holes in this theory even then, because an acromantula can’t paralyze, but a basilisk, controlled by the last parseltongue student to have entered the castle, could have. You look almost exactly like Tom Marvolo Riddle, save for the hair…”

“You sound very confident about what seems like ancient history, sir,” Wizard Lenin remarked but his eyes were hard, because this was a lot of information, this was a lot of information Lockhart shouldn’t have even been able to get, “But I’m afraid I still don’t see what this has to do with me.”

Out of his robes, the madly grinning Lockhart pulled out a maroon journal, and Lily paled.

“Lenin Rabbitson is an avatar, fashioned from these diaries, created with dark unspeakable magic to drain the life and souls from whoever uses them, distributed to many of the young students here at Hogwarts as well as Eleanor Lily Potter herself, undoubtedly…”

And Lily suddenly, abruptly, remembered all of those diaries, all of those diaries that each girl had claimed was given to them by Lenin Rabbitson, and that Wizard Trotsky must have been planning this from the camber, since the chamber at least if not before then…

At the end of the corridor, Lily could almost hear Dumbledore’s footsteps.

“Well, Mr. Rabbitson, are you going to try and deny it?”

Wizard Lenin gripped Lily’s wand in his hand even as a cruel smile worked its way onto his face, “If Dumbledore weren’t practically standing behind you…”

“Avada Kedavra,” Wizard Lenin calmly unnunciated in his impeccably accented English, a flash of terrible green lighting the hallway, casting Lockhart’s paling face a sickly color even as he dove out of the way of the blast.

(The Future Lily though, she simply stood, let the light almost hit her from behind, her eyes didn’t once leave Lockhart…)
Then Wizard Lenin was hissing, pulling Lily with him into the place where sink was rearranging itself into an entrance, and then with another hiss slammed the entrance closed behind them, trapping himself and Lily inside.

For a minute, they both lingered, listening for the distant sound of something… But the stone was thick here, and nothing came through.

Then, without a word, Wizard Lenin grabbed her hand and began to guide her down the dark, molded steps.

Lily produced a light in the dark, felt her eyes linger on this forgotten staircase, that even now nature was reclaiming even with magic to deter it, “You could have told me there was a staircase…”

Wizard Lenin stopped, Lenin Rabbitson’s shoulders shaking as he stood there, even as Lily herself ran into him.

“Lenin?”

“I can’t defeat Dumbledore,” he said, the words echoing down the staircase and into the dark heart of the chamber they had yet to reach, “Not like this, not in this… This crippled body.”

Lily had known that though, the past and future version of herself apparently, but it wasn’t her he was explaining it to. Because once, not so long ago, Wizard Lenin would have barely hesitated to take on Dumbledore in a duel.

They kept walking, past the dead shed skin of the basilisk, down into that darkened water filled chamber with Salazar Slytherin’s face carved into the wall, mouth still gaping from where the basilisk had once exited it.

And there was the basilisk itself, eyes missing, staring out with empty sockets into the unknowing chasm of death. Wizard Lenin stared at it, his eyes almost dull as he took in this great majestic beast that Lily had… Had taken from him.

Had taken from him in a fight that she honestly could only barely remember.
“I’ll go to London,” he finally said, “I’ll announce my return, find my old followers, and rebuild…”

Lily just stared at him, as he stood there in Lenin Rabbitson’s form with Wizard Lenin’s words pouring through his mouth and, and she let it slip from him, let the illusion of Lenin Rabbitson, her Albanian communist school aged best friend, drip from him until it was only a puddle of memory beneath his feet.

Then, then it was just Wizard Lenin, tall and proud, dressed in black and red, staring blankly back at her.

Swallowing, Lily said, “There’s another Lily here, there’s still the other Lily upstairs, holding back the mob… I can’t come with you.”

“I know.”

Neither said out loud that neither of them knew how it ends for the Lily upstairs, or for that matter, Wizard Lenin himself. That this appeared to be where, at least temporarily, their paths would part.

Lily rushed forward, throwing her arms around him and hugging him desperately, pressing her face into his jacket even as she promised, “I’ll find you, when I’m finished upstairs I’ll leave Hogwarts, and I’ll come find you, I promise.”

A hand combed through her hair, wrapping itself in red curls, and quietly he said, “I’ll hold you to that.”

Reluctantly, with great force of will, she stepped back once, then twice, shoved her hands into her pockets, and forced herself to silently watch as Wizard Lenin offered her one last, strangely soft, smile, and then walked off into the gaping hole that was Salazar Slytherin’s carved mouth, until even the red of his scarf was out of sight, leaving Lily standing behind.

And in the dark, the water dripping everywhere, with only her reflection in the still murky water for company, she considered Hermione Granger, Luna Lovegood, and Lily herself and what was to become of them in this battle that Wizard Trotsky was so very clearly winning.

The body of the basilisk had no answers.
She closed her eyes, pulled the homemade time machine out from her clothing, pressed her fingers to the dials and quoted to herself, “I must not fear. Fear is the mind-killer. Fear is the little-death that brings total obliteration. I will face my fear. I will permit it to pass over me and through me. And when it has gone past I will turn the inner eye to see its path. Where the fear has gone there will be nothing. Only I will remain.”

That was the trouble, she thought as her eyes flew open and she manipulated time through this little machine, Lily was always what remained.

Time twisted itself around her in ribbons, winding back on itself, unseen inside of this timeless place with only a basilisk to mark its changes. Then it halted, there was a dizzying sense of vertigo as time caught up with her, as Lily found herself solidly in the present of a half hour before.

Then, without hesitation, she removed her shoes, transformed her clothing into something reminiscent of Death’s garb, stood on top of the water and ran her way up through one of the pipes and into the castle itself, exiting through one of the bathrooms with an unfortunate explosion that scared the living daylights out of some Hufflepuff upperclassman.

“Forge, lookee here, it’s our goddess!”

Lily looked up, blinked, and saw herself staring at Ron’s doppelganger brothers.

“Oh, it’s you two,” Lily said, “Sorry about the bathroom, I’m in a bit of a rush.”

“What are you up to, today, oh glorious leader?” Forge or George, asked her.

“Exorcizing evil and helping a friend in need,” Lily responded, “Also lighting myself on fire, apparently.”

And they… They smiled at her, like they really believed that’s what she was up to, and nothing else. Like they didn’t think she was the heir of Slytherin at all.

“I…” Lily trailed off, an uncertain feeling welling inside of her even as she fixed the bathroom behind her, “I have to go but… Thank you.”
Then it progressed much as it had before even as Lily made her way up a few more staircases and to the History of Magic classroom, or as the other Lily had witnessed it, Lily appeared seemingly out of nowhere, lit herself on fire, quoted The Princess Bride, kidnapped Wizard Lenin, blocked Lockhart from the entrance to the bathroom even as Wizard Lenin and Lily disappeared from sight then…

Then they were at that moment that Lily hadn’t seen, Lily standing in Lockhart’s way as the chamber entrance closed behind them, blocking him, even as Dumbledore’s footsteps, his shouting and aura, came ever closer.

But there was no look of horror or even anger on Lockhart’s face, instead, just a smirk, a growing and horrifyingly familiar smirk.

“I knew it,” Lockhart said, entirely too pleased and too charming by half, “What a brazen upstart.”

“No, an accident.” Lockhart corrected himself, without Lily even having to prompt him, “That’s the term for him. Although, how someone can accidentally cut their soul in half is beyond me.”

Then, he caught her eye, offered her that trademark Gilderoy Lockhart smile without even taking a pause for a breath, “Hello, Lily.”

“Oh, you son of a…” Lily started, taking a step back but he just stepped into the bathroom with her, inspecting all of it with a rather unimpressed gaze.

“Oh, Lily, come now, aren’t you the least bit impressed?” Wizard Trotsky via Lockhart asked. Then, he motioned to himself, “He wasn’t an easy nut to crack, you know. Always so suspicious, should have been a Slytherin for all his paranoia. Of course, given his own sordid history with memory charms, perhaps that fear was warranted…”

He turned to stare at himself, at Gilderoy, in the mirror, smoothing back his hair, even as Lily glanced out into the hall and saw Dumbledore rounding the corner. But Wizard Trotsky seemed unconcerned.

“It was his ego, his narcissism, that did him in, or rather, it was the chance to have bona fide glory, something he could actually prove for himself. And it was such a perfect opportunity, Voldemort in a weakened state, the body of a child, the panic of Hogwarts… A few details here and there, a confession or two, and he was mine for the taking. Because, aside from you, Lily, what wizard could claim to have lain waste to Voldemort himself?”
He turned from his reflection to her, blue eyes glowing almost eerily, feverishly, as he stared at her. Then, his eyes caught on Dumbledore’s figure, now very close indeed, “Oh, yes, him, necessary for your communist friend, but I think we’d best be going.”

He reached out, grabbed her by the lapels hissed for the chamber to open again, and made to drag her inside but Lily gripped the sink, refusing to be budged.

“Don’t try me,” Lily hissed out, “I could lodge an ice pick in your head just as easily as I can snap you like a twig, Trotsky.”

“And be thrown into Azkaban,” he said with a tired sort of patience, “Hacking into your professor’s skull with an ice pick or else snapping his spine is generally seen as being in poor taste.”

Then, before Lily could blink, he had a wand against her temple, “Besides, I can always just do this.”

Lily blinked, blinked again and they were… She was back in the chamber, standing barefoot in her strange death garb, and Lockhart was looking down on her in judging, sitting on the carcass of the basilisk as if he was a king.

Except… There seemed to be even less of him than before, he was paler, his hair less golden, his eyes too bright, and he seemed almost translucent.

“Sorry, about that, by the way,” he said as he looked at her, “Terribly rude of me, but then, you do go out of your way to make trouble.”

He motioned to their surroundings with amusement, “As evidenced by all of this.”

He paused then, curiosity in his eyes as he looked at her, “You were willing to sacrifice Gilderoy Lockhart for the greater good but faltered when it came to Ginny Weasley… Of course, little good it will do you now. Kill Lockhart and you buy a day or two, at most, I worked on him long and hard, but Pansy… Now, Pansy Parkinson was all but dying to make my acquaintance.”

Apparently, this was supposed to be hilarious, as he laughed at his own joke, Gilderoy’s body
slumping and jerking like a marionette whose strings had been cut.

Lily swallowed, then stated, “Dumbledore thinks I’m behind this, doesn’t he?”

“Well, you and your Albanian friend,” Wizard Trotsky offered, “Which, in a way, is true if you think about it. I’m behind it, and he and I were once the same man, and you are very much on his side… Well, Lily, who is to say you aren’t on my side too?”

It was almost reflexive, “I am not on your side!”

“Oh, you are, you just… You just don’t know it yet,” Lockhart stopped, slumped over coughing, fell off the basilisk and began shivering, but Wizard Trotsky forced himself to look up through Lockhart’s eyes to hers, “I did say I was sorry.”

“What do you really plan for Hogwarts then?” Lily asked.

“Oh, I think I’ve left enough…” more coughing then, “Enough chaos in my wake. Those girls will never be what they once were, your friend Lenin banished from the school, you yourself either drained of your soul or else corrupted by the dark lord, and Gilderoy…”

He glanced down at his hands, then back up to hers, a small smile on his lips, “I’m afraid Gilderoy’s not long for this world.”

He closed his eyes, almost in relief, “They will remember my name, Lily.”

A final look, and a smile that… The same smile that Wizard Lenin had given her, not so long ago, in this same place, “I’ll see you on the other side, my friend.”

And then, a wand at her head, and the sight of his lips before the sound of his words even reached her, those syllables that she should have long since suspected…

“Obliviate”
(And there, in her memory, buried away out of reach was Lily, bleeding out and poisoned by a basilisk, appearing in the train station called purgatory with tears in her eyes…

“I’ve failed, Death, I’ve… I’ve failed!”)
The Pinball Wizard

In which Morgan Lily Gaunt retains her title as lord of Mortal Kombat, apparently wakes up fifty years in the future after having been abandoned in a coma by her surprise cousin, meets a strangely symmetrical and oddly familiar young boy who devours reality, and is inadvertently responsible for arson.

Morgan Lily Gaunt was the only child of the deceased Morfin Gaunt and some hooker he’d stumbled into in Knockturn Alley when neck deep in fire whiskey. That said, this was something of a fuzzy story, Morfin himself had never been too sure of it, as he was always more or less neck deep in fire whiskey. However, what was clear was that one day there’d been a hooker on the doorstep, a squalling baby girl in hand, and Morfin Gaunt presented the irrefutable proof of his progeny when she started hissing in terror at the snakes crucified to the outside of Casa del Gaunt.

Point being, ever since the beginning of when Morgan was Morgan, and perhaps even before then, she’d lived with Morfin where she worked as an indentured servant until she had repaid him for his unending kindness. She couldn’t quite remember where she’d heard the term ‘indentured servant’, not in the beginning anyways, but she’d found it in her brain one day (Morfin never really used that word, he’d always said ‘freak’ or ‘girl’ or any other monosyllabic name that was really more like a command) and had decided that’s what she was. After all, she was the one who was tasked with keeping the house clean, (or, well, relatively clean, apparently the Gaunt shack was expected to have a sort of rustic, terrifying, charm to it), making sure breakfast was made in some edible form (which usually ended up being dangerous amounts of fire whiskey for Morfin), and prying Jesus Christ Super Snakes from the walls, and in return Morfin gave her room (the servants’ quarters beneath the stairs) and board (whatever the snakes didn’t manage to devour).

Sure, her room had been a cupboard that had probably been a pantry in its last life, but it was a room with a mattress so she hadn’t complained too much. She always had wondered how she’d gotten sorted into the indentured servant business, she couldn’t remember a time when she hadn’t been working for Morfin, but she just assumed it was one of those package deals that came with being your father’s unwanted bastard daughter.

Of course, all of that turned out to be moot point later, as she was freed from her indentured servitude when her surprise cousin Tom Riddle, himself the bastard son of dead Aunt Merope (god rest her hideous squib soul) and that smarmy muggle Tom Riddle, wiped out his entire paternal line then blamed Morfin for the murder.

It was one of the clearest memories she had, possibly because it was one of the most recent…
It had been summer, then, the shack devoid of charms as always, had been sweltering. There she’d been in the patched robes that had perhaps, once, belonged to Aunt Merope, hovering on the outside of the house as she partook in the dangerous task of removing the crucified snakes.

Morfin never liked this, he preferred the screaming, or the idea that they would serve as warning to their brethren, but oh, how they screamed. Those were some of her first memories, the sound of snakes, screaming in the darkness. Wordless terror and agony that transcended all languages and species.

If snakes had a god then he was either cruel, indifferent, or deaf.

And often, too often, her own wordless scream of wretched agony would join them as she jolted awake in cold sweat from her fuzzy and indistinct nightmares.

Either way, with concentration, slowly, ever so slowly, she wandlessly would remove a snake from the wall, and it would stare up at her with dark, dull eyes, and silently slither away from her or else fall broken to the ground, before she’d moved onto the next one.

Perhaps it’d been natural that she almost hadn’t seen him coming.

Of course, she did, see him coming. There’d been a pang of something, and when she’d turned to look at him, even though he looked the spitting image of Tom Riddle from Little Hangleton, she knew that it wasn’t him.

He was dressed as a Hogwarts schoolboy, in prefect’s robes, Slytherin, walking up with a grin on his face that felt far too out of place and a spark of fire in his pale blue eyes. There was an almost ethereal confidence and grace to him, as if magic was imbued in his very footsteps, and as he stepped closer she…

She knew him, she knew him more than she knew her own name, she knew his smiles, his frowns, his ups, and his downs. She had long since grown accustomed to his face, as it were. He was the shadow her own soul cast across this world, the missing piece of herself that she hadn’t even thought to look for.

*(Lenin)*
For a moment, she abandoned the snakes, and watched him approach until he came level with her. He looked at her dubiously, with raised eyebrows, the charming smile dimming somewhat then forcing itself to reappear, far more strained than before.

“Hello, I’m Tom Riddle, Tom Marvolo Riddle… I’m looking…” his eyes drifted to the snakes, hearing one as it gave out its swan’s song, its own hissing De Profundis, then drifted back to hers.

There was an almost obligatory moment of strained silent as they listened to the snake’s ascent into heaven.

“For Morfin?” she finished for him.

He nodded, slowly, as if this wasn’t quite what he wanted. Morgan had inspected him more thoroughly then, taking in his strangely perfect appearance, so at odds with the place he’d found himself in. What was a boy like this doing in a place like Little Hangleton?

“Well, if you’re looking for anyone, you’re looking for Morfin,” Morgan continued, “Grandpa Marvolo’s long dead, Azkaban, nasty business. Aunt Merope ran off to London ages ago with that muggle bastard Tom Riddle and all the family heirlooms, strangely though, Tom Riddle came back, Merope and the heirlooms didn’t. And, well, Morfin might be drunk off his ass, but, well, he’s the only one left.”

Then she paused, considered him and his well-groomed, perfect prefect appearance and juxtaposed him in her mind with Morfin, “Although, what could someone like you possibly want with Morfin?”

“I…” the boy offered her another strained smile, reached out his hand towards her, and failed to answer the question, “I’m sorry, I don’t think I caught your name in all of that.”

“Morgan Lily Gaunt, Morfin’s bastard daughter, well, so I’m told, I was also told prostitutes were involved. Unofficial heir to the house of Gaunt…” behind her she could hear the sound of a beam breaking, another section of the roof collapsing in on itself, “It’s a fixer upper.”

“I’m… I’m Merope’s son, she died, in an orphanage and I’ve been there ever since,” the boy said, before admitting, “I was… hoping to meet my uncle, and whatever’s left of the family I suppose.”

Morgan paled, looking over him again, and blurted, “Well you can thank god that you look nothing
like Merope. I’m sorry, just, there are pictures and… It’s not good.”

Morfin himself wasn’t a looker, neither was Marvolo from what Morgan had seen of the pictures, but Merope had really taken the genetic cake. Morgan, by the grace of god, had somehow managed to escape the Gaunt curse of hideousness and instead must have greatly resembled her mother, who likely shared her thick curling red hair, elfin features, and green eyes.

The boy frowned at this, apparently taking this as an insult. However, Morgan, brushing her hands off on her robes, grinned at him, “Oh, ye of little faith, behold, I have proof!”

She dragged him inside, where he stumbled along behind her and with a sort of wordless horror stared at the surroundings, following Morgan until they came to her cupboard, which she wandlessly unlocked and opened, pulling him inside.

“Why is there…” his eyes drifted to the mattress, to the colored drawings on the wall, to all of Morgan’s horde knick-knacks and curiosities to while away the long hours in the cupboard, when it was only Morgan Lily Gaunt and the endlessness of eternity to keep her company.

“This is where I sleep, indentured servant, you understand, have to make up for the disgrace of being a bastard and a daughter,” Morgan explained, rummaging through her pile of hoarded picture frames until she came across it, yes, the one good photograph that remained of Merope Gaunt.

“Behold, your mother,” Morgan said, turning the picture to face him, and she could tell right when he made out the crooked teeth, the strange narrow almost beady eyes, and well, all the rest of it.

He looked like he was about to protest, but stopped when Morfin’s voice sounded, slurred hissing coming from the entryway as the door slammed shut behind him, rattling the house from its very foundations.

“Girl! Girl! Have you been freeing those blasted snakes again?!”

Morgan, without a word, popped out of the cupboard shutting it behind her with a protesting Tom Marvolo Riddle inside, “No, of course not, Uncle Morfin!”

It was best to give short, sometimes, untruthful answers to Morfin. Generally, the less time spent talking to Morfin the better. After all, Morgan wasn’t entirely convinced that Morfin was a true blue
human being. He depicted sentience well enough, she supposed, but if you looked beneath the surface of his endless loop of drunken hissing and throwing her in the cupboard then he was nothing more than a cheap automaton, forever imitating life.

Such was the absurd nature of Morgan’s (Lily’s) reality.

However, it was right about then, looking down the hallway that reality itself seemed to… flicker. Instead of Morfin there, slumped over, loosely holding a bottle, there was a taller, rounder, more familiar walrus of a man, staring down at her in purple rage…

Then it was gone and Morgan was standing there once again, berated in parseltongue and then told to get back in the cupboard for good measure, where Tom Marvolo Riddle was waiting inside.

“Yes, so… that was Morfin, he’s great,” Morgan said before confessing, “Honestly, I’m not entirely sure he’s actually a person, I mean, he tries, sort of, but he’s not quite… there.”

Then, as an afterthought, seeing his disappointment, she added, “Sorry.”

Then… Then she wasn’t sure why this happened, or what changed, but something must have, because he was looking at her and it was like he was seeing all of her, just as she had earlier seen all of him. He looked at her, and in his pale blue eyes there was… Everything.

All the hopes and dreams, bitterness and despair of mankind.

He took her hand in his, just as pale but much smaller, and pulled her into his arms, and he asked, “Lily, would you like to come with me instead?”

And she… She nodded, and said, “Of course, I said I’d find you. I meant it, Lenin.”

He moved his hands to cup her face, tilted her head to search her eyes, and must have found what he was looking for because he nodded to himself, smiled one last time, then exited her cupboard beneath the stairs.

And somehow, even though she knew he was wearing green, she could have sworn that it was really
The next thing she knew, it was hours later, the Riddle estate in the valley below ransacked and everyone inside it dead, and Uncle Morfin, carted off to Azkaban even as Tom snuck in one last time, took her hand once again, and took her outside to some other world…

Well, that other world else turned out to be putting her in stasis for fifty years, because he had to become a revolutionary or something and couldn’t have little cousins narking on him to the aurors. Apparently, it was only because the other half of his soul, which he’d sawed in half with patricide and stuffed into a notebook, remembered where he’d put her once he’d escaped his own prison, that Morgan Lily Gaunt was back among the living at all. Not that she was bitter, or anything.

Not helping her not being bitter was the fact that, apparently, he now called himself Lord Voldemort, a name which somehow, the whole country managed to take seriously, and had been blown up by a toddler a decade ago and was only now rumored to returning in order to band his now middle-aged followers together in a glorious pureblood revolution.

Or, well, according to the Tom she knew, he hadn’t exactly made his return public yet, but Tom seemed oddly certain (and rather bitter) about it.

Either way, clearly, this wasn’t a waste of time, compared to remembering to wake your cousin from a coma.

The other Tom Marvolo Riddle, the version who had come back for her at least, who had been stuck in a diary for fifty years, he was a strange sort but was nice enough. Sometimes, she thought to herself, that she must have met him before that one day, because he seemed… She didn’t know, only that sometimes she felt like she couldn’t remember anything at all, and that all her memories were flat visions of things that had never happened.

Sometimes, she liked him well enough. Sometimes, when she looked at him, she almost choked on bittersweet nostalgia for a moment she didn’t dare remember. And sometimes, there was some bitter loathing inside her, whenever she looked at him.

And she couldn’t help but think, that maybe she should have killed him when he’d walked towards her that day with his overeager smile, maybe she should have lodged an ice pick into his head and…

(But then he’d smile at her, and she’d see someone else entirely, and she’d remember that somehow,
in some impossible way, he meant more than life itself to her.)

Point being, all of this now led to this present moment, in the strange land of 1992, with Morgan Lily Gaunt, in the local arcade in Little Hangleton, continuing to destroy all the records in the new arcade game Mortal Kombat.

“Test your might, test your might. Test your might, test your might. MORTAL KOMBAT!”

Ah, Raiden, god of thunder, what joy to see your hands filled with pixelated lightning ripping through the chest of another man and holding his still beating heart aloft. There was something about the sheer unadulterated violence in the game which soothed her soul in ways she couldn’t express… Except by dominating the score board.

And crushing the souls of any one of the dweeby muggles with glasses that walked up to take second player, that was also somewhat satisfying.

It was also about all she had to do these days as Tom had been spending most of his time around the Riddle manor, staring at the ceiling, going through period of great emotional upheaval and just in general having no idea what to do with himself.

That first day he’d woken up, he’d pulled her to him with that same grin he’d had walking up the hill, and he’d held her for a moment too long and silent tears had run down his face… He’d spent the next two and a half days curled in on himself, staring at the walls, drifting in and out of sleep.

She’d just stared at his back, at his shoulders, searching for something in him that she couldn’t quite remember how to find. Perhaps, a touch of Gaunt, of something hauntingly and bitterly familiar.

Or, perhaps, she was searching for something she couldn’t name at all.

Sometimes she would walk around Little Hangleton, staring at the Christmas decorations, and she’d wish that he’d at least walk with her because she… She didn’t think she’d ever had a true Christmas, or if she had, that it’d always had a touch of murder to it.

Sometimes, when she thought back to that day she met Tom, she could have sworn that it was snowing outside and that the village had been decorated in red, green, and gold…
It’d be nice, she thought one day as she stared at her rather gaunt reflection in the pane of a window, to have a Christmas filled with all the warmth, splendor, and human companionship that seemed so natural in holiday specials.

However, in general, it was best, when he was in the oddly quiet mood he’d been in that morning, staring at the peeling wallpaper and the dilapidated furniture of the Riddle mansion with nothing at all inside of him, only a bleak sort of indifference, that she kept out of his way.

So, if she was going to spend her time playing arcade games, then by god, she would be the god of arcade games.

Winning against shape shifting, all around nefarious, sorcerer Shang Tsung, Morgan cracked her knuckles shaking out her hands as she prepared to enter her initials once again upon the score board.

Except, as with every time, she had to catch herself as the first letter she instinctively entered was E, carefully backspacing with a frown and entering the obligatory M.

Looking down at the tenth score, she saw the nagging ELP, the one she hadn’t managed to catch before she’d entered it…

Well, she had more than enough time, she might as well knock it off the score board completely. With will alone another shilling appeared out of thin air, materialized between her pale fingers, and she slid it into the coin slot as the theme began to play again and Liu Kang prepared himself for glorious battle and the salvation of Earth.

Or at least, that was the plan, until the warped black glass of the screen a face seemed to appear out of nowhere, “Holy, Jesus!”

She turned and there, behind her, was a boy around her age. He was slightly taller than her, though that wasn’t very remarkable, no, what was more noticeable was his extraordinarily pale coloring. His skin was white as marble, but more than this, his hair itself seemed white, a strange pure white that you only saw in fresh printer paper or untouched mountain snow. He was the kind of pale, that even under the dimmed lighting of the arcade, seemed to glow.

Juxtaposed with this were his eerily dark eyes and the long black lashes that framed them, a flat cold black, the kind of black that bled into his pupils until it seemed there was no difference at all in the
His features, also, were perfect. Or rather, they were perfectly symmetrical, the kind of symmetry a Greek sculptor would have wept to behold, a strange almost jarring sight given that he was still very much in adolescence. He had a perfect face on a body that was still growing, where most their age had too large of noses, ears, teeth, or eyes for their frames, instead he had a perfectly formed face on this child’s body.

She swallowed, turned back to the screen, and shuddered slightly before stating, “Sorry, I… Didn’t see you there.’

The boy, perhaps naturally, didn’t respond. He just… stared. Even in the reflection of the screen, now lit with the overly muscular forms of men and demons, his dark eyes bore into hers with an expression that wasn’t an expression at all.

She decided that this was one of those times where it was best to ignore something until it went away.

Unfortunately, glancing over to her left, catching sight of his pale elegant fingers on the other joystick, he clearly had decided he belonged here, much to her strange internal horror.

“Oh, sorry, I’m playing one-player right now and…”

Without a word, and where there had been none before, a shilling appeared in his fingertips and was placed into the coin slot for the second player with an almost delicate care.

“And I guess you’re playing, great, that’s… great,” Morgan said before sighing, “You know, I’m very good, if you’re looking to win then you’ve just gone and wasted your money.”

She decided to switch to good old Raiden while her opponent hovered over the default choice of Sub-Zero, staring blankly at the screen, not a hint of sentience or thought inside him whatsoever. He was a dream, she thought, dreamt by no one.

And, this proved eerily accurate, as, when the game commenced, he made no moves whatsoever and allowed Morgan via Raiden to kick the ever-loving shit out of him and rend his avatar in half.
And he just continued to stare at the screen with that strange, empty, look on his face.

“...Well, that was...” she trailed off when she saw, somehow, another two shillings appear in his hand, one placed into each coin slot, apparently gearing up for round two.

“Oh, are you actually going to play this time?” she asked, but the answer, as he once again chose Sub-Zero, and then proceeded to do absolutely nothing, his fingers not even twitching as they rested on the buttons and the joystick, was clearly no.

And then, just as before, two more shillings.

“Oh, for god’s sake, look, if you don’t want to play then I want to...”

“You have never told me how to play these games of yours, Lily.”

She blinked, blinked again, his voice was... Well, it wasn’t, weird, or at least, not on initial hearing. It was pleasant, almost eerily so, perhaps a bit too even for his age but... But there had to have been something wrong with it, something wrong with his accent or diction or the very tone quality that she couldn’t place.

“Morgan, actually,” she corrected feeling a strained smile grow on her lips, “Although, that is actually my middle name...”

The boy just stared at her, seemed to stare into her, and then, just once, he blinked and then turned wordlessly back to the screen.

She wondered if that was supposed to mean something.

“Look, it’s not hard, your joystick helps control your movement, so back and forth or up and down in this case, and the buttons are for kicking, jumping, or blocking,” she explained demonstrating the moves as she spoke with an ease that came of too many hours playing this game.
“You let the abomination manipulate your form,” the boy said instead, “You worked hard on it.”

“Uh… what?” she asked, as she really had no idea how to parse any of that, but, and it might have been her imagination, but the boy seemed almost frustrated by that. A flicker of something certainly flashed in his dark eyes.

The boy, with one hand, reached out and tapped her forehead, right against the strange lightning bolt scar on her forehead, and his fingers were at once cold and hot and felt like the universe itself pounding against her skull, “He has refashioned you in his own fragmented image, it doesn’t suit you… You give him too much freedom.”

“Look, I really don’t…”

The boy didn’t even let her finished as he darkly concluded, “He has always had too much nerve for a human that doesn’t even have the decency to remain human.”

Suddenly, and she didn’t know exactly why, but it was clear that he was talking about Tom. Or, perhaps, talking about the idea of Tom, a Tom Riddle that was greater even than the Tom she knew. Either way, she felt something cold creep inside her with the realization, her own hand stalling on the controls, “What do you want?”

“The lesser of evils,” the boy answered, “That’s what it’s called?”

“The lesser of…”

“I will trade one Tom Marvolo Riddle for another,” the boy said before adding, somehow, without any expression, appearing almost amused, “They turn on each other so quickly.”

Now that, that seemed more than clear, “You’re going to bring Voldemort down on our heads.”

And she didn’t know why, exactly, this struck such a large and loud chord with her, or why, in her head there was the haunting image of blood, a knife, a handgun that should have been there, and a
man who wasn’t as lucky as he’d thought he was.

The boy said nothing, just continued to look at her, with those dark fathomless eyes that spoke of abysses beyond reality and the great monsters that dwelled there.

“You think I’ll sit here and let that happen?” she asked, but this didn’t seem to concern the boy, he turned from her to stare out the window, at the snow as it fell lightly from the sky to coat the ground of Little Hangleton.

Christmas, she thought, was soon approaching. Not here yet, not for a few weeks yet, but all the same…

Finally, in a strangely soft tone, eyes catching the flakes as they fell, he said, “Three days and three nights, for your past, your present, and your future. Then, I’ll send him, and he will keep his promise.”

Then, turning slowly, too slowly and gracefully back to her, he said, “Use them wisely, Lily.”

She said nothing, just slowly backed away from the game, keeping her eyes on him, and then, as soon as she was out the door and onto the street, began sprinting through the village and back to what remained of the Riddle manor as fast as she was able.

As always, even from the outside, you could almost taste the patricide of fifty years ago. The gardens had long since overgrown their borders, weeds and ivy springing everywhere and crawling through the walls. The roof itself was patched and filled with holes, the glass of the windows long since broken, and if you stared at the place too long you could almost see the souls of all the dead staring out.

Inside, it wasn’t any better, in fact it might have been worse. Dust and mold were everywhere, water dripping down the walls and into corners, mushrooms growing here and there in the dark. Amid this were the untouched heirlooms of the Riddle family, portraits of Tom Riddle, his mother and father, and all their relatives.

In the sepia frames, their still photographs smiled at Morgan, but their eyes were so empty.

Shuddering at the sight of them as she stepped inside, forcing her eyes away, she loudly slammed the
door behind her and shouted, “Trotsky, we’ve got problems, we’ve got… Well, I don’t know if they’re large problems but I think they’re large problems!”

There was no answer, only her voice echoing through the place, like it was the first voice it had heard in fifty years.

She moved into the living room, the walls lined with deteriorating books, the grand piano still silently sitting in the corner, waiting for attention to its yellowing keys, “Trotsky?”

Finally, turning a corner and racing up the stairs she found him, moodily staring out the window, pale eyes blazing.

“Trotsky,” she said with a sigh, “Look, we have problems and…”

“Why do you call me that?” he asked.

She stopped, blinked, even as he turned from the window to look at her with eyes that both accused and implored her in the same moment, “What?”

“You still… You call me Trotsky, why do you call me that?”

She felt her mind go somewhat blank, she stared at him, took him in piece by piece and answered, distantly even to herself, “You… Look like a Trotsky.”

He frowned, looked at his hands and then back towards her, a strange self-deprecating smile appearing on his lips, “Strange, I’d think I’d look like anyone but Leon Trotsky.”

He didn’t, she didn’t know why she’d said that, it wasn’t that he looked like Trotsky, the man Trotsky, but that he’d looked like a Trotsky. However, what this meant, or what she intended it to mean, slipped right by her.

Still, while they were on the subject of names, she felt she might as well ask, “Why do you call me Lily?”
“What?” he responded, looking somewhat confused by the question.

“That’s my middle name, you know that… You know, someone else called me Lily today,” funny, she hadn’t questioned it too much at the time, how that boy had looked at her and known her middle name. She shook her head and said, “Right, anyways, so I was at the arcade and…”

“You know, it’s not safe to leave here, I’ve told you that plenty of times!” he interrupted, looking at once furious and then the anger fading and jagged nervousness taking its place in the blink of an eye, “No, I’m sorry, that’s unfair, I know you don’t want to stay here and I… I should never have brought us here in the first place, Dumbledore will know to look here, not that he seems to care in the slightest. Two birds with one stone for him. All the same you’re too recognizable, I wasn’t think I… I should have changed your hair and your eyes, why didn’t I change your hair and your eyes?”

He gave a small laugh then, and answered himself, “Oh, I know why, I would never think to change…” he trailed off, sighed, then with a forced grin asked, “How was the arcade?”

He stopped, blinked, interrupted himself and asked, “That’s a muggle thing, isn’t it?”

Apparently, he wanted an answer to this one as he actually waited for her to get a word in, normally he had a tendency to fill the silence with whatever was and wasn’t on the top of his head.

Tom Marvolo Riddle, it seemed, had a chronic fear of silence.

“Yeah, they’re like board games meets television,” Morgan explained, which seemed to be close enough for him as he offered her a quick smile.

“I… I haven’t gotten much of a chance to watch television,” he admitted, “You should introduce me, Lily, to all of your favorite shows and films you used to talk about…”

“Why do you think I’d know anything about that?” Morgan asked, after all, she’d only just woken up into this glorious age of 1992, she hadn’t exactly had barrels of time to watch television. Especially since they didn’t even own one.

He paused, something seeming to dawn on him, and he paled, “Right, I’d forgotten… I, some other time, then.”
“Right,” she answered hesitantly, a frown growing on her own face, she had hoped this would be easier, “Well, so I was at the arcade, slaughtering the competition in Mortal Kombat…”

“Mortal Combat?” he asked, eyebrows raising and looking at her dubiously.

“The most gloriously violent video game I’ve ever seen,” she responded with great pleasure, as indeed, Mortal Kombat was far superior than her other pastimes of weeding, vacuuming, and prying snakes off the walls.

“Anyways, so I was playing Mortal Kombat, like usual, when this eerily pale symmetrical boy, around my age, shows up out of thin air and says… Well, among other things, he says that he’s bringing Voldemort here, in three days, I think… In retrospect it was unclear, but the understated threat was certainly there!”

At least, Morgan was willing to assume it was.

For a moment, Tom just seemed to stare, then, he must have recognized something she herself hadn’t, because he paled again and asked, in a tighter voice than was called for, “Was he Albanian? A Hogwarts student?”

“How the hell should I know?” she asked, “It wasn’t like I asked, I mean, he didn’t even say his name.”

To be honest, he hadn’t seemed like the type to possess one, or at least, not any name that represented him, instead something to be worn for the occasion like a tie or a shirt or a worn pair of shoes. He defied any name that dared to be placed upon him.

For a moment Tom said nothing, seemed to retreat into himself then, out of nowhere, he grabbed his hand in hers and asked, with a quiet desperation, “Lily, do you trust me?”

Did she?

She didn’t really know, sometimes yes but sometimes no, as it was he was… He was her world, good and ill, he was everything she had and everything she didn’t. However, trusting that, that was an entirely different matter.
All the same, a negative answer might break him, but an overwhelmingly positive answer might break her, “Sure.”

“We need to leave, now,” his eyes turned towards the walls, fire in them once again as he looked on them with contempt, “I should have set a match to this place years ago…”

He pulled his wand out of his sleeves, one that… That didn’t quite seem to fit him, had always had a sort of borrowed air about it. All the same, Morgan’s eyebrows raised as she looked at him, raising the wand to the walls.

“Now?”

“Do you have everything you need?” he asked, because yes, apparently, he was going to set the place on fire right then and there.

Half measures, apparently, were for the weak.

“Well, I, sure, I guess but don’t you think…”

Tom apparently didn’t think as wordlessly, he moved his wand and set the walls ablaze, fire catching and somehow spreading despite the snow outside and the rotted soaked wood of the walls and foundation.

Morgan wasn’t about to miss her cue, without a word she teleported outside the house, watching as it rapidly began to fall apart, neighbors already shouting to come and look at the old haunted Riddle mansion…

Quickly, Tom appeared next to her, and together they watched the house that he hadn’t destroyed fifty years prior. No, that Tom, the earlier one, instead he’d left a pile of corpses, then walked away with Morfin’s wand still in hand, letting this place stand as a monument to his massacre.

And Morgan, watching the flames rise, felt some unnamed feeling crawl up from inside her, one unassociated with memory, and she asked, “Why is it, Trotsky, that you destroy everything you touch, when I am the one who is supposed to be the destroyer of worlds?”

He didn’t have an answer for that, he could only stare at her, the fire reflected in his pale eyes and his
lips twisted into a grimacing sort of smile, and then take her hand in his as he had so many years ago, and, just as he had then, lead her out of Little Hangleton into some other world entirely.
The Ghost of Christmas Past

In which Wizard Trotsky drunkenly converts to communism since his first choice was taken, Morgan tackles alarming issues like incest and pedophilia all in the same day, and the past is discussed though not revealed.

“Trotsky?”

Tom, or well, Wizard Trotsky (if she was going to call him that out loud Morgan might as well correct her internal monologue, Wizard Trotsky seemed to fit, or maybe Snowball, in a way that Tom just… didn’t), didn’t even look at her. No, he just kept staring with that same thousand-mile stare at this rather dingy looking set of flats on London’s east side, hands hanging limply by the side of his trousers, pale fingers twitching ever so slightly.

“Trotsky?” Morgan repeated, crossing her arms and sticking her hands underneath her armpits, feeling woefully underdressed for the weather. She really could have used a pair of gloves, and some leggings, and maybe even a scarf. As it was she was still wearing, well, she didn’t even know what, conjured pity clothing from Wizard Trotsky that consisted of what seemed like a catholic schoolgirl type of skirt along with a thin cotton sweater.

In other words, decent for early fall and spring, but for early December when if Morgan stared at the sky long enough it looked like small flakes could start descending at any moment? Not so much.

“Trotsky,” Morgan said more forcefully and this time, she seemed to get his attention, or at least some of it as he slowly, eerily slowly, like an automaton rather than a true human being, turned his head towards her, “Not that I don’t like looking at apartments, they’re quite fascinating, really, but… Are we done here?”

They’d been here for an hour, at least. And at first, it’d been alright, or well, not alright, a little weird, but Morgan hadn’t said to much. At the very least they weren’t still hanging around Little Hangelton and the charred remains of the Riddle mansion. And London was… Exciting. Weirdly familiar, considering Morgan was fairly certain she’d never been to London before, but then Morgan had been experiencing strange bouts of déjà vu at almost every turn, really since she’d been woken up from her fifty-year nap.

Everything looked familiar yet not familiar at the same time.
Maybe that was a side affect of napping for fifty years, your head hurt, you got some weird associations (like the whole Christmas equals Doom thing that she couldn’t even really explain to herself), and you had déjà vu like nobody’s business.

Either way, Morgan had tolerated Wizard Trotsky’s staring contest with a building for a while, but she was now out of patience and kind of cold.

“It used to be an orphanage,” Wizard Trotsky said flatly, conclusively, as if this alone should have Morgan gasping in shock and putting everything together and exclaiming, “My god, Trotsky, the universe now makes perfect sense! It used to be an orphanage! Everything I’ve known before this was a complete lie.”

As it was Morgan raised her eyebrows slightly, peered at the flats again, then looked back at him. However, he turned his attention to the building again, pale blue eyes burning with bitterness and memory all at once, “Wool’s Orphange, to be precise, this is where I was born and where I lived my entire life until… Until the diary.”

“Oh, oh, that orphanage,” Morgan said, taking a second look at the building then back at him, “So, Aunt Merope just… left you here then?”

“She gave birth on the floor of the orphanage and then she died,” Wizard Trotsky frowned, no, scowled as a thought seemed to occur to him, “She could have lived, if she’d gone to St. Mungos, if she’d gone anywhere at all…”

Which in short meant that she hadn’t wanted Tom junior at all and would rather die than raise her bastard son. Which, yikes, at least Morfin had had the decency of not drowning her in the bathtub when she was dumped on his doorstep, or, well, drowning himself in the bathtub out of shame which was the equivalent to what Merope had done.

Sheepishly, rubbing her hands together, Morgan shrugged as she said, “Well, that’s Aunt Merope for you… You know, there’s a reason she was everybody’s least favorite Gaunt.”

Apparently, this was the wrong thing to say as Wizard Trotsky turned his terrifying attention towards her, “She was my mother! And what would you know about it?!”

Now that was mildly offensive, Morgan felt what little patience she had whittle down to nothing as
she exclaimed, “Hey, you didn’t grow up with years of hearing about aunt Merope the stupid thieving drunk squib whore. Besides, you barely met any of the Gaunts. Grandpa Marvolo had long since kicked the bucket by the time you showed up, you barely had the joy of Uncle Morfin’s drunken parselblathering before you framed him for murder, and like you said Aunt Merope was already dead by the time you were even born. If anyone’s an expert, Trotsky, then it's me.”

He didn’t like that, oh he didn’t like that at all, and even the fact that they were standing in broad daylight in muggle London didn’t make Morgan think he wasn’t about to burn her alive with anybody and everybody for a witness. He seemed impulsive like that, ever since she’d woken up, this strange iteration of her cousin seemed to have no self-control whatsoever. As it was though, he just grit his teeth, and forced himself to smile, “Right, silly me, how quickly I’ve forgotten about you being the… Resident family expert.”

The resident family expert, well, that was one way to put it. All the same she had the sneaking suspicion that Wizard Trotsky had glorified or at least romanticized the past somewhat, like he’d forgotten just what the Gaunts really were.

And there was something about that, about that kind of self-delusion, that Morgan simply couldn’t abide.

“… Trotsky, you do know our family is complete white trash, don’t you?” If they had been muggles then Morgan wouldn’t have been surprised if they’d be running a meth lab.

His teeth began to grind, his fingers twitching almost rhythmically, as his forced smile became that much more forced, “Lily, if I were you I would watch my tongue. Wretched they may be, they’re still…”

“All dead and the world better off without them,” Morgan finished for him before casually exclaiming, “Really, if I cared as much as you apparently want me to, do you think I wouldn’t have put up more of a fuss when you carted Uncle Morfin off to Azkaban?”

Honestly, it was like he couldn’t make up his mind. He was already a moody asshole, but now he kept wanting her to have different opinions. Hate the Gaunts, love the Gaunts, like she was somehow supposed to keep up with his own flip-flopping opinions. Plus, when it came right down to it, he was the one that had slaughtered all the family he could find, Morgan had just had to live with them.

They should be toasting each other over champagne over how much they hated the Gaunts and the Riddles and how beautiful Wizard Trotsky’s destruction of them had been.
For a moment Wizard Trotsky said nothing, just sort of stared down at her, rage dripping from his face and leaving nothing behind except a sort of hollow emptiness, then he said quietly, “He’s not your uncle.”

Well that was a bit of a non-sequitur if Morgan ever heard one, “What?”

“He’s your father, you keep calling him your uncle,” there was a strange look on his face, one she couldn’t quite decipher, something that was a mix of apprehension, fear, and fascination.

Morgan blinked, and realized that yes, she had. Well, she knew Morfin was her father, technically, but… But there was some disconnect, he played the role of her father, but… But it just didn’t connect, there was something wrong with that idea, dreadfully wrong, something she couldn’t quite put her finger on.

When she closed her eyes and pictured her father, it was a taller man, thinner, who shared most of her features, along with the strange scar on his own forehead now faded with the millennia, hair like crows’ feathers, and eyes that strange and brilliant green…

And at the very thought of the man there was a great well of shame and despair within her that was unsupported by anything in her memory. Another strange association, a Christmas filled with blood and death, that seemed as inconsistent as everything else within her reality.

Crows’ feathers and fathers, what would she come up with next?

“Anyways, what do you want to do now?” Morgan asked with a sigh, and he responded in kind, likely he had no bloody idea.

That seemed to be Wizard Trotsky’s modus operandi, act first, think later, the trouble was that he was clever enough that thinking later appeared to work out for him.

At any rate, he’d known it was time to leave Little Hangleton, absurdly quickly too, but then the first thing they’d done was gone to London and just sort of walk around, Wizard Trotsky gazing in awe at the electric lights and the cars and everything London had to offer, until finally they found themselves here in front of the orphanage turned flats.
“Right,” Morgan said, answering her own question when Wizard Trotsky proved incapable, “We should get a room at an inn, at the very least, it’s getting dark out.”

She looked up at the sky, it was notably darker, almost sunset, that was one day gone already, and soon enough starting in on that first night. She wondered if Wizard Trotsky found that idea, the idea of a day dedicated to Christmas Past, nearly as ominous as she did.

What exactly was coming for them in three days and would it be able to find them here?

Either way he silently grabbed her hand, ignoring her involuntary, instinctive flinch, or at least, only sadly smiling at it, tightening his fingers around hers briefly, and then apparated them straight to the Leaky Cauldron. For a moment he stared at the sign, then looked down at her, eyes wide as if a realization had just tiptoed behind him and hit him on the head with a cricket paddle.

He stared back, “Oh hell, we can’t stay here.”

“… Why not?” Morgan asked, and he almost seemed to cringe at the question, and she had the strangest suspicion that he was about to tell her that he’d once killed everyone staying here in the barfight to end all barfights and there were still severed limbs dangling from the ceiling fans and thus they could never stay here again.

Or something like that, that seemed like the type of horrifying hobby Wizard Trotsky would get up to in his free time if he wasn’t too busy poisoning pigeons in the park.

He opened his mouth, closed it, then moved down on one knee like he was about to propose to her, he placed his hands on his shoulders and looked her directly in the eye with the look of a man who was not about to profess his undying love but rather that he’d drowned their only child accidentally in the washing machine, “Lily.”

“Trotsky,” Morgan blandly responded, feeling more than a little uncomfortable with this whole set up.

“Lily, I… I have not told you, but you look remarkably like, well, almost identical to the girl-who-lived.”

Morgan had no idea what to do with that information, she sort of stared, looked at how seriously he
appeared to be taking his own words, then noted, “Trotsky, I am a girl who lives.”

Living, it could be said, was one of the main things she did, the main thing that anyone living did.

“No, no, the girl-who-lived, Eleanor Lily Potter, she… She defeated…” he looked around, casting a notice-me-not charm around them with his wand before looking back to her, “She defeated Voldemort, eleven years ago now. Anyone, and I do mean anyone, would recognize her.”

Morgan failed to see the issue with this, but apparently there was an issue, a large issue, one that had Wizard Trotsky a touch nervous.

Wizard Trotsky, seeing her confusion, tried to explain in the most delicate and ineffective manner possible, “She was, well… She’s disappeared, Hogwarts has been something of a mess this past year, more so these past few weeks, a professor vanished, the girl-who-lived vanished, two Albanian refugee students disappeared, medical calamities… If they… mistake you for her they’ll take you away.”

There was something… Something about that nagged at her, that name, that history, something about it rang bells in her mind that were almost deafening. Still, even so, even so she was still Morgan Lily Gaunt, standing in front of a pub, with her cousin Wizard Trotsky looking up at her almost in pleading desperation.

“So, we can’t stay here, because somebody might think I’m Eleanor Lily Potter, and then might call the wizard cops,” Morgan blandly summarized, and he offered her a relieved smile that she’d followed his logic train to the final station, not even correcting her on the term wizard cops.

“Yes, yes, so we can’t stay here, not in Diagon Alley… Come on, I’ll find us a place.”

What followed was the most furtive, secretive, and ridiculous route of getting from point A to point B that had ever taken place in the history of ever. They hid behind wards and alleyways, Wizard Trotsky continually taking the lead with wary eyes scoping out any possible dangers as they darted from one street to the next until they were firmly in wizarding society’s seedy underbelly. You’d think they were on a top-secret mission from God with the way he was acting.

Morgan, personally, didn’t see what the large deal was or why it seemed to have been ingrained as life or death in Wizard Trotsky’s brain but she’d also learned enough in the short time she’d lived with him not to argue one way or another and just wait for them to get wherever they were going.
Which ended up being a brothel.

“A Midsummer Night Dream,” Morgan quoted off the sign with raised eyebrows, the sign being that of an hour glass curved queen Titania featuring a larger than possible ass as she demurely looked down at those who passed by, “Well, they’re not even pretending to be a reputable business. You think it’d at least be a massage parlor.”

Wizard Trotsky stopped, stared at it, and oddly enough flushed but then said weakly, “Well, that just means this is the last place the aurors will come looking.”

“Are you sure you’re not just here to get your groove on?” Morgan asked Wizard Trotsky suspiciously, which caused him to freeze and even twitch, like a man caught red-handed in the cookie jar.

“What are you talking about?!” he cried out like she’d just accused him of murder.

“I don’t know, you’re a young teenage guy, I’d assumed sex was kind of a thing you’d be interested in,” or at least, that was what public education had taught her… Or, well, not public education, she’d never had any public education, so it must have come from Morfin at some point she just couldn’t remember.

The point was that, like Christmas being terrible and filled with death rather than holiday spirit, there was an association with teenage boys and sex that was stamped in her brain and did not seem all that unreasonable of an assumption to make.

“Not with them!” he hissed, pointing at the sign as if it had done something personally to offend him.

“I won’t judge you, Trotsky, besides, if you’ll remember, my own mother was a dirty hooker,” Morgan then brightly smiled at him, “I guess you could say that your fondness for prostitutes runs in the family.”

He stared down at her in horror this time with the look of a man who had realized that something had worked far too well, and he was reaping what he’d sown. She didn’t know why, but she was starting to prefer the cookie-jar look.
Abruptly he drew her close to him, hugged her tightly, too tightly, pressing her face into his dark jacket, “Uh, Trotsky?”

“I am… I am so sorry, Lily. I am so sorry for everything I’ve done to you. But, but please, remember, that the only one I’ve ever cared about, ever thought about, it’s always been you. Even in that wretched, terrible diary, even more than my other half and his conquests, I thought about you. Always, I promise.”

That was heartfelt and rather creepy and filled with incest, or maybe not, maybe it was platonic and she was just reading it wrong, but no there was a distinct pinging in the back of her mind that screamed this being romantic interest and Morgan couldn’t help but cringe as she stepped back and pointed out, “Uh, Trotsky, we’re cousins. First cousins.”

He stopped, opened his mouth, looked at her, then cried out, “Goddammit!”

While he was kicking the wall, and having his own apparent existential breakdown, Morgan took her own turn to assess him to try to pin down what she was feeling. She honestly didn’t know, inside of her was a maelstrom, unexplained by any memory she had of him.

The incest was weird, yes, but honestly that didn’t seem to bother her too much, as if her unconscious mind shrugged it off. Instead, instead there was a different creeping kind of horror, as if he was using some false face without knowing it, a face she would have crawled through hell for…

Except, it was also a face that brought about rather bitter and painful feelings and a great deal of betrayal.

A rather strange contradiction, if she thought about it.

Eventually, Wizard Trotsky calmed down, he offered her a rather weak smile, “Well, you know, in pureblood families it’s actually rather traditional for first cousins to marry so it’s not…”

Morgan cut in, “I’m also twelve.”

“I am perfectly aware that you are twelve!” he raged before laughing, stepping backwards, and rubbing the back of his head rather sheepishly as if it was perfectly normal for him to fly off the handle and wasn’t he cute just standing there this sheepish beautiful sixteen-year-old boy that he was,
“I can wait, I’ve waited over fifty years, I can wait a few more… Only four and half years, that’s not so bad.”

Well that wasn’t alarming or anything, Morgan, for her own, part, let out a displeased hum and decided it was best to just step inside the brothel and get it over with. Inside she was immediately hit by the scent of alcohol, sweat, and a lot of sex, or, a musky tang that she assumed was sex.

There was a bar area to her left, featuring a few bleary eyed middle-aged men as well as younger girls dolled up with heavy makeup who seemed almost blurred about the edges, sitting in the lap of some or else walking into the back kitchen. On her right was a small window with a smoking woman sitting inside, looking at Morgan with dark, critical, eyes.

“One room, two beds, if you please, for the next three days at least,” Morgan said as she approached what she assumed was the madam, an older rather heavy looking witch who in her day probably had been one cheap hooker based on her rather hideous appearance.

“Extra fee for minors,” the woman rasped as she looked down critically at Morgan, Morgan blinked then motioned behind her to where Wizard Trotsky was now walking through the door with a look of distaste on his face, “Oh no, it’s not for me, it’s my cousin’s birthday and unfortunately I’m his only friend. He wanted me here for emotional support and to be the designated driver.”

The madam looked at Wizard Trotsky rather critically with no small amount of distaste to which Wizard Trotsky glared down at Morgan before attempting to look back as if he wasn’t ashamed at all for bringing his twelve-year-old cousin into a brothel to watch while he got laid.

“You’re still paying the fee,” the madam said.

“That’s fine, but if any of your girls so much as touch her, then I want a refund,” Wizard Trotsky hissed out through his teeth but the madam wasn’t having it, no doubt thinking that the whole point of Wizard Trotsky bringing little Morgan Gaunt was for the touching.

“We’ve only got two boys,” the madam said instead, which seemed to be the last thing that Wizard Trotsky wanted to hear.

“We’re still paying the fee,” Morgan reassured before Wizard Trotsky could so much as open his mouth, fishing in her pockets for sickles as the woman watched.
“There’s only one room left, it has one bed,” the woman added, and this time Morgan paused, blinked, and found herself having to process those words. Because suddenly it was like she had no ability at all to parse English.

“I’m sorry?” Morgan asked.

“Look,” the madam said to the flushing Wizard Trotsky, “I think your girl-who-lived fetish is real cute, kid, best look-alike I’ve seen, but if you’re not paying for my girls or my boys then you’re not staying. I’m busy enough not to have to put up with your freeloading bullshit.”

Wizard Trotsky opened his mouth, closed it, his eyes began to burn, “My what?”

“So, if you’re staying, you’re paying the minor fee, you’re paying the room fee, and you’re paying the fees for the girls or the boys or whatever the hell it is you fancy,” the madam concluded, “You want anything else, you take it and your little Ellie Potter outside in the back alley.”

Wizard Trotsky looked about two seconds from ripping out her spine and drinking her bone marrow. Morgan decided it was a good point to cut in, she slapped a pile of money on the table, and declared with far too large and cheerful of a grin for the situation, “Sold!”

The madam took it with a grunt, slipped a room key towards them, and noted, “It’s upstairs, second floor.”

“Thank you, madam,” Morgan said with a slight bow, “It has been a pleasure doing business with you.”

The room was small, and indeed, there was only one bed, and unfortunately no couch, which meant Wizard Trotsky, Morgan, and the hooker du jour would all be sharing it… Maybe Morgan just wouldn’t sleep, at all, yes, that seemed like a reasonable solution. Wizard Trotsky sat on the bed, staring blankly at the wallpaper (a truly hideous pink thing featuring fluttering hearts) the way he’d been staring blankly at the orphanage, and quietly he asked himself, “How did this happen?”

“You decided we couldn’t stay at the Leaky Cauldron,” Morgan pointed out, but he shook his head ruefully.

“I… No, that’s not… I need a drink,” with that, without another backwards glance, he divested himself of his jacket and left Morgan standing after him as he quietly exited and closed the door behind him, returning to the bar area on the first floor.
For a moment she stood in the perfect silence, the smell of smoke trapped in the wallpaper, the sickly-sweet scent of spilled wine in the carpet, all overwhelmed her as she stood there. Yes, how did this happen?

Closing her eyes she saw a train station, a great red and black steam train, the man with feathers for hair, and... And Wizard Trotsky, except not, older, more worn about the edges, looking down at her with familiar fondness and exasperation.

And when she opened her eyes, to this other different reality, the world of Morgan Lily Gaunt in a brothel, staring in a cracked mirror and looking at herself as if she was a stranger, there were tears in the corner of her eyes.

Without a word, without a thought or a smile or a frown, Morgan turned from her reflection and descended the stairs to where, true to his word, Wizard Trotsky was already one drink in and well on his way to getting plastered.

Next to him was a discarded issue of the Daily Prophet, on the front page something about violence in Diagon Alley, the dark mark seen in the sky, as well as passing note of violence and danger at Hogwarts that seemed to have died down just before the holidays.

“He’s back, only a few weeks and he’s already managing this,” Wizard Trotsky said bitterly, his eyes trained on the photograph of a destroyed shop, “They won’t say it, they may not say it for years, but he’s already back.”

Wizard Trotsky sighed, rubbed at his eyes, “You know, if he had come to me earlier, perhaps if he’d come to me at all, I would have accepted this, accepted him much easier. After all, he had the body, I didn’t, so that must mean that he deserved it or... For a long time, he was me, and I was... I didn’t differentiate between him and me, I was the necessary sacrifice. It took years, ages and ages, for me to realize I had gotten the short end of the stick.”

He frowned, fingers moving over the picture now, tracing it as his eyes burned, “But when I was... contacted, again, and I learned what had happened to him, to the original Tom Marvolo Riddle. You can’t imagine how betrayed I felt. All that I’d sacrificed, every potential that had been overwritten by that diary, every dream and ambition I’d placed in him to live for me, all of it for nothing. And to imagine, he didn’t even come back for you.”

His eyes lifted to hers even as he drank, and they were such a clear, strange, pale blue, “I would have
come back for you, Lily, it would have been the first thing I did. I had it all planned out, every possible iteration of what could have been, you would have been a queen to me, perhaps even a god… And funny, he didn’t follow a single one of them, not one.”

“That’s nice,” Morgan commented with a sigh, not really sure how she was supposed to take that, or any of Wizard Trotsky’s passion.

“Nice,” Wizard Trotsky scoffed, raising his hand now for another glass after emptying his current, “It’s not nice, it’s not even approaching nice.”

The glass arrived, he took it with a grateful nod and smile before he turned his attention back to Morgan, “He doesn’t deserve it, those followers he’s gathered, his prestige, his reputation, he deserves none of it. He wasn’t even there for it, not in any real sense!”

Morgan paused, a bit confused by that last statement, even as Wizard Trotsky chugged down the fire whisky at an alarming rate, “What do you mean, he wasn’t there for it?”

Wizard Trotsky paused, looked at her, blinked, and then slowly said, “The original, or at least, I think the original is out of commission at the moment. The man who has taken his mantle is like me he’s… A fragment, a derivation, a… You would call him a replicant, I think. But he was created much later, and he was never intended, or at least, not when I was created.”

He swigged his drink again, declaring imperiously, “He’s not important, not in any real sense, he’s a dirty thief is what he is.”

Morgan scoffed lightly, “I didn’t think being a dark lord was something based on morality.”

Wizard Trotsky didn’t seem to appreciate that at all, as he sloshed his drink and glared down at her imperiously, “That’s not the point!”

Morgan just raised her eyebrows at this, but didn’t say anything, didn’t say anything even when Wizard Trotsky ordered another drink, then another, and then started slurring as he drunkenly rambled at her, saying, well, some really weird shit, “You know, I’ve always loved you. You know that, right?”

“…No, not really,” Morgan said but he didn’t even seem to hear her as he slumped in his seat, looking rather dazed with a flush on his cheeks, and motioning in her general reaction.
He scoffed, dismissing this entirely, “That’s because we haven’t met yet, and that’s what… That’s what bothers me, you looked your age, or close to it, then… But it hasn’t happened yet, so it must happen soon and… And that means you’re leaving again, for a little while… I was so angry when you left the first time.”

“I really have no idea what you’re talking about,” Morgan said sipping the butterbeer she had ordered when it seemed that he wasn’t going anywhere.

“I dreamed in there, Lily,” he said sorrowfully instead of answering her, “I dreamed so very many things, and they were both beautiful and horrible, and inside them I don’t even know what I wanted him to be. This… thing I’d created for myself, this anagram, only that he would be great and terrible in the way that you always were so casually great and terrible.”

He paused, looked at her, a small smile on her lips as if that was a rather profound joke before it slipped away and left a terrible desolation in its place, “But we haven’t met yet, I’m here, but you’ll leave… And he’s stolen my name from me, he’s stolen my name and my future and everything…” he slumped forward, head crashing onto the table even as his fingers twitched, “Lily, what do I do now?”

He was asking her now? Well, she honestly had no idea. While it seemed like he might not have a plan Morgan had been kind of hoping he’d had something on his mind beyond stay in this brothel a few days while they waited out Voldemort and his Rabbit… (now there was another strange association, terrifying pale boy and rabbits… it sort of fit, if she thought about it).

However, it seemed he really hadn’t thought this through, and that left Morgan to decide. The trouble was, Morgan was all a bit dazed herself, having just been yanked into the twentieth century and could honestly care less about this whole dark lord title thing.

“… You could always light something on fire again,” Morgan pointed out with a small shrug, that seemed like Wizard Trotsky’s fallback plan in any situation, he’d certainly enjoyed lighting the Riddle mansion on fire.

“What, the ministry?” Wizard Trotsky asked before dismissing his own suggestion, “No, no, that won’t do at all.”

“Well,” Morgan started, staring into her drink as she thought, before simply stating, “If this other guy has taken the pureblood side of things then you’re going to have to take the other side.”
“The other side?” Wizard Trotsky asked, or rather, slurred, blinking at her in confusion.

“Sure, the other side, you know, the mudbloods.”

“What?” Wizard Trotsky barked, “No, no, they have no money and no power. They… can’t, never would work.”

“The Bolsheviks didn’t have money or power at first, but with enough violence and rage anything is possible. And I rather imagine the mudbloods are sick of lower paying jobs and getting killed all the damn time.”

“Are you… Are you saying I should become a communist?” he looked bewildered, almost confused, but Morgan nodded quite sagely.

“You already have the name for it,” Morgan noted, “Besides, I imagine you could sound quite impassioned standing on a soap box or two. More, as the dark lord gets more and more violent, it provides more and more fuel for your own movement.”

Not to mention he had the general horrific violent mindset that would have been right at home with the Bolsheviks. He lifted his head, looked at her, and it seemed that despite himself the idea was taking root.

“Yes, yes, it’s not ideal but… But there’s ultimately more people on that side, more working class… Purebloods, the truly pure ones, are really only a quarter of the population, maybe less…” he nodded to himself, grinning. “Yes, Lily, this could work.”

“Glad that’s settled,” Morgan said with a responding grin, “Also, I told the madam, you’ll be seeing Mustard Seed tonight.”

His smile disappeared abruptly, “I’ll be doing what?”

“Well, you have to see someone, we paid for it after all, and I’m pretty sure we’ll get thrown out if you don’t do something, and Mustard Seed is available… Unless you really are into men, because then Demetrius wraps things up at ten and I’m sure we can arrange something.”
Although according to Wizard Trotsky he was into underage cousins.

Wizard Trotsky leaned back in shock and horror that wasn’t really appropriate for a man who was about to get lucky, “Mustard Seed?!”

“It’s part of the theme, I think she’s one of Titania’s handmaidens or something… Titania cost too much, before you ask,” Morgan pointed out, as had Oberon for that matter, but Morgan wasn’t going to get into that unless he really started arguing.

“And by tonight, I mean in five minutes,” Morgan said, staring at a clock on the wall, “You’d better get upstairs.”

“And where will you be?” he drunkenly asked, though it was really more of an accusation, as if Morgan was the one about to have sex behind his back.

“Me? I’ll be down here,” Morgan stated holding her glass up, “Finishing my butterbeer and reading the Prophet… You don’t want me to watch, do you?”

“No! No, I do not want you to watch!”

“Good, because that would be alarming,” Morgan noted, before clarifying, “I mean, more alarming than you already are… And you’re already very alarming.”

Wizard Trotsky stared at her as if he had absolutely no idea what to do with her. Morgan patted him on the shoulder, “You’ll figure it out, I’ve heard it’s fun.”

Then none too gently, she shoved him out of the booth, and watched as he walked, like a man walking to the gallows, up the stairs and towards their bedroom while Morgan waved him off with a smile and a cheer.

When he was gone, she frowned, staring at the inside of her drink. Slowly, she lifted it, clinking a glass that wasn’t there, “To the Ghost of Christmas Past.”

She listened for the echoes that never happened, but still, still she could imagine the Ghost of
Christmas Past, wearing Wizard Trotsky’s aged face, and the name Lenin, clinking his glass against hers with that fond smile.

The entire past that she could not even glimpse lying between them.

That night, a few hours later when she slunk into the room, glancing at the disheveled Wizard Trotsky now passed out on the bed with the moonlight casting shadows on his face. His clothes were still on though, and he looked disheveled in the sense that he always looked disheveled, not like a woman had run her fingers through his thick dark hair.

With his eyes closed, dreaming, Morgan couldn’t help but note that for all his strange mannerisms, his ups, his downs, he was quite beautiful.

She stared for a few moments, taking in the pale shadows beneath his eyes, then, slowly, flopped onto the bed next to him and closed her eyes, a great red alien desert stretching out before her.

And while Wizard Trotsky dreamed of lives he never lived, Morgan Lily Gaunt dreamed of secret agents on Mars.
It was a cold day once again and looking at the sky Morgan was almost certain that it was going to snow. Not yet, not in the clear early morning as mist formed from her breath, but soon, it was going to snow.

Wizard Trotsky didn’t even seem to notice. Neither the clouds nor the cold could shake his attention from his newfound passionate zeal for the inevitable communist uprising of wizarding England and his hatred of the bourgeoisie. He stood on a soap box, conjured from thin air, at the edge of Diagon Alley, dressed in black and red that not one pedestrian seemed to recognize, and with a fire in his eyes he shouted out to the indifferent crowd, “When will enough be enough, Britain? It’s only beginning now but will we really standby and let it happen again?!”

This didn’t seem all that out of character for him though, Wizard Trotsky was a slave to his own fantastical whims, or at least, so Morgan thought. As for his latest flight of fancy…

“I can tell you now, comrades, that it won’t be the Wizengamot, filled with Malfoys, Blacks, Crabbes, and Goyles that will help us. No, we all know the truth! The truth is that they will turn their heads as they did eleven years ago! Because our leaders, these bourgeoise petty lords who have tyrannically ruled over us for one thousand years, belong to the dark lord.”

Black and red, it suited him, it brought out his pale skin and his blue eyes, certainly it suited his name, except… Except there was something almost painful seeing him with a black overcoat and a red scarf. Even though he was picturesque standing there, in the perfect position for a propaganda poster, he was painful to look at directly for too long.

The very sight of him, for reasons she couldn’t understand, seemed to tear her heart in half with bittersweet nostalgia.

“Yes, even those who talk about muggleborn children and how much they care belong to him and his ilk! Think about it. We know the name of every Death Eater, we know the names of the ones who never went to Azkaban. Yet here we are again, and nothing has changed! Tell me, what’s the...
difference between condoning and saying nothing?"

Morgan herself was dressed as nothing particularly special, except, that she was dressed to look like anyone but herself. She was wearing muggle clothes, much like Tom was, dark shoes worn thin, an oversized holiday sweater featuring something that looked like a festive reindeer or else a moose, a pair of out of season sunglasses, and all her hair stuffed up into an oversized Santa Claus hat leaving only a few stray crimson strands to curl out from under the brim and escape.

In other words, she looked utterly ridiculous, even among wizards and especially in juxtaposition to darkly dressed Wizard Trotsky on his righteous soap box.

He shouted out towards the crowd, his eyes tightening, grimacing at their lack of attention, “Is it because we’re afraid or is it because it’s convenient! Convenient for us to be gotten rid of this quickly and easily!”

However, he’d insisted, when he’d insisted they go out and start inspiring the countrymen to revolution, that she look like anyone but herself, and it was either this getup or him cutting off her hair and dying it nondescript brown. Somehow, the terrible sweater and the stupid hat had seemed like the lesser of evils (and the sad thing was, even though he’d winced when he’d seen her conjured clothing, he hadn’t seemed to disagree with her choice).

As it was no one was glancing at her, or Wizard Trotsky for that matter, their eyes were instead on the ground, ignoring even the holiday cheer of Diagon Alley. There was a tenseness in the air, the smell of smoke, and everyone’s eyes darted in every direction for anyone and everyone that wasn’t a muggleborn child on a soap box.

“Do you really intend to stay still and silent, relying on nothing but a few odd aurors barely graduated from Hogwarts, again?! Can we really stand to do that?!”

The holiday music playing, a tinny poorly recorded “It’s the Most Wonderful Time of the Year”, was strangely eerie among the hurried footsteps, harsh breathing, and lack of conversation. Perhaps, Morgan thought to herself as she watched dispassionately, there was something to her Christmas association after all.

Here an irrational and unquenchable fear and dread were practically bleeding into the holiday.

Abruptly, the fire seemed to die in Wizard Trotsky’s eyes as he surveyed his lack of an audience. For
a moment he looked terribly distant, as if his soap box was the height of a mountain, it was a god’s
distance from a people he could no longer comprehend. Quietly, he said, “You people will never
change, will you?”

Someone passing by, in their haste, accidentally dropped a copy of the Daily Prophet at her feet.
With a glance towards Wizard Trotsky, now staring in contempt and disappointment at the mob who
only wanted to get their holiday shopping done as quickly and quietly as possible, carefully reached
for it and unfolded it.

There, on the front page, was none other than Diagon Alley the day before, a burning shop that
specialized in muggle knick knacks and curiosities, and green light and smoke in the form of a skull
devouring a snake grinning down upon the scene with malevolent glee.

“This is all you’re capable of, isn’t it? I suppose, for a moment, I had forgotten that.”

She stared at it, for a moment, the streets of Diagon Alley, the ink of the witches and wizards fleeing
in terror on the printed page, and then she started flipping through, through and through until
somewhere in the middle of the pages she came across a blaring centerfold headline, “Hogwarts in
Chaos: Girl Who Lived Kidnapped Again and More!”

There, in copious and rather melodramatic words, reporter Rita Skeeter detailed the first half of 1992
to her avid readers, “Heirs of Slytherin, dark magical maladies and signs of possession, multiple
students missing and presumed kidnapped, murdered Hogwarts professors! Shocking and horror
filled 1992 has somehow topped even 1991 when Quirinus Quirrell, beloved Muggle Studies then
Defense professor, kidnapped the girl who lived to Albania.

And at the heart of it all, just as the year before, none other than incompetent Headmaster Albus
Dumbledore.

Our story begins only a few months ago when ominous messages, written in rooster’s blood, were
left dripping on the Hogwarts walls warning castle denizens to, ‘Beware the heir’ and that ‘the
chamber is now open’. This, of course, being a reference to the fifty-year old tragedy surrounding the
petrification of numerous students and the death of one muggleborn student Myrtle Warren,
instigated by none other than Hogwarts Groundskeeper Rubeus Hagrid and his pet acromantula.”

Morgan glanced up from the article to spy Wizard Trotsky, now laughing at the wizards and witches
passing them by, an amused almost hysterical laugh as if he was only now remembering exactly
what they were, and that it was unbelievably funny that even for a moment he had forgotten.
Deciding she didn’t want to go there she looked back down at the paper, picking up where she left off, “Did Dumbledore and company warn parents then? No, of course not! As with the year before and the hidden third corridor housing such deadly terrors as a Cerberus the staff merely told children to exercise caution while Groundskeeper Hagrid continued to perform his everyday functions unchecked on schoolgrounds.

As always, Dumbledore’s Hogwarts has prioritized the children!

Thus follows, with an unusual influx of Albania refugee students, weeks of petrifications and terror as muggleborn students wonder which of them will be next.

Muggleborn student Hermione Jean Granger tells all as she, with stoic features for a twelve-year old girl stated, ‘It was terrible… Somewhat not surprising though, isn’t this always what happens to muggleborn students? I think that there are reasons, that in these kinds of situations, it’s only Ellie Potter that we can rely on.”

Morgan’s concentration broke as she glanced up at a particularly loud laugh, Wizard Trotsky crowing, “You’re all fools!”

“Petrifications weren’t the end either, Rubeus Hagrid wouldn’t stop there, no, only a few weeks ago, four Hogwarts second year and two Hogwarts first year female students showed signs of possession, Eleanor Lily Potter along with her Albanian refugee friends disappeared from Hogwarts entirely and are presumed kidnapped by unknown associates of Hagrid’s, and beloved Defense professor and national hero Gilderoy Lockhart was found drained of all life in the Dungeon bathroom. No doubt, brave, valiant, heroic Gilderoy sought to defend the school from Hagrid, only just now arrested once again as he was in 1943, sacrificing his life in the struggle to foul and unspeakable magic.

How it must have tortured him, to fail to save Ellie Potter once again, to allow this beast to roam free and out of aurors’ clutches! How easily this all could have been avoided if Dumbledore had merely acted and arrested Rubeus Hagrid from the start!

Meanwhile students, dazed and horrified, resume their daily lives and try their best not to grieve for injured and missing students, particularly beloved Ellie Potter. Neville Longbottom, Gryffindor second year and friend of the girl who lived, had this to say, with tears welling at the corner of his eyes at the mere thought of his missing friend, ‘She never talked about Albania much. She… I can’t talk about this now.’

Draco Malfoy, second year Slytherin, spiteful and betrayed, proclaimed, ‘It just goes to show what a shame headmaster Dumbledore really is! When I told my father, he couldn’t believe what was going
Though perhaps it was Luna Lovegood, first year member of the newly minted Default house, who said it best when, with ultimate faith in the girl who lived, she stated, ‘Ellie will come back, she always will. Even the greatest and most daunting of obstacles, the tallest of mountains and widest of seas, are nothing to her in the end. Ultimately, she is without care for the heir, because to her he is a mere speck of dust. Ellie is made for greater challenges than these.’

Skimming through, the article then went on to reference Lucius Malfoy, member of the Hogwarts board of directors, who noted that this, more than anything else, proved that Albus Dumbledore was not fit to be headmaster Rita Skeeter giving her hearty approval of this idea.

On the side were several pictures, one of Hogwarts itself, one of a grim Albus Dumbledore at a press conference in the ministry, and one of Eleanor Potter herself. Looking at her, indeed, she looked alarmingly like Morgan, eerily identical in every conceivable way from the curls of her red hair to the luminosity of her green eyes.

She stood on a quidditch pitch in black and white quidditch robes, the caption under the picture remarking her as Default quidditch captain, while beside her, looking ranges from unimpressed and disinterested to cheerfully gleeful were her Default companions and quidditch teammates Daphne Greengrass, Blaise Zabini, Luna Lovegood, Hermione Granger, and Lepur and Lenin Rabbitson. Standing behind them, off to side, was a flock of Weasleys, the youngest boy with an absurdly fat three-toed rat on his shoulder, as well as Neville Longbottom.

It was a picture aimed to endear despite the eccentricities of its subjects, and it worked, even now as Morgan looked at it she was gripped by overwhelming bittersweet nostalgia.

However, aside from lingering on Ellie Potter, her eerily familiar mannerisms, she found her eyes drifting to the white haired Albanian boys, one, an almost exact replica of Wizard Trotsky, and the other…

It was the boy from the arcade, staring blankly, without expression once again into the camera. Except, no, Morgan had the feeling that he was somehow looking through time and space itself to Morgan in this exact moment, dark eyes boring into hers as they had in the arcade.

“Lily.”
Morgan looked up, found Wizard Trotsky staring down at her with pursed lips and a completely unamused expression on his face. Morgan quickly discarded the Prophet, bunching it into a ball and hurling it into the mob of pedestrians with an awkward grin, even as Wizard Trotsky said, “These people are ungrateful idiots, we’re done here.”

“Oh, already?” Morgan asked, looking around, wondering if they’d even spent that much time here. Sure, it’d been a few hours, but then he’d spent just as much time staring at a bunch of run down flats the day before.

“I’m not wasting my time on these people,” Wizard Trotsky said with an insulted sniff, crossing his arms and sticking his pale hands underneath them for warmth, “If they want to go and make the same mistakes they made a decade ago and end up with a dark lord ruling their country then far be it from me to stop them.”

Morgan herself had thought that this very quality was somewhat the point, but if Wizard Trotsky was done sitting out in the cold then she wasn’t going to complain. Still, it was almost pathetically short lived for a revolution. She supposed that Wizard Trotsky just didn’t have the patience for the proletariat.

He was looking at her again, his eyes softening and impatience drifting away as he took in her ridiculous get up, that fond look taking its place without warning or any apparent cause, “Lily, let’s get ice cream.”

“Ice cream?” Morgan asked, eyebrows raising as she glanced at the sky again, where, yes, it did still look like snow, “Isn’t it a bit cold for that?”

“I haven’t had ice cream in over fifty years,” he remarked before blinking with surprise and stating, “I think I’m craving it, actually.”

Morgan would personally rather have warmed butterbeer, but she supposed she didn’t have much of a choice as Wizard Trotsky vanished his soap box then took her hand in his, pulling her down the crowded and tense swarm of shoppers to the ice cream shop.

At least it was warm on the inside, though Morgan, mostly to humor him, kept her sunglasses and hat firmly on. Nobody seemed to mind though, the shop mostly empty, Wizard Trotsky and Morgan the only real customers as the rest hurried about their necessary business as quickly as possible.
Today was not a day for ice cream.

Wizard Trotsky seemed unnaturally in awe of his double chocolate frog mint ice cream, digging into it slowly, relishing every taste while Morgan’s eyes drifted to her own reflection in the window, barely tasting her own sundae.

Finally, seeing past the dark lenses of her glasses to the pale green of her eyes in the reflected window, Morgan said, “I dreamed about Mars.”

“What?” Wizard Trotsky asked, distracted by his own sense of taste, newly discovered after fifty years of being nothing more than paper.

“I dreamed about Mars,” Morgan repeated, sounding distant even to herself, “Secret agents on Mars, mutants, a blue sky, and a woman who was both sleazy and demure somehow…”

“Ah,” Wizard Trotsky seemed at a loss for words at the moment, setting down his spoon to stare at her, as if merely by looking her in the eye he could dissect exactly what this meant, “Was it a good dream?”

Morgan thought about it, thought about how brightly the stars had shone, how they had almost been blinding, screaming at her, “No.”

Then, looking at him, she asked, “What did you dream about when you were in the diary?”

He stilled, unnaturally so, so that it looked like he wasn’t even breathing for a moment as he stared at her. Then, with reluctance, life and movement returned to him and he said softly, raggedly, “Many things.”

“What kind of things?”

“Myself, mainly,” he said, looking away from her to his own reflection and his fierce blue eyes, “And you, you showed up quite often.”

To that they both said nothing, there was too much of an undertow to those words, enough to pull
them both under and drown them if they weren’t careful. For a moment then there was an awkward and tense silence, the only sound the music coming from outside and the movement of the cashier.

“Chestnuts roasting on an open fire…”

“I… would graduate Hogwarts, often, top of my class of course, O’s in every subject. I’d travel the world for a few years, see anything and everything I had ever imagined, was capable of imagining. I’d come back to England and become a king, just as I had always predicted and thought, and I’d find you or sometimes you would find me and…” he trailed off, looking back at her and there was such desperate and fierce longing in his eyes as he looked at her, that Morgan could easily read what he wasn’t saying.

That his dreams weren’t merely dreams, they were all the lives he’d never lived, over and over and over again inside his head with only the slightest variations, Morgan herself as his bride or his something.

However, Morgan couldn’t ask about that, didn’t want to. No, there was only one reason, looking at him now, that she had asked him in the first place, “How did you know they weren’t real?”

This time there was a flicker of something sharp, something apprehensive and dark, within his pale eyes, “With great difficulty.”

She kept looking, searching his face for more. He hesitated again, looking at her and through her, and finally he elaborated with a pained look on his face, “The last time, when I stopped playing house with myself I… I was in so deep, deeper than I’d ever been, that even I didn’t know it wasn’t real.

But why would I doubt it? I had everything I had ever wanted. I was a king, all nations bowing before me and I was so tired of only being a memory…

We had children, Lily, and I…

At some point, I think I wanted it to be real, and so I forgot how to doubt.”

He rubbed a hand over his face, sighed, his breath louder than it should have been, “One day you came in, but you were different, for that moment you weren’t mine. You were dressed like a man, a
dark and worn leather coat on, tall boots and for that single instant, in the twilight in the palace, you were utterly alien and ineffable.

This didn’t bother me like it should have, there is no true reality in dreams, Lily. You could be both my wife and a stranger in the same instant, standing in two places at once with ease, and my mind would never balk at it.

So, you were Lily but you weren’t my Lily, and as you walked, taller and older yet wholly yourself, I did not blink.

There was smoke in the room, but no one was smoking, the light was caught in it as an orange haze, reflected in your eyes as you looked across at me. You set up a machine, put it up to my eye, and you told me that you had come to administer the Voight-Kampff test, a type of Turing test.”

He paused, quirked a smile at her, and said, “Only later did I remember that you had been the one to tell me about…”

He stopped, paled, shook his head, then continued, “You asked, first, reading the machine and not looking at me at all, a very strange question about a tortoise in a desert. You asked, ‘You’re in a desert, walking along in the sand, when all of a sudden you look down and see a tortoise, Tom. It’s crawling towards you, you reach down and you flip the tortoise on its back. The tortoise lays on its back, its belly baking in the hot sun, beating its legs trying to turn itself over, but it can’t. Not without your help. But you’re not helping, why is that, Tom?’

Of course, I didn’t know, but you didn’t let me answer, barely let me open my mouth as my heart raced without my control or without even knowing what it was I was so very afraid of only that I was paralyzed with fear of something.”

Tom’s hands clenched, knuckles white as he rung them, even now anxiety bled into his voice as he remembered the dream world that had been anything but, his words resonating inside of Morgan’s mind with more force than they should have been capable of.

“Then you asked me to, ‘Describe in single words only the good things that come into mind about your mother’

I failed to answer, there were no single words for my mother, and good words, what are good words, what good words could I possibly have for her, and you knew it before you even asked. And you
grinned at my failure, you put your machine away, and announced, ‘There, see, you aren’t human after all.’

I paused, blinked, and asked, ‘Pardon?’

‘You’re under the illusion that your human, a common misconception, but you’re really little more than a replication a… memory, as it were,’ you were all business, utterly indifferent to my terror and rage as you announced, ‘You have prescribed false memories to yourself, that was clever, but not good enough.’

And suddenly I remembered, I remembered that I wasn’t real, that none of it was.

And you said to me, a look of pity in your eyes as the world ended, as everything shattered, ‘It’s too bad you won’t live, but then again, who does?’

They both fell silent again at that, unspoken was that this was the last dream for Wizard Trotsky, and after that no doubt he had been too afraid to ever let himself sink so deep again. Instead Morgan ate her ice cream, the flavor flat and unrecognizable, unimportant.

Wizard Trotsky stood, reached out a hand towards hers and pulled her out of the booth, “Let’s go to Hyde Park.”

They took the long way, through the streets of muggle London, the atmosphere far more cheery and typical of the usual holidays than inside the wizarding counterpart and as they did the shadows grew longer, twilight approached, and just as Morgan had predicted small flakes of snow began to fall.

As they walked, past double decker buses and red telephone booths, Wizard Trotsky with his hands in his pockets, he said, “I… Sometimes, Lily, I think you don’t know how I feel.”

Their shadows behind them were long and dark, trailing off towards the horizon as the sun slunk down into the earth.

“It’s understandable, even I’m uncertain of myself to tell the truth. The diary never did any of us any favors. Still, I feel so much, too much at times. However, I have always known, that ultimately, whatever it is I feel for you is what matters to me most. More than power, kingship, money, or women.”
He glanced at her, the light caught in his eyes, painting that pale blue shades of orange, magenta, and gold as if his eyes were twin suns as well, rising in a pale blue sky. He ruefully smiled, looking away from her for a moment, “I was never this fragmented before, when were one Tom Riddle. I feel constantly on edge, high then low, I hate it. I hate… how out of control I am, how fragmented my thoughts are! I hate that I can’t make them listen or care and that I don’t even care if they do!”

He stopped abruptly, listening to his words echo, watching them go almost with fascination as if he hadn’t realized the strength of his own frustration and anger. He sighed then looked down at her again, conflicted once more as they stepped into the park itself, past carolers and ice skaters, “And I am sorry, Lily, for everything, but… You have to understand that there was no way out. You left me no other choice. Because I can’t…”

He looked down at his hands, pale even against their faded winter backdrop, and with a wry smile he said, “I’m not what I was, I can’t persuade like I used to. Ginny Weasley, Pansy Parkinson, even Gilderoy Lockhart perhaps. But you? Even then I couldn’t, how could I hope to now?”

He moved towards an empty bench, sat down and stared at her, framing her with his hands as if they were a camera with which to take her picture. With a smile he stated, “I always envied you, you were so… Powerful, even then, even when I had no idea what the depths of that power could possibly be. At first, I was rather bitter about it, then I coveted, but then… Even now, I wouldn’t take that away from you any more than I would your hair or your eyes or anything about you. You have always been quintessentially yourself, Lily.”

That remark seemed to reassure him, he dropped his hands back into his lap, still smiling softly, staring out at the park and at Morgan herself while Morgan stared back at this strange young man that was her cousin.

“We are not,” Wizard Trotsky stated with confidence and a grin, “Two ships passing in the night, Lily. One way or another, we were destined to meet. That, beyond everything, I know.”

It was almost twilight now, somewhere in the park, a recording of a Ray Charles’ song was playing, strangely not holiday themed. Trotsky stood, held his hand out to her with a slight bow, and waited until she took his hand for him to pull her towards him.

“You give your hand to me and then you say hello.”

The snow was falling harder, the sun just now setting fully, as with their woefully mismatched
heights they stepped awkwardly into a slow swing. His lips stretched into a smile, one without malice or bitterness as white flakes caught in his dark hair.

Staring up at him, one hand on his waist the other in his hand, Lily wondered if it was the day of Christmas Present or Christmas Future, and that she couldn’t quite tell, that somehow her second and third day seemed to be blurring into one so that its theme was lost entirely in something she herself could only barely understand.

“And I can hardly speak, my heart is beating so.”

Only, she knew even as she looked at him, at the light framing his face like a halo, that she was haunted by puzzle pieces of a reality she was finding difficult to believe in. The rabbit with the face of a boy, fathers with crows’ feathers, Christmas with the scent of blood, Wizard Trotsky her fragmented cousin, Lenin Rabbitson who wore his face with paler hair, Hogwarts, and Ellie Potter at the center of it all. All these things wrapped together into something that made her head and heart ache desperately, though she didn’t have the name for what that was.

“And anyone could tell, you think you know me well, but you don’t know me.”

And that, when she looked up at Wizard Trotsky, just for this moment, and he smiled down at her with his joyful passionate desperation, and yes, even love, she couldn’t help but both pity him and love him in return. Only for a second, because even when she looked at him, she felt something even though…

“No, you don’t know the one who dreams of you at night, and longs to kiss your lips, and longs to hold you tight.”

Even though, well, she didn’t know, except that he wasn’t in her dream. She was in his, perhaps, or some conglomeration of her was but…

“I’m just a friend, that’s all I’ve ever been, but you don’t know me.”

But in some sense, they were ships passing in the night.

Even now, her hand in his, they weren’t really touching one another.
The song faded, the lyrics passing through unheard in the air, the sun set, and the air grew dark and cold as the snow fell thicker. Soon, all Morgan could see in the light of the streetlamps were the white flakes swiftly falling to the earth. He kept gripping her hand tightly, as if sensing that Morgan was miles and miles from this place.

“Are we going back to the brothel?” Morgan finally asked, her words a white fog in front of her from the cold.

“For now,” he said, “Well leave though, soon, I don’t know where yet but…”

Morgan nodded, extracting her hand from his and shoving it into her pocket, that moment now lost in time like a tree falling unnoticed in the woods. “Right, we should head back then.”

They walked in silence, Wizard Trotsky contemplative, clearly forgetting that he had an appointment with Mustard Seed again, or perhaps merely indifferent to the idea of it as he could probably just confound her and send her on her merry way. Either way, when they entered, Morgan veered off towards the bar and left Wizard Trotsky to his own sordid affairs, him sparing her a pair of somewhat affronted raised eyebrows before stalking upstairs with a shake of her head, leaving Morgan with her butterbeer and the quiet.

Or at least, until the chime of a bell sounded as the door opened, and an early evening customer walked in. Morgan’s head turned almost without her consent, as if the mere sound of his footsteps were enough to draw her attention, and when she looked everything stopped.

There, taller, older, filled out into the body of a man while Wizard Trotsky’s still wavered in adolescence, was Tom Marvolo Riddle. A man wearing Tom Riddle’s face, his eyes, his legs, and even his hands as he slowly surveyed the room, eyes, eventually, finding Morgan’s.

Walking past the madam, dozing, he came towards her, sat in the booth across from her, folding his hands on the table and just staring at her while she stared transfixed back. Slowly, carefully, she removed her hat and her glasses, but he had recognized her even with them.

Quietly, in an older Tom Riddle’s voice, he said, “You didn’t keep your promise.”

There were tears, unexplainable tears, in the corners of her eyes. She blinked against this, grimacing, trying to keep her bearings even as she said, “I think I dreamed about you.”
She shook her head, held at her hand, tried to see past the Tom Riddle in his eyes as she held out her hand towards him so he could shake it, “Sorry, I’m Morgan Gaunt, recently recovered from a fifty year coma.”

He said nothing, didn’t move either of his hands towards her, just frowned. Only, only it was deeper than he was allowing his expression to show, this wasn’t mild disapproval, in his eyes there was an unfathomable rage burning there, as if he saw far more in her than she ever could.

And she found she somehow couldn’t blame him for it.

Except, her mind told her, except it hadn’t been three days, or had it? She didn’t know when the days started, and he could be Voldemort, very likely was Voldemort. But no, no somehow, she knew that wasn’t it, that he wasn’t Voldemort as she knew him but something else entirely.

She knew in the way that in dreams you always unexplainably knew.

“I need to talk to you,” he finally said, calmly, politely, as if there were no tension in the room at all, “It’s about Tom Riddle.”

“Who are you?” she asked instead, eyes pouring over his familiar features, that were more familiar even than the fact that they belonged to Wizard Trotsky. As if Wizard Trotsky looked familiar because he looked like a younger version of this man.

He smiled, a wry amused thing, and announced a name that echoed so loudly inside her own head, “Lenin.”

“How did you find me?”

The smile stayed, small, and reminiscent of Wizard Trotsky’s, “That’s a little hard to explain.”

Then, motioning towards himself, placing a wand, a wand that hummed with familiarity on the table, he noted, “I’m not armed.”
Then, catching Morgan’s glance behind him, for the white-haired boy that wasn’t a boy at all he added, “Don’t worry, I came alone.”

Except… Except Morgan knew these words, this had been in her dream, yes, yes she remembered this or something in her did. The words tumbled out of her mouth, the words she’d heard asked or had asked herself before, and yet she still meant every one of them as she stared across at him, “What do you want?”

She wasn’t sure she wanted this scene to end.

He leaned back, his smile twisting into a rueful grin as he examined her, until it disappeared at the sight of her own trepidation, her fear, dashed his mirth entirely. Finally, he said, “This is going to be very difficult for you to accept, Lily.”

“I’m listening.”

And then she was Doug Quaid, in a hotel room on the run, reeling from memories she did not have, as a man in a suit and glasses looked across from her and echoed this doppelganger’s, Wizard Lenin’s, words, “I’m afraid you’re not really standing here right now.”

She grit her teeth, leaned back, and said, “You know, Doc, you could have fooled me.”

“I’m quite serious,” he responded, and indeed, his face was grim, grimmer than Wizard Trotsky’s had ever been, “You’re not here, and neither am I.”

“That’s amazing,” Morgan drily remarked, “Where are we?”

“At Rekall,” he said simply, but behind this was some other darker truth, that this was the metaphor he had simply chosen to use but the meaning remained the same, the meaning that had been haunting Morgan for days now, “You were strapped to an implant chair, and I’m monitoring you from a psychic probe console.”

She laughed, a bitter thing, wondering if this was what Wizard Trotsky had felt, confronted by his own Morgan, his own older Lily in his dream world. Faced with the unbearable reality that reality itself simply wasn’t, “Oh, I get it. I’m dreaming, and this is part of the delightful vacation package your company has sold me.”
“Not exactly,” he responded grimly, and it was amazing, that out of context he played the context so well, that these jarring words that she had no right to know, that he had no right to know, flowed so well, “What you’re experiencing is a freeform delusion based on our memory tapes, but you’re inventing it yourself as you go along.”

She grit her teeth, as she had as Doug Quaid in her dream on Mars, and asked with a shaking voice, “If this is my delusion, then who the hell invited you?”

“I’ve been artificially implanted as an emergency measure,” he noted before expanding, looking her directly in the eye to the very heart of her, “I’m sorry to tell you this, Lily, but you have suffered a schizoid embolism, we can’t snap you out of your fantasy, and I’ve been sent in to try to talk you down.”

The words, at this point, were almost horrified rote, “How much is Cohaagen paying you for this?”

None the less he played his part, and there was something tender and terrifying in that, that he would quote words back to her that he had no business having memorized. And his words, the implications, were truly terrible, “Think about it.”

He gestured towards her, towards the brothel, towards everything that made Morgan Lily Gaunt what she was, “Your dream begins in the middle of the implant procedure. Everything after that, the chases, the trip to Mars, the suite at the Hilton, are all elements of your Rekall holiday and ego trip.”

Then eyeing her, looking at her directly, he noted, “You paid to be a secret agent.”

If he had said it directly, that she was not really Morgan Lily Gaunt, that she was someone else, possibly Ellie Potter, possibly some girl named Lily, would she have listened. Would she have shook in terror as she realized that everything she had ever counted on, everything she knew, was nothing more than an illusion?

She didn’t know, she only knew that even now she didn’t truly want to know, that for all she could dismiss reality as a great fickle machine, it was one thing to know it, and another to embrace it without hesitation, “Bullshit. It’s coincidence.”

“What about the girl?” he asked instead, of course, meaning, what about Tom, what about cousin Tom, cousin Trotsky?
“Brunette, athletic, sleazy, and demure just as you specified, is that a coincidence?”

Did Wizard Trotsky really come for you after fifty years in a coma? And if not, where were you before then? Where did he find you and what did he fashion into your current image?

She shook her head, looking down at her reflection in the butterbeer, “No, she’s real. I dreamt about her before I even went to Rekall.”

Strange, was she dreaming now, because the conversation flowed like a river. Flowed and flowed where it shouldn’t, where it didn’t make sense, and yet it did and she accepted it for what it was.

“Lily, can you hear yourself?” he asked, and he meant these words or he was a profound actor, his eyes, Wizard Trotsky and Lenin’s shared eyes, burned, “She’s real because you dreamt her.”

She swallowed, closed her eyes and opened them, forcing herself into stoicism, “Who am I really then, Lenin, if not Morgan Gaunt?”

“Eleanor Lily Potter,” he said with ease, reaching across the table to take her hand in his, his hands slightly larger than Wizard Trotsky’s had been, “Lily, the destroyer of this world and the girl who lived, and my only friend.”

“And you, Lenin?”

A smile, that damn smile that she had seen too few times in her life but did not wish to see now, “The peculiar man who once lived inside your head.”

“And do you have any proof?” she asked.

“Only Total Recall,” he said, because he couldn’t offer more, to dispute the whole nature of reality there could be no evidence, only inconsistencies.

And so, it was Morgan who picked up the scene, as if Doug Quaid’s wife had walked into the room,
demure and grieving, so different than the homicidal cold woman he had seen prior, “If I wanted to return, then what?”

And as she said it she realized she faced the same dilemma ad Doug Quaid, worse perhaps, she must actively choose, without evidence, with only nagging suspicions and apparent coincidences, the reality she preferred to live in. Because that’s what it was, ultimately, nothing was certain, his world or Morgan’s, instead it was a preference.

Did she choose the strange half familiar world of Wizard Trotsky’s or swallow the red pill and reject reality, truly reject it, altogether?

In front of her he placed a red pill on the table, the pill she had known he would place before her, “Swallow this.”

“What is it?”

“It’s a symbol of your desire to return to reality,” he answered, his hand warm against hers, as real as it had seemed fifty years ago in a life she might not have lived, “In your dreams you’ll fall asleep.”

“Alright,” she said swallowing staring directly at him, perhaps in warning, her last desperate warning that she was not helpless here, “Let’s say you’re telling the truth and this is all a dream. I could pull this trigger and it won’t matter.”

“It won’t make the slightest difference to me, Lily, but the consequences to you will be devastating,” and he almost didn’t seem like he was parroting lines here, the words burned, the depths of his rage bleeding through into his words, “In your mind, I’ll be dead, and with no one to guide you out, you’ll be stuck in here in permanent psychosis. The walls of reality will come crashing down around you. One minute, you’re the savior of the rebel cause; next thing you know, you’ll be Cohaagen’s bosom buddy. You’ll even have fantasies about alien civilizations as you requested; but in the end, back on Earth, you’ll be lobotomized! So, get a grip on yourself, Lily!”

He leaned forward, placed the pill into her hands, and hissed out, “Take the pill and put it into your mouth. Swallow it.”

She looked down at it, this red pill, her fingers shaking as the philosophical magnitude of it sunk in. To take this pill, to reject this reality was in some way to reject every reality. It was to irrevocably stake her claim that reality, that the world she inhabited, was lacking to the point that it must be
Wizard Lenin suddenly leapt from the booth, pulling her down with him to the floor as a bolt of light struck where he had just been sitting, leaving a smoldering scorch mark where his head had been. Morgan glanced up and saw Wizard Trotsky now entering the bar, wand out and breathing heavily, people fleeing past him as he glared across at Wizard Lenin, the madam rushing out of the building as the fire from the spell began to spread across the walls.

Suddenly, Morgan remembered, that to meet your doppelganger was an omen of death.

“You,” he said, in clear horrified recognition, not even sparing a glance for Morgan, “What do you think you’re doing here?”

Wizard Lenin picked himself up off the floor, summoning the wand he’d left on the table back into his hand, and dully asked, “What do you think I’m doing here?”

It was an unnecessary question, it seemed that Wizard Trotsky knew the answer without even having to think. Shaking his head he stated, “You can’t honestly imagine I’d let you take her.”

“It has nothing to do with your permission,” Wizard Lenin scoffed before turning towards Morgan, motioning to her, and crying out, “Besides, look what you’ve done to her! Morgan Gaunt, what is she, our sister, our cousin?!”

“I did what I had to!”

“You had to make this…” Wizard Lenin motioned around them, to their absurd surroundings, “This cheap charade, this sordid attempt to play house in a brothel of all places? To what end? Surely, you can’t imagine that she, that I, would be grateful for this.”

“You have no right to call me on cheap charades!” Trotsky spat, pale eyes burning as light began to spark out of his wand, “You’re no more real than I am, and here you are picking up his mantle as if you have any more right to it than the rest of us!”

“And you think you have a right to it?” Wizard Lenin asked, stalking forward, wand gripped tightly in his hand as he approached his younger doppelganger, “Tell me, Snowball, where exactly would you go, what contacts would you use, how would your dear cousin factor into your endgame? What
exactly is it that you were planning to do next, or are you even capable of planning at all?”

Wizard Lenin then stopped, fully looked at Wizard Trotsky, at everything he was, and it was in a pitying tone that he said, “I never imagined meeting you, but I expected you to be… so much more than you are.”

Wizard Trotsky shot out a spell, immediately deflected by his older counterpart, and barked out a laugh, “You think I’m looking for your approval? Because I can tell you, Lenin, that I’ve found you lacking from the start.”

Wizard Trotsky, grinning his mad grin, began to list off Wizard Lenin’s flaws upon one hand, “Let’s see, first, your disastrous failure with Eleanor Potter eleven years ago, well done there. Second, the fact that you yourself weren’t even meant to exist, you were an accident, a mistake, a glaring stain upon our reputation that will haunt us for eternity.”

Wizard Trotsky then motioned to Morgan herself, still on the floor looking up at them, desperately clutching the red pill in her hand, “And her, Lenin, you can’t even seem to remember who she really is! You accuse me of playing house, look at you! I’m not even sure what you’re playing but the denial, the dismissal, surely that is far more pathetic.”

“You’re mistaking her for someone else,” Wizard Lenin insisted, again dully, almost impatiently, but Wizard Trotsky merely balked, barked out a short mad laugh at his counterpart’s dismissal.

“For someone else, really, do you think there could be two? Even in fifty years?” Wizard Trotsky said, shaking his head with a smile, “That really is… so disappointing.”

“It’s an understandable mistake,” Wizard Lenin said, and there was something in his voice, familiar and strange as it was, something that Morgan couldn’t recognize except that somewhere in memories she could no longer recall, “After all, she looks almost exactly like her mother.”

“Her mother?!” Wizard Trotsky cried, in a tone that played at amusement but was far more desperate and angry than that, “At least I only made her a cousin!”

Wizard Lenin sighed, looking irritated with the affair, pulling Morgan up from the floor to stand with him. Then, he addressed the boy version of himself, as if for the final time, “I won’t deny it, what you’ve managed was clever, reckless, but clever. I doubt I’ll ever be able to set foot inside Hogwarts again, perhaps even Lily won’t be able to with the chaos you left in your wake. However, Trotsky, it was only ever clever, and ultimately, even you must know that it could never get you anywhere. This, I think, is all you’ll ever be capable of.”
And that, the sight of Morgan’s hand in his, torn between two worlds, as well as his own dismissal was enough for Wizard Trotsky. His wand whipped out, with a great Latin cry a bolt of light shot towards them and they were off to the races.

And they were vicious, both of them, fire burning around them, people screaming as they fled down the stairs and into the street, some caught in the spell fire and their blood gushing out onto the staircase, walls twisting, both only just ducking out of the way of the other’s spells.

It seemed to be about far more than their words, far more than Morgan, and maybe even far more than each other. No, both literally and metaphorically, Morgan imagined that they were seeking to destroy, in this one rage and hate filled moment, everything they loathed within themselves.

The brothel quickly began to collapse in on itself, not able to withstand the multiple fires now breaking loose, and Morgan herself found her attention drifting from them and to the red pill in her open hand.

A man stumbled, fell to the floor, dead, the left side of his chest missing as he ran into one of Wizard Lenin’s spells. Blood spurted from his chest, his eyes were glazed, but neither seemed to notice as they kept going, Wizard Trotsky screaming his spells in rage even as his counterpart’s eyes burned.

Then, with a single spell, a lucky shot, Morgan watched as Wizard Trotsky’s wand clattered to the floor and out of his hand, he reached for it, even as Wizard Lenin towered above him, mouth already forming the first syllable that would spell his death.

And, for a moment, a perfectly surreal moment, she wondered how it had possibly come to this. How Tom Riddle, without hesitation, with no hint of doubt, could think to destroy Tom Riddle.

Morgan moved between the pair, holding down Wizard Lenin’s hand in her own, and commanding, “Enough.”

She glanced down at Wizard Trotsky, staring up at her in numb terror, as if he knew exactly what was coming next, perhaps had always known. And that this, in some ways, was worse for him than that.

(“It’s too bad she won’t live, but then again, who does?”)
Never moving her eyes from him, throwing her hand to her mouth, Lily took the red pill.

And as she and Wizard Lenin teleported from the brothel, she could still hear the echoes of Wizard Trotsky’s screaming.
Apparating from the burning brothel was more jarring than Morgan, no Lily, was used to. As if they had torn through far more than simply time and space when they left Wizard Trotsky behind. Still, with the taste of the so recently swallowed red pill in her mouth, and the great crack of teleportation ringing in her ears, she stumbled to her feet and took in her new surroundings.

It was an opulent bedroom, perhaps a guest room. The kind with wealth written into every corner and every gilded silver leaf decorating the walls and ceiling, the kind of room she imagined would have been quite at home in Versailles. It edged on gaudy and ridiculous yet was not quite there for how much the room seemed to glitter. However, where Versailles was golden, this room was a study in green and silver, serpents carved into the furniture with emerald eyes staring out at Lily and the man, Wizard Trotsky’s older doppelganger, the accidental horcrux Wizard Lenin.

Somehow, though she didn’t know how… Perhaps from Eleanor Lily Potter’s forgotten memories, the place reminded her of the Slytherin common room. The same desperate attempt for grandeur existed here as there, the same colors, and the same tone…

Softly, carefully, as if Lily was far more fragile than either of them could remember her being, Wizard Lenin ushered her towards the silver bench at the end of the large bed which seemed to be drowning in entirely too many pillows.

For a moment too long his fingers, long and pale and strangely smooth, lingered on her jaw as he looked into her eyes. For all that he looked like a grown Wizard Trotsky, she thought, he looked nothing like him either. This wasn’t an expression that Wizard Trotsky was capable of wearing, it was too old, too worn, and the sympathy, fear, and concern inside of it was a subtler thing than Wizard Trotsky’s passion ever allowed.

Wizard Trotsky, in many ways, had worn his heart on his sleeve.

With a wordless sigh Wizard Lenin stepped away, summoned the great dark green chair resting by the fireplace and sat in it across from Lily, for a single moment the very picture of domesticity. In the
perfect silence he snapped his fingers, summoning a shaking and terrified house elf.

It looked at him with too large eyes, dressed in ragged fabric that could barely be classified as clothing, entire shrunken body quivering at the sight of this man as if it were staring up at a cruel and indifferent god.

“Two cups of tea and tell your master we are not to be disturbed until I myself say otherwise,” Wizard Lenin commanded, barely looking at the creature before it disappeared with another too loud crack.

Tea appeared moments later, and then there was silence once again.

Quiet, why was it so quiet? There had been so much noise in the brothel, so many thoughts, so much rage and feeling and yet here she was still buffeted by the storm and had nothing to say and nothing to ask.

She could still hear Wizard Trotsky screaming, begging her not to go, not to leave him there again even as she and Wizard Lenin disappeared right before his eyes.

No, now the only thing she could think of was that moment, the terrible choice, and that she had chosen to reject the reality that was Morgan Gaunt. Not because it was any less believable than Eleanor Lily Potter but rather because she could not bring herself to believe in it.

Wizard Lenin’s voice, though soft and calm and collected, jarred her thoughts just as the crack of a gunshot might, “We’re at the Malfoy residence. I don’t suppose you have any recollection of Draco Malfoy at the moment, but Lucius Malfoy was once a follower of mine and, on my resurrection, was kind enough to offer a spare bedroom for my use.”

Lily swallowed, her throat suddenly dry, as his words seemed to border almost on nonsensical for how much context she was missing. She could only say, “The Prophet article on Hogwarts mentioned Draco and Lucius Malfoy. Draco’s a second-year student, he… blamed Dumbledore for the semester. Lucius Malfoy is on the Hogwarts board of directors.”

He only stared at her for a moment, for a flicker of a second his lips quirked into an amused smile, but it disappeared all too quickly as something grim took its place, “That may have been the most sensible and accurate description you’ve ever given a pair of human beings.”
“Oh,” was all Lily, Morgan playing at being something other than Morgan, could say to that.

That fond, almost nostalgic smile, briefly returned as he stared across at her, “For the record, you fondly refer to Draco Malfoy as Mini Pimp, as you were convinced from the moment you met him on the Hogwarts Express that he was putting on the airs of a miniature pimp without a prostitute to his name. As for Lucius, the few thoughts you’ve spared on him thus far has been to call him Bigger Pimp, and bemusement and confusion over Draco Malfoy’s constant use of him as a threat.”

With a small laugh, as he sipped at his tea, he said, “If Draco Malfoy were to have a catch phrase it would be, ‘My father will hear about this, Potter!”

However, the silence persisted, and whatever good mood there was to be found in nostalgia dripped away as they reconciled that in many ways, in this moment at least, they were from two entirely different worlds.

She searched for Wizard Trotsky within him even now, noting the similarities and differences even as she’d always compared Wizard Trotsky to someone unseen. He, for his own part, searched for Lily and Eleanor Lily Potter in Morgan Gaunt.

Finally, he continued, “Regardless, I have been staying here in the weeks since I left Hogwarts, the day I later learned you yourself disappeared from Hogwarts. Rabbit, Lepur Rabbitson…”

He trailed off, eyes drifting to a corner of the room, fingers gripping his wand as he did so. Lily herself turned and there was the boy from the arcade, suddenly without any noise or indication of his arrival, inside of the room and standing in the corner, staring out at both of them with those black eyes.

“Him,” Lily said, pointing, and though she should have had more to say about this, to say about this unnatural thing wearing the body of an adolescent boy she couldn’t find the words.

“Yes, I was wondering when he’d show up,” Wizard Lenin groused, looking about as pleased to see him as Lily herself was, “You have always been convinced that he’s an abomination that exists outside of our reality and will one day devour existence itself whole. I have never been as convinced as you, but regardless, I have always found him a touch unnerving.”

A touch unnerving, was that what it was called now?
For his own part the boy glanced at Wizard Lenin, and again there was nothing in it, just those cold, dark, endless eyes that stretched on like the void of space without any stars left inside of it. A stark contrast to the pale, blank, white that was his skin and hair.

Yet for all that he was expressionless, eldritch even in this pale perfect body of his, there was something that looked at Wizard Lenin and judged.

“He’s…”

Whatever she meant to ask Wizard Lenin didn’t answer, instead, motioning to the boy he explained, “He came to find me, a few days ago, to come and collect you as it were. A very out of character move for him, but none the less, it did help greatly in tracking you down.”

“I see,” except she didn’t see, because even though she was still Morgan Gaunt in all but name, some part of her rebelled at the idea of this boy, this rabbit in human skin, doing anything for anything’s sake.

He seemed removed from action just as he was removed from sentiment.

The idea of him going and seeking Wizard Lenin of all people…

Wizard Lenin’s face relaxed somewhat at her concern, a spark of relief and amusement entering his eyes, “Yes, you would have found it just as unnerving a few weeks ago.”

Then it was business as usual as he concluded, “There are others here, many of my servants for my revolution as you liked to call it, who will come in and out of this place. Severus Snape you once knew, and loathed, I don’t think you’ve met any of the others. However, they shouldn’t give you too much trouble.”

“Right,” she echoed rather lamely, then they stared at one another, waiting for the other to speak first.

Her eyes kept moving to the pale boy, but he wasn’t doing anything, was in fact actively doing nothing as he stared forward with all the focus of a corpse out at the room. Yet she was almost certain that he was watching her, focusing on her as he had in the arcade and as the pixels representing him had in the paper.
However, that seemed to be the extent that he was willing to act today. There were no words, no greetings, nothing as he just stared forward, ignored completely by Wizard Trotsky’s counterpart as if he wasn’t even worth dismissing.

“What exactly did he tell you?”

She looked back over to Wizard Lenin, and with the dark and frustrated look on his face she felt he was perfectly aware of what a difficult question that was. Wizard Trotsky, after all, hadn’t told her anything. No, she’d just… Woken up one day and he’d always been there, since that day he’d come to find her in Little Hangleton.

And she hadn’t questioned that he had come for her, that one day Tom Marvolo Riddle had appeared on a hill in his school uniform to come and find Morfin, no some part of her had always known that he would find her.

Or that perhaps… Perhaps Wizard Lenin would find her.

So, all she could do now was look at him, the older version of Tom Marvolo Riddle, and tell him everything she knew, “My name is Morgan Gaunt, unwanted bastard daughter of Morfin Gaunt and some unnamed prostitute that I no doubt resemble. For most of my life I lived in Little Hangleton with Morfin, living in the cupboard beneath the stairs and prying snakes from the walls, until Tom Marvolo Riddle, Merope’s bastard orphan son, arrived on our doorstep.”

She paused, closing her eyes and tasting the words, the memories, so much more than she could ever condense into a few short sentences, “He killed his family that same day, framed Morfin, came back for me but put me into a coma I don’t remember. The diary, Wizard Trotsky, woke me up years afterwards, and here we are.”

She opened her eyes, he was staring at her, and at once he looked almost alien to her. There was a noble aristocratic grace to him, a stillness and calm, that had never been there in Wizard Trotsky. Yet their eyes were the same color, and both, in their own way, burned when you stared at them for too long.

And though you couldn’t tell it by his expression, even by the way he held himself, there was an unseen rage building within him at her words.
“I never had a cousin,” he finally said, a terrible edge to his quiet voice, “Morfin died in Azkaban childless. When I met him, before meeting my father, it was hissing drunken Morfin Gaunt who greeted me and Morfin who slammed the door in my face. There was no one else.”

So, Morgan Gaunt had never existed in the first place.

She laughed, slowly at first and then the terrible hilarity of it overwhelming her. Holding her sides together, Wizard Lenin and Rabbit watching her, she couldn’t help but think that it was overbearingly simple, everything she’d suspected and doubted squeezed into that one small sentence.

He waited until she finished, which was far too long, because at the end it was still both funny and horrible. So, when she stopped laughing she just felt… empty.

“Morgan Gaunt was an invention of my other half, Trotsky as you call him, false memories bestowed upon you to artificially explain your presence in his life,” unexplained was why Wizard Trotsky had done this, what had been in it for him, and why he had seemed to cling to it both desperately and loathed it at the same time.

Hadn’t he always seemed to cringe, when he thought of Morgan as his cousin?

“In truth you were born July 31st, 1980, to Lily Evans and James Potter, and October 31st, 1981, halted my revolution in its steps and became the infamous girl who lived,” he continued, expanding on what he’d said in the brothel, that name that hadn’t surprised her in the slightest, Ellie Potter.

“Yes, I read about that in the paper…”

“You’ve always gone by Lily though, since we first met,” and there was that smile again, the one from the brothel, the one from before that was both familiar, fond, and so very sad.

Lily, Wizard Trotsky had always called her Lily too. For a moment, she wondered if Ellie Potter was any more real than Morgan Gaunt, if Lily was what she had always called herself.

His smile faded, he sighed once again, and at last they seemed to come to the crux of the matter, “Memory manipulation is more an art than a science and hardly the catchall that the ministry’s obliviators would like for you to believe. Even small, singular, moments can be tricky and spread this out to replace a person’s life and it becomes infinitely harder. At its heart, the implanted memory
must be something a person can believe, a moment where they can fill in the blanks of sight, smell, and sound. You give them a suggestion, say, the idea of an apple, and they supply what the apple in question looks like. The memory has to coincide with their lives, their world, it has to be something that they imagine could be possible.”

With a motion towards her, almost unwillingly impressed, he said, “What Trotsky did, theoretically, should be impossible. One cannot replace almost all aspects of a person’s life, for the illusion of Morgan Gaunt to hold up as long as it did, still hold even now when you no longer believe it, is almost miraculous.”

Here he leaned forward, a strange speculative look in his pale eyes, “However, if Morgan Gaunt is really Lily in all but name, if the world she grew up in mirrored Eleanor Lily Potter’s home life, then it could be done.”

“What does that mean?” she asked.

“It means that I highly suspect that Morfin Gaunt, the young Tom Riddle, everything you think you remember is in truth coming from your real memories buried beneath the suggestion of Morgan Gaunt,” he leaned back, and in the motion regained something of his authority and casualness, as if here, in action and explanation rather than sentiment, he was once again at ease, “The solution, I think then, is to look into your mind and separate the idea of Morgan from Lily which rests beneath.”

“Look into my mind?” she leaned back, at once feeling uneasy, not entirely sure what she or even Wizard Lenin would find up there.

“Yes,” Wizard Lenin said drily as if he was even now reading her mind, “And here I had told myself that I’d never look back once I’d torn myself out of there. None the less, it’s the fastest and in some ways the easiest way I can think of.”

He leaned forward, motioning for her to look at him, look him directly in the eyes. She tensed beneath his fingers, at once his face far too close and his eyes far too sharp.

He hesitated for a second, “Can you trust me, Lily?”

Trust.
Had she trusted Wizard Trotsky enough for him to have broken it? No, not as Morgan, but none the less there was some feeling of betrayal there, one she didn’t dare to look at too closely and yet now would be forced to.

But even if she didn’t trust him she trusted Wizard Lenin, she knew that, there had been something almost unconditional in his reappearance in her life. She had been waiting for him to show up, she now realized.

So firmly, she said, “Yes.”

He said nothing in return, but his eyes seemed to grow larger, no, that wasn’t quite right, it was more as if she herself was falling into them, lost somewhere in that pale ice river that flowed in his irises…

The world around his eyes began to fade into gray and then into black, disappearing entirely and she herself with it, until that pale almost colorless blue was all that remained.

Then, suddenly, she wasn’t in the Malfoy guest room at all.

She was back in the Gaunt shack, inside of her cupboard beneath the stairs, the walls littered with colorful drawings and broken toys, the floor occupied by the thin and bare mattress. At once it seemed more cramped than she had remembered it being, the walls darker and jagged, and spiders looming above her head just out of sight.

“Trust you to make this wretched place somehow smaller.”

There, sitting next to her, curled in on himself to avoid hitting the ceiling, was none other than Wizard Lenin, dressed in the red and black that Wizard Trotsky himself had worn that morning. It suited him yet didn’t in the same moment, it fit him, but he didn’t seem to enjoy wearing it for all he seemed resigned to it.

“You’re here,” Lily said in surprise.

“Neither of us is here, Lily,” he said with raised and rather judgmental eyebrows, “Right now we’re in your memories, further than any sane legilimens would dare travel.”
Glancing around with distaste but a distinct lack of surprise he asked, “I take it Morgan Gaunt also lived in a cupboard beneath the stairs?”

Lily nodded, slowly and uncertainly, and as she did the drawings themselves flickered, the contents morphing and changing instead to reveal scenes of train stations, Wizard Lenin himself in various communist outfits, and a man with crows feathers for hair.

He moved towards the door, opening it and stepping out into the hallway as he spoke, leaving Lily to scramble behind him, somehow lost in her own memories, “You lived in the cupboard beneath the stairs for as long as you could remember until you were five years old when you conditioned your relatives into giving you the extra unused bedroom.”

The hallway was that of the Gaunt shack, creaking and dilapidated, Morfin Gaunt drunk and slouched against the wall, head in one hand and a bottle of fire whisky in the other. However, even as she watched Morfin seemed to flicker, replaced by the image of a great, overweight, mustached man.

“Your Uncle Vernon Dursley,” Wizard Lenin explained, watching as the memory of Morfin Gaunt flickered out, “He wasn’t a drunk, but he was abusive, and entirely too concerned with punishing you for your extraordinary abilities.”

The house began rearranging itself, changing into the image of white-washed suburbia, familiar pictures of this perfectly ordinary family in this perfectly ordinary suburb hanging on the walls without Lily in any of them.

As if they were desperately writing her out of her own life as Wizard Trotsky had.

Pointing at the nearest one, Wizard Lenin’s finger lingered on the image of a severe thin looking woman with a perpetual grimace, “Your Aunt Petunia Dursley, your mother’s sister, who clearly took out her relationship issues with her sister on you.”

Finally, he pointed to the overweight whale of a boy, the son, “Your Cousin Dudley Dursley, Dudders as you often called him, whose chief characteristics were his weight, his bullying, and his unbelievable stupidity.”

It was with a fond smile towards her that he noted, “For all the years you lived with them, from the beginning until you were eleven, you never once were convinced they were sentient or capable of
any thought or emotion of consequence.”

“They are automatons,” Lily repeated as she stared at their picture, the Dursleys, a strange sense of déjà vû and exhaustion overtaking her, as if these were words she had once said and could even now full heartedly believe in once again, “Thoughtless simulations of humanity that serve no real purpose. They like to think they can think, and they put on a good show, for the most part. But if you’re around long enough it all falls to pieces and the bugs in the programming show through.”

And at once Number 4 Privet Drive, like a terrible dream, shifted into place and focus in her mind. Yes, the Dursleys, she remembered now, she could mark Morfin Gaunt for the cheap imitation of Uncle Dursley (himself a cheap imitation of the dream that was humanity) for herself.

Little Hangleton, the Gaunt shack, crumbled from her memory leaving the Dursley’s residence in Surrey, in Little Whinging, standing tall and proud.

And yet, she thought as she looked around, there was something so bleak and cheap about this place. Not that it was any more or less real than Morgan Gaunt’s reality, but for all that it stood truer it was made flimsier and cheaper for it, there was no romanticism here to paint the walls a different color.

Wizard Trotsky hadn’t come to rescue her from this world.

“Oh, there we are,” Wizard Lenin said as the last of the walls shifted into place, an almost relieved smile on his features, as if he couldn’t quite see this place for what it was, “Good, there’s plenty of more places to see before we’re done.”

Stepping outside it wasn’t Surrey that greeted them but rather a strange formless world, that of Lily’s ever shifting consciousness, and she couldn’t help but think it wasn’t what she would have expected of herself.

The world was dark, a picture of grays and blacks, a truly bleak and surreal place of shifting shadows and gray upon gray. Here and there though, were bold, almost desperate splashes of light and color, as if to distract from the true nature of the place.

Stepping forward, on shadows and stars, Wizard Lenin and Lily walked towards a great tree that was even now rising in the middle of the pavement in front of Number 4 Privet Drive. It grew, taller and taller, scraping the ceiling of Lily’s mind and growing further still.
A spiral staircase had been carved into the tree’s trunk, and without hesitation Wizard Lenin, then Lily behind him, began to climb, leaving Little Whinging to grow smaller and smaller behind them.

“Lenin,” Lily said at one point, after they had climbed past the thick layer of clouds towards the moon and stars all crowding around the sky, casting an almost divine spotlight on Lily and Wizard Lenin, “Do you think… Do you think Morgan’s life was much worse than Lily’s?”

“I think they were roughly the same,” Wizard Lenin answered without even looking back, “That’s how he pulled this off. Why, are you afraid?”

“No but I…” she stopped, paused, not certain of how she wanted to put this.

There had been more… optimism, to Morgan’s existence. Not the forced, desperate, optimism that seemed to exist in Eleanor Lily Potter’s, but a true optimism represented in none other than Wizard Trotsky.

For whatever he was, for whatever he had done to her and wherever he was going, there had been something cathartic in that memory he’d crafted for her. Or… Not cathartic, that was the wrong word, something hopeful and true and precious for all it had never happened.

Maybe it wasn’t so much that it had reflected Lily’s life, but that when he’d given it to her, she’d wanted to believe in it.

“It is what it is, liking or disliking won’t change who you really are,” Wizard Lenin said, his back tall and straight even as they kept climbing, forever and always, past where any ordinary human would dare to travel, “And you are the last person who should run from yourself.”

And that seemed to be the trigger, enough to bring them to the branches of the tree, up and up, to where they converged together into a pale platform, Kings Cross that served as purgatory, where Death himself, with black hair and her eyes, waited at a café table with a cup of tea in front of him.

The exiled god emperor, banished to Lily’s purgatory forever and always…

Even as she approached, his voice, the memory of his strange ethereal voice, sounded out in the train station, “Do you know why I like Jenga better than chess?”
Without looking towards her, without glancing at her, the memory of Death poured her a cup of tea and she felt the station shift into terrible focus, bringing with it the memory of a summer’s day in Albania when Hogwarts was the last place Lily had wanted to be.

“Chess is a game of strategy, of warfare, of two people placed together attempting to outwit one another until there is a clear victor. It’s a metaphor that speaks to wizards and non-wizards alike, one that pervades through time, until it is used even when the chess itself no longer exists. But life is not like chess.”

She walked towards him, the sight of him almost blinding for all it represented, as Wizard Lenin himself had been almost blinding when he first walked into that brothel. There was such feeling represented in this man that she could hardly stand to look directly at him.

“Life is not so easy as winning or losing; as being the black or the white. We lose too many pieces along the way, or we lose them only partially, because they are still visible, but they are out of reach. Chess does not account for the things we almost have or the things we have almost lost.”

And the tea, she could taste the tea from all the years in this very moment, at once sweet and bitter on her tongue as its memory poured itself down her throat.

“Jenga has no end. There is only the tower, and the attempt to build it out of the pieces you already possess. You try to take the safer route but then sometimes you are forced to remove the pieces you do not wish to touch. And sometimes it falls as you fear it must, but sometimes it doesn’t.”

And Lily had said, looking at him almost in desperation as she had run out of lines and excuses, “I’m not going back.”

And he’d smiled at her, his shadow in her mind smiling at her now, at once so different than Wizard Lenin’s smiles, and she remembered at once that Death was the first real person she had ever met, “Perhaps not, but then, you have left so very many things undone.”

And finally, the ending of that conversation, Death’s final words on her twelfth birthday, “I have been down this path you’re on, Lily. I have run from myself, from my past, from every doubt I had until I couldn’t run any further. And when I finally stopped, when I forced myself to stop and turn and look at where I’d been, I realized I hadn’t gone anywhere at all. We are tied to ourselves, Lily, and we cannot run from that.”
Tied to themselves, yes, she was, wasn’t she? Even when Morgan, even when Eleanor Potter, Lily was still tied to Lily. It was how she could stand to take the red pill. And yet, she wondered as she stared at Death, certain she was forgetting… something, something important, why was she so desperate to run now?

Wizard Lenin was strangely quiet, compared to what he’d been before, staring at this memory of Death, listening to his words, and looking as if even inside Lily’s memory he could not quite understand the man.

Of course, Lily remembered, Wizard Lenin had shown up after Death had. They had never understood one another.

Lily turned, looking away from Death, Death’s train, Death’s King Cross, and instead to the other side of the station, the exit. Calmly, as if in a dream she walked towards it, leaving the ethereal cleanliness of this Lily’s King Cross behind and instead entering back into the rabble and rubble that was her memory of the physical plane.

There they were, in the gray monotone of Diagon Alley, wizards selling their strange charades of human thought for a few galleons a piece, there at the end of the alley way in a darkened corner yet somehow filled with light was Riddle Incorporated. Frank lingered outside the door, a secretary in all but name, greeting the sight of her with that wary yet pleased smile of his.

This… This was her world.

How familiar, yet how strange, it looked.

“You never did see Diagon Alley quite the way I did,” Wizard Lenin noted, and looking at him Lily realized that he and Death were a pair in this, or rather, they were set apart, there was no caricature to him, he was solid and real and wore his own colors well. For all that he shouldn’t belong in this world of hers there was nothing unnatural about him as he stared out at Lily’s Diagon Alley with fondness and exasperation.

“Just look what you’ve done to Ollivanders,” he said, motioning to a rather faceless building that looked like all the others, “And Gringotts, and the Leaky Cauldron… None of them made any impression at all.”
“From the very beginning you were unimpressed by this place,” he said, that amused smile only growing as if that was just like Lily, like he had expected nothing less from her, “Oh, for me it was the opposite, the magical world was my glimpse into my true home. In my mind, even now, I am sure Diagon Alley glitters as if the streets were paved with gold.”

Lily turned, shoving her hands back into her pockets wordlessly, suddenly entirely too sure of what would come next. Yes, walking forward through the streets, past the warped Gringotts on its grey tilted pillars with its faceless goblin bankers, she found herself in a different, bleaker, Kings Cross with a mockery of the Hogwarts Express waiting for her.

Except… She hadn’t seen that at the time, the first time. No, then it’d looked just like Death’s train, perhaps a sign of good things to come.

Echoing her eleven-year-old steps she stepped on board, finding her way to that first compartment with Ron Weasley, the snake loathing caricature, grinning at her, “Cor, are you really Ellie Potter?”

Then the door opened, a cheery, unfamiliar, Hermione Granger opened it, prattling onward with an academic enthusiasm that bordered on obnoxious, “I’m Hermione Granger, by the way. I was very excited when I got my Hogwarts letter, I’d never known about magic before all this. I’ve been practicing spells though. They’ve all worked for me so far, and I’ve been reading all the text books too, so I won’t be behind.”

Then, suddenly, she flickered to the Hermione Granger of the next year, sitting on this same train, her eyes dull and haunted and her face bitter in the vein of Wizard Lenin’s bitterness and rage, “There’s a war in Albania, I read about it at Neville’s, it was in the Prophet. A vampire revolution, they took over the capital and now a vampire warlord is in charge of the ministry…”

The train kept rushing towards Scotland though, regardless of Hermione or Ron, Lily staring out the window and watching as Hogwarts loomed larger and large like an indomitable wave about to crash over all their heads.

“This was where you met Draco Malfoy, by the way,” Wizard Lenin mentioned, ignored by both Ron and Hermione, “He came waltzing in here, saw the Rabbit on your head and Weasley on the other end, and went waltzing right back out.”

Wizard Lenin though, for all his fondness, for all the strange fondness he held for her memories couldn’t seem to see them like she could. He couldn’t see the grim base coat beneath them, and how desperately even Lily had painted them.
It had taken Morgan, the idea of Morgan Gaunt, for her to recognize this place for what it was.

The train pulled into the station, and together with the mob, she and Wizard Lenin walked towards Hogwarts.

“God only knows what we’ll find inside,” Wizard Lenin mused as they approached, “Default I’m certain, Lepur Rabbitson (though I’m surprised he hasn’t made an appearance yet), trolls in the dungeon, Quirrell, Lockhart…”

However, Lily already knew something terrible waited for her in Hogwarts, something she had been all too willing to leave behind.

And indeed, stepping in, the other students vanished and instead the castle seemed at once too large and too small. The walls ran red with blood, T.S. Eliot’s poetry painted on the walls with the philosopher’s stone as a tell-tale heart thumping away inside the school, Quirrell, Lockhart, and Ginny Weasley all dead as Wizard Trotsky approached her with a basilisk at his heels.

“Lily?”

Lily turned, began to run, but the stone beneath her feet moved in the opposite direction, drawing her backwards into a great never-ending pit. As she ran points were docked from both Default and Slytherin in equal measure, quidditch teams pointed and laughed, Wizard Lenin looked at her in his solid body and dismissed her entirely as he turned to his own revolution, Dumbledore asked her if she knew the Dursleys loved her, Neville Longbottom silently accused her of unleashing a basilisk on the school…

“Lily!”

It all was rushing back, oh yes, Lily remembered it now. Every single moment, from first being sorted into Slytherin, that first disastrous week of school, the philosopher’s stone, Rabbit in his human form, the troll, Squirrel, Dumbledore, Hermione’s transformation, Albania, Luna Lovegood and her strange eleven-year-old optimism, Default, the Default quidditch team, the Chamber of Secrets, Lenin’s twelve year old body, those grief golden moments of Default, and then everything falling apart without her even noticing.

No noticing, then forgetting, over and over and over again.
At once she hit the floor of the chamber of secrets, staring up at the dead basilisk, herself bleeding, staring at a stunned Wizard Trotsky masquerading as Ginny Weasley.

“Oh, Lily…”

She staggered to her feet, slowly, uncertainly, gripping the sword of Gryffindor in shaking and failing fingers, feeling death creep up on her inch by inch. Ginny Weasley stepped out of reach, face torn between horror, regret, and satisfaction as she watched Lily march to her grave.

(“I will ruin you if I must, just as you will ruin me. Just as you did ruin me, eleven years ago,” he’d said that then, only moments before the basilisk had appeared, before Lily had had to close her eyes and fight blind…)

Except, standing in the memory she had lost, Lily couldn’t help but ask as she walked, “How did I lose?”

The blood against her arm was warm, the poison seeping towards her heart, and yet with each breath she asked herself, “I was far more powerful, even in that moment, so if I lost I must have wanted to lose. Even if I didn’t know it, some part of me wanted it. Was I tired, two years in and tired already?”

Mirrors appeared on either side of the chamber, propagating Lily and Wizard Trotsky, wearing the cheap mask of Ginny Weasley, into infinity, “Or did I see this being the rest of my life, eternity, our prisoner’s dilemma? If neither of us lost, then how could either of us win? I saw this endless infinite game of infinite stakes and I hesitated. And in that moment, for that single flicker, I must have been more than prepared to lose.”

“For a moment,” Lily concluded as she finally reached Wizard Trotsky, now removing the mask and moving forward to cradle her in his arms, his expression the same as from the brothel, that torn desperation, “I was more than willing for Eleanor Lily Potter and her farce to die.”

And so, she allowed him to rewrite her, over, and over, and over again until finally he went to far and created Morgan Gaunt for the pair of them.

Hogwarts began to crumble at its foundations. Neville’s suspicions, Hermione’s use of Lily’s abilities, Dumbledore’s cold suspicions and machinations, Wizard Lenin’s distance, Zabini and Greengrass’s indifference, all of it began to crumble away until nothing of Hogwarts remained.
Only the single, horrifying moment of the train station, after she had died in Wizard Trotsky’s arms in the chamber, bleeding out and poisoned in the same instant, as she faced Death and cried out, “I’ve failed, Death, I’ve… I’ve failed!”

Except she wasn’t staring at Death and she wasn’t in the train station, rather, she was in the arcade again playing Mortal Kombat, Rabbit standing beside her, as if he’d been here in her head the entire time.

And Rabbit, eerie, emotionless, yet filled with some unknowable inhuman emotion as always, said, “He has refashioned you in his own fragmented image, it doesn’t suit you… You give him too much freedom.”

Suddenly Lily knew exactly what he meant, where Morgan hadn’t had a clue. Morgan had asked for clarification, Lily swallowed whatever questions Morgan might ask.

None the less, black-hole eyes burning, Rabbit concluded, “He has always had too much nerve for a human that doesn’t even have the decency to remain human.”

“No,” Lily said Rabbit, to herself, her memories, suddenly exactly where she’d left them, exactly where they should be, “No, I’ve seen more than enough…”

And Lily, just like that, was alone.

Wizard Lenin was nowhere in sight, likely still inside Hogwarts somewhere, somewhere in those early days when it had not been so terrible. Just boring, just endless, but hardly terrible.

Lily looked out towards the horizon, nothing in sight at first, then walking forward, a bridge into the ether appearing. One that would lead her out of the realm of Lily and to some other world, some other stage with another play that Lily hadn’t seen before…

So, with confident steps, blood still staining her Hogwarts uniform and dripping down her torso, Lily walked across the void, out of the play known as Eleanor Lily Potter and into Tom Marvolo Riddle’s mind and memories.
The Ouroboros

In which a subconscious version Wizard Lenin plays the passive aggressive tour guide to his own memories, a great and terrible comedy of errors is revealed, and Lily is given a desperate quest with a dubious end goal.

The streets were not paved in gold, as Wizard Lenin had suggested, rather Lily’s bridge descended onto a street front as gray and decayed as any in her own mind had been. Only, there was no pretense of grandeur painted garishly onto his memories, they were stark and cold, and a desperate unhappiness clung to every shadow.

Lily looked up, blood dripping down her arm and onto the street, the only sign of color in this world, and stared at a decayed sign with fading painted letters reading, “Wool’s Orphanage”

Looking up and down the street, staring at the faded buildings of a time long since gone by, she then realized where she was, or rather, that she’d been here in some capacity before. This was where Wizard Trotsky had taken her, to those flats on London’s east side that had once been this orphanage…

These must be the memories of Wizard Lenin and Wizard Trotsky’s, Tom Marvolo Riddle’s, childhood.

Except there, in the yard, in a gray orphan’s uniform was a small, pouting, familiar boy who was pretending to be affronted by something and next to him… Next to him Lily herself, grinning cheerfully down at him, years older than he was and yet certainly Lily’s own age or close to it.

Lily in the orphanage’s yard looked up, her eyes haunting and green and filled with light even in Wizard Lenin’s grim childhood, and at the sight of the other Lily staring across at her, the grin grew that much wider and more jagged.

“What the hell?” Lily asked but the pavement itself began to move like a treadmill, moving Lily forward and away from Wool’s Orphanage even as she tried to walk against the pavement’s current and keep both the younger Wizard Lenin and herself in sight.

“Wait!” she cried out but neither the younger Wizard Lenin nor herself noticed Lily’s cries, or her
sprinting as she desperately tried to think of what her showing up inside his head like this could possibly mean.

They faded from view though as Lily turned the corner, a spot of red the last sign of them, and soon Lily was rushing past scenes of Hogwarts with basilisks and wonder held inside, of a glittering Diagon Alley filled with magic even in wartime, of adventures in distant lands with strange foreign objects of power, past years and years until suddenly she was falling forward and onto a stationary sidewalk and then into a dark and dusty cupboard under the stairs.

“Oh,” Lily moaned, rubbing at her head and wincing as she took in her new surroundings, this place, at least, she was familiar with.

Straightening as best she could in the tight quarters she then noted Wizard Lenin was sitting in there with her, cramped and impatient in his typical communist regalia, but looking down at her with a soft smile as he said, “You know, I had a friend like you when I was very young. She even had your hair.”

“Lenin?” Lily asked, but no, this wasn’t really him, this was his own memory of what he’d said to her, or else some part of his subconscious reacting to her presence. It was a fragment of him, of his regard for her, but not the full weight of him which still felt distant, still lost somewhere in Lily’s own head rather than in his own.

“You’re right, allow me to correct that statement, she was my only friend,” Wizard Lenin continued, to Lily’s unasked question of Wizard Lenin’s ability to have friends at all.

As he spoke the wall of Lily’s cupboard turned into the screen for a projector, and memories of herself in a different time and place began playing. Herself in that gray orphan’s uniform sitting on an equally gray bed, out in the orphanage’s yard, or dragging the young Tom Riddle through an equally gray London…

“Very intelligent and incredibly awkward, could barely get through a conversation, but she was the only person who I ever met who I came close to liking.”

Lily’s eyes were wide as she watched the projection of Wizard Lenin’s memories, not rose tinted, but certainly brighter than the rest of his childhood had been, with herself in a starring role. Then she remembered Wizard Lenin’s words from the brothel, said to a desperate Morgan Gaunt who had only the barest understandings of what she truly was beneath all that, “Lily, the destroyer of this world and the girl who lived, and my only friend.”
“But Lenin,” Lily said, grabbing onto his lapels and pulling him forward to look him straight in the eye, “That can’t be me, can it? Because I’m…”

However, he didn’t answer this, instead he answered the question she’d asked him years ago now, of what had happened to the friend he’d once had because something clearly must have happened, “If you must know she grew up, became very boring, and married a near sighted idiot with terrible hair.”

Lily felt the cupboard shake then, like an elevator dangling from only a few loose cables. Then the cables snapped, and the cupboard plummeted through time and space with Lily and Wizard Lenin still on board.

Lily cried out and clung to the dark lapels of his jacket but the memory of Lenin, or subconscious image of him, didn’t seem to mind at all as he merely smiled, even had the indecency to conjure up a cup of tea for himself while they plummeted to their death.

“How?!” she asked her politely.

“Tea, is now the time for tea?!” Lily questioned, feeling a lot more like Wizard Lenin than Lily, as both she and Wizard Lenin began to float off the floor, losing gravity in their acceleration towards certain doom.

“Nonsense, it’s the perfect time for tea,” Wizard Lenin chided without a care in the world, “Everything’s about to go to hell in handbasket, I can think of no better time for warm refreshments.”

“What do you mean?” Lily asked but he didn’t answer, there was no time as they finally hit the ground, the cupboard blown apart and Lily wheezing and crawling out of the aftermath of splintered wood and crumbling foundations.

Meanwhile Wizard Lenin didn’t look worse for wear at all, he hadn’t even lost his tea in the process.

“That was unfair,” Lily remarked and earned only the subconscious Wizard Lenin’s raised eyebrows at this.

“Life is patently unfair, Lily, best get used to it,” he remarked, stealing words that Lily was fairly
sure she herself had said at one point, “Besides, you’re the one who invited yourself into my memories.”

Lily groaned as she stood, brushing off her beyond ruined Hogwarts uniform and glaring at this rather passive aggressive version of Wizard Lenin, “So, you are self-aware after all.”

She then paused, considered his words, and said, “And I didn’t invite myself, I just…”

“You just chose to wander past your own mindscape when you found it… uncomfortable, leaving most of my conscious thought trapped inside,” Wizard Lenin finished for her, pausing on the last word and giving her a pointed look, as if he knew Lily herself would choose something stronger.

“I…” Lily paused trailed off, looked down at her torn and bloodstained uniform, her blood still flowing out of her arm even here then back up at him, “I remembered everything, past all of my pretenses, and it was… unpleasant.”

Unpleasant was also far too soft a word, too kind of one, it had been more than that. Even now Lily could hear the distant drums of war that were her own memories, pounding in the distance, loneliness and pain in every echo.

“And you choose to see Lenin’s instead?” Wizard Lenin asked her, dark eyebrows lifted, questioning all the thoughts and choices that had brought Lily here.

“They have to be better than mine, don’t they?” and she knew she wasn’t really talking to Wizard Lenin, not in any real sense, and yet she couldn’t help but feel that his blank, assessing, expression boded ill for the answer to that question.

“Lenin?” she questioned further, feeling herself grow paler and paler by the minute as the blood never stopped moving out of her.

“Now, you know I’m not really Lenin,” he said, and here his crooked amused smile returned before it faded, “And hardly self-aware at that. However, I am aware enough to acknowledge that, perhaps, there is something you should know. Something that I myself have suppressed for years, and something that may destroy us both for the realization of its implications.”

“Well, that’s not ominous or anything,” Lily noted as she looked around, taking in what looked like
Diagon Alley, only not as Lily herself had known it, or at least, not until Morgan had seen it recently. There was that rushed and tense feeling to the place, of people going about their business as quickly as possible, a faceless fearful mass…

None of them seemed to acknowledge either Lily or Wizard Lenin.

“It is already written,” Wizard Lenin merely responded, still sipping at his seemingly never-ending supply of tea as he stared out into the crowds, “Your Trotsky, in some sense, is right. Burying my head in the sand will not change things.”

“Change what things?” Lily asked again but he was hardly paying her any mind now instead looking into the crowds, searching for something, finally he spotted it and pointed.

Lily followed his hand to a sudden bright spot of red hair, a young woman appeared, likely a recent graduate of Hogwarts or close to it. She looked remarkably like Lily herself, or at least, how Lily imagined she’d look once puberty came and went. Taller, thinner, but their faces, and more their eyes, were almost perfectly identical. The only true difference was her straighter more manageable hair that curled slightly at the ends.

More than though, was the way that even in Wizard Lenin’s otherwise bleak but realistic memory of this scene, there was this glow about her, something in her hair, in her eyes, that drew the eye of the viewer and demanded it stay there. The shadow she cast was both lighter yet deeper than those around her, in a world of automatons, she alone seemed to move as a true human being might.

“Lily Evans, 1979,” Wizard Lenin narrated for Lily, and there was something in his voice, something that yearned and burned in the same moment as he looked at her, “Brightest witch of her generation, the woman who thrice defied the dark lord in accordance with a prophecy that has yet to be spoken, your mother, and my only and oldest friend.”

“Lily Evans?” Lily gawked, her own mother, which made sense looking at her now, but she thought back to the orphanage and the memories playing on the wall, “But that wasn’t…”

Wizard Lenin looked at her, something like approval in his eyes, as if Lily had caught onto the point he was trying to make before he could even state it directly, but before she could clarify or ask further or ask how any of this could happen he was stepping forward, clothing melting into a muggle suit as he, with a strangely anticipatory yet nervous grin that didn’t suit him, approached Lily Evans.
“Lily,” he said, and she blinked at him, narrowed eyes and awkward smile as he walked up to her and reached out to take her hand in his, “Lily it’s been… You never did tell me a year.”

“What?” Lily Evans responded, almost as nervous as him and twice as awkward, “I’m sorry but do I…”

“It’s Tom,” he said, cringing at his own name, and there was such an earnestness to him, one that Lily had never seen in him before, in Wizard Trotsky yes but never in Wizard Lenin, “Tom Riddle, it’s been ages though, probably… Five, six years for you.”

He looked… Not young, not necessarily, but there was something younger and far less jaded about him as he stood there. As if here was someone who could believe at least in some of the wishes of the world if not all of them. There was nothing sardonic or bitter in his smile as he looked at Lily Evans.

“Tom Riddle…” she said, nodding slowly but still clearly at a loss, clearly not placing him. At her lack of remembrance, a hint of doubt entered Wizard Lenin’s expression, quickly followed by anger and impatience, as he insisted, not coldly but certainly with an undercurrent of irritation and something deeper and more dangerous than that, “Surely, Lily, you haven’t managed to forget me already.”

“Oh, no, of course not I’m…” she trailed off, then awkwardly smiled as she admitted rubbing the back of her head, “I’m afraid I have, I’m so sorry, did we go to muggle primary together? Although, that can’t be right, because then you would have gone to Hogwarts…”

“Something like that,” he said tightly, then he dropped her hand, his own hands now awkward without motion as if waiting to do something. He stared at her for a moment too long while she fidgeted under his assessing gaze, even as his eyes softened as they landed on her straightened hair, “I like what you’ve done with your hair.”

“Thank you,” Lily Evans responded, clearly not quite sure how to respond to that, and when she smiled, Lily thought as she watched, her mother really was beautiful. The very space around her, for a moment, seemed to light up with the force of it like she herself was a miniature sun in human form. The warmth of her smile spread even to Wizard Lenin, who at once seemed to relax and smile back. And for a moment, no more than a second, there was… A ‘could have been’, floating in the air between them. A ‘perhaps in some other time in some other place’, a ‘in any other world besides this one’, or simply a moment that shone for just a single second between the pair of them.
Sometimes, it only took a moment, but in this world the moment came like a flash, and then it was gone.

As if the moment hadn’t truly existed in the first place.

“Do you want to…” he trailed off at her look of hesitation, the way she looked over her shoulder then back at him with an apologetic grimace.

“Oh, I can’t right now, see, my husband, James, is just around the corner and we’ve got a lot to do and…”

And whatever else she said didn’t register, instead a high, painful, noise began to sound blocking out anything else that could have come through. Wizard Lenin stared at Lily Evans, his face expressionless, even as the scene began to crumble and fade, but not before Lily standing and watching it all caught sight of a bespectacled, young, James Potter grinning and making his way down the street towards his wife with the latest broomstick model in hand.

Nearsighted, a rogue’s grin, and terrible hair…

And then it was just Lily and Wizard Lenin once again.

The subconscious image, the memory, of Wizard Lenin stared out into the abyss, still expressionless. No, that wasn’t quite the word, for it. If white was not a color, but rather the absorbing of colors and reflecting of none, then that was the word for Wizard Lenin’s expression. Inside it contained and drew in all emotions, far too many of too great a strength, so that his face reflected nothing at all.

“I…” Lily started as she stepped towards him, her footsteps echoing in the emptiness, “I’m not sure I…”

“She only gave me a name, Lily,” Wizard Lenin said his voice flat and just as distant as the look in his pale blue eyes as he kept staring out and out past the endless and empty horizon, “Only a name, never a year, never a last name either. You tell me, Lily, forty years go by, the brightest witch of her age, an object of worship and capable of miracles in the mind of Severus Snape, red hair and your eyes… What was I supposed to think?”
Lily wasn’t sure what she was supposed to think, or what she was supposed to think as their landscape changed again, became Wizard Lenin staring out from the shadows as summer approached and signs of Lily Evans’ pregnancy grew, rage simmering in every corner at the sight of it and the happiness she shared with James Potter.

Self-hatred began to twist the walls, small cracks like those in glass appeared over the surface of the memories, growing deeper and more jagged as he lumped himself both subconsciously and consciously with the likes of James Potter and Severus Snape, both little more the petty oblivious school children thinking they were soldiers in some grand war.

They walked and walked through memories of wizard battles, dark vicious fire, Diagon Alley in ruins and terror, and death at every turn with Wizard Lenin’s expression hardening with each scene they passed by. Then, the montage came to a sudden and swift end, and they were inside an old and regal office.

In a way, and she didn’t quite no why, it reminded Lily of the Malfoy Manor. It had the same almost desperate attempt at elegance, the same snake motifs on the legs of the chairs and desk, and everything spoke of wealth if not taste. On the great mahogany desk were a pile of old grimoires with a foul miasma lingering in their thick pages, reams of papers were littered across the desk, a jar of ink with a quill left resting in it as if the paperwork had only just been pushed to the side.

And there, kneeling before the desk was a young Severus Snape, Wizard Lenin standing in front of him and looking down upon him with cold distaste and a dash of loathing. Yet Severus Snape, dark eyed, bitter, ambitious, and so very young, didn’t seem to notice at all as he said in a manner that was both somber yet somehow eager for it, “My lord, the new Divinations Professor Sybil Trelawny in her interview gave a prophecy about you. I did not hear all of it before I was discovered, but the first two lines should be more than enough, ‘The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches. Born to those who have thrice defied him, born as the seventh month dies.’”

And he was… so young, Lily had never thought about that, she had known in her head, even seen images of it from Wizard Lenin, but she’d never thought about how young Severus Snape would be in this moment.

If only because, just looking in his dark eyes, Lily knew that this Severus Snape had yet to learn to loathe himself.

“It wasn’t truly the prophecy that damned Lily Potter and her husband,” Wizard Lenin relayed, leaning upon the desk as he stared down at the kneeling, oblivious, Severus Snape with cold indifferent eyes. The light of the sunset poured through the window, creating a halo around his head, making the shadows of his eyes dark and giving him an ethereal aura of great and terrible divinity, “It marked you for death, certainly, as it marked Neville Longbottom for death but further rumor had it,
from quivering Peter Pettigrew, that the full prophecy related to a boy rather than a girl. That you were protected at all from my wrath was only paranoia on Dumbledore’s part.”

Lily remained quiet, could only watch and stare as the pieces slowly but surely came together in her head, as Wizard Lenin reached out a hand to Severus Snape with a smirk, contemptuous of the wonder and ambition in the younger Snape’s eyes and further explained, “Thrice defied was a leap for the Potters or the Longbottoms, they were barely graduated from Hogwarts. None had really caught my attention or faced me directly in battle. That the prophecy would be considered even remotely to apply to them was the small fact that they were both members of the Order of the Phoenix. Yet, I thought to myself, if anyone of these schoolchildren could be said to have defied me in any capacity, let alone thrice, it would be none but her.”

The sunlight grew brighter, almost blinding against Wizard Lenin’s back so that Lily almost had to shield her eyes to avoid looking at him, “She defied me in friendship, leaving me once in 1938 for a time and place far beyond my reach, and again in 1945. She defied me almost unwittingly in the future, in the hopes and ambitions I’d made for her and myself, could not wait even six years while I had waited forty, before selling her body and heart to James Potter. And in battle, by pitting herself with the likes of Albus Dumbledore, she defied me again.”

“Yes,” Wizard Lenin said even as Severus Snape stood, bowed, and took his leave, “Though Severus Snape hardly knew it, would damn himself in retrospect, in this moment I had already chosen Lily and no one else. No matter what he begged me, no matter what I promised him, there was no saving her from here.”

He turned to look directly at Lily, the sun seeming to burn now through his bright blue eyes, “October 31st, 1981 was an opportunity I could not resist, to kill a child that had nothing to do with the prophecy and yet everything to do with me. I would cast Lily out, lock her outside of my mind once and for all. All the hopes and dreams I had held within her would become nothing more than the illusions and childish fantasies they always had been. I would transcend the last vestiges of Tom Marvolo Riddle that resided inside of her. I would ruin her, just as she had so casually, so easily, so obliviously ruined me.”

The sun flooded the room, everything a blinding white that had Lily closing her eyes shut, and when she opened them the office was gone. Instead she was back in the orphanage, this time inside the building rather than staring in from the street, in a room with a younger Wizard Lenin as well as… As well as herself again, staring and looking out the window at the overcast night sky.

Her hair was as curly as Lily’s ever was, her skin as pale, and yet even now Lily could suddenly see that similarity she’d never even thought to see before. Between herself and her mother, a similarity that must have always haunted Wizard Lenin in some respect or another.
Wizard Lenin himself, a child, young enough to have not even received his Hogwarts letter yet. And in his eyes, as he looked on Lily’s counterpart in memory, there was a hint of Wizard Trotsky’s passion as well as Wizard Lenin’s fondness.

In a confident, but childish, voice he declared, “Lily, we’ll get married one day.”

The other Lily looked back from the window, eyebrows raised and a fond but derisive smile on her face, “I doubt that.”

“Why not? I can’t think you’d do better, after all, I’m going to be a king one day,” a frown marred his features, he glared at her slightly, but all the same he waited for her answer.

When she did her smile was fond but sad, as if she knew far too many things that he himself did not, “You’ll be far too great and terrible to be content with anything as simple as happiness. For you, to be happy is to stagnate, comrade. The moment you are happy you will effectively be dead.”

“But what does it even mean?!” Lily cried out and the scene stopped entirely, and the older, present, subconscious Wizard Lenin’s voice sounded from behind her as he melted into place next to her.

“It means that you and I are an ouroboros, we are without beginning or end, each vastly responsible for the development and personality of the other,” he said, and his words were somber, resigned, and filled with something both sweet and bitter as he stared at the memory, at himself and at Lily inside it.

“Without Tom Riddle, you would not be as you are now, and without Lily, Tom Riddle would not be what I would become,” he said before pausing, a brief flicker of pain crossing his features, “And what a terrible truth that is.”

“Why?” Lily asked, such a simple, short question, but with so much packed inside of it.

Yet he still smiled at her as he answered, and though it was sad and soft, there was more than something of the way he’d looked at Lily Evans inside it, “Because it means that I have never been my own person, never anything real. In one sense or another I have always been a figment of your imagination, a footnote in your great tale that by its very nature overshadows my own. It means that I destroyed myself, in 1981, not out of hubris but something more desperate, pathetic, and ironic than that. Everything I am, everything I ever was, perhaps even everything I will be centers upon you. If she is you, Lily, rather than simply Lily Evans, then I as a very concept will cease to exist.”
“Oh, that’s…” she trailed off, stopped as he placed both of his hands on her shoulders, and crouched down to her level so he was looking her straight in the eye and taking one hand to her chin to prevent her from looking elsewhere.

“It is why I will never admit it, not to you or to myself, I will lock it in the deepest darkest places of my mind where only you would think to look. Even when I know, in my heart of hearts, that the reason you remind me so much of her at every second of every day is because you are her. Not simply that Lily Evans grew out of her eccentric, over powered, miraculous, brilliance and settled for a mere quidditch captain, passing her best and brightest qualities to her strange, lonely, and brilliant daughter.”

He reached out and grabbed a lock of her hair, wound it between his pale fingers even as he looked at her, “And yet, I know, that if you are to go it must be soon, and if anyone were to survive that trip, then it’d be you and you alone. And if it has already happened, then even I, no matter how much I wish to, can’t stop it.”

“A trip? Am I going somewhere?” Lily asked, wishing she was joking but Wizard Lenin’s subconscious said nothing, just smiled, pulled her hand into his and placed in it the crude, homemade, time turner.

And suddenly, just like that, as the cold metal seemed to burn into her hand, she knew exactly where and when she was going and could feel the terrible, horrifying, weight of it pressing into her skin like a poisoned basilisk fang in a chamber beneath Hogwarts.

He closed her fingers around it, slowly and gently, even as he said, “If your Trotsky will have faith in you, Lily, then I can certainly do no less.”

She opened mouth, to say something, to make some promise to him, his memory, and perhaps even to Wizard Trotsky, but no words came out and…

“Lily!” hands, solid, warm, real, and present fell on her shoulders and Lily was blinking and shuddering back out of Wizard Lenin’s mind and into reality. The Malfoy’s guest room returned in all its opulence, both Lily and Wizard Lenin were where they had left themselves, staring into each other’s eyes.

His eyes though, there was a numb, terrible, horror inside of them, no anger, no rage, just that dawning horror as he looked at her. Lily, in turn, in the reflection of his pale eyes saw her own shaking terror, and her hand, still open and curled around the memory of a time machine, held so small and so innocuous, in the palm of her hand.
In which Wizard Lenin returns from his metaphorical Saint Elba, a strangely assertive Rabbit and Lily have as close to a heart to heart as they can, and Lily considers the weight of a decision she has no choice but to make.

In the pale light of the small floating Christmas decorations, glowing and dancing on the Malfoy’s Christmas tree in the front hallway, the homemade time machine in Lily’s hand glittered as if it was made of gold.

Across the hallway, in the dining room, sound blocked off by wards, she could see Wizard Lenin leaning over a map of Azkaban with his assembled comrades. All of whom were much older than they had once been ten years ago, older and worn and so very afraid, where once they had been ambitious fools who had sold themselves and their families into servitude and slavery they now were men who reaped the mistakes they had prayed were dead and buried.

(She wondered if they were crack heads again yet, or else had remained crackheads this whole time even without Wizard Lenin goading them into addiction.)

They stared at Wizard Lenin’s map of the island of Azkaban, of the dementor patrols and patrols of the auror guards condemned to work there, and they quaked with fear.

Lucius Malfoy glanced up, silver eyes spotting her, and along with the hint of fear there was also confusion as they lingered on her. As if even now, he was asking himself, how on Earth Eleanor Lily Potter had wound up inside his own home, at the dark lord’s invitation without anyone knowing.

She could practically read his thoughts, even at this distance and without Wizard Lenin to interpret, what was a girl like Eleanor Lily Potter doing so firmly in Voldemort’s clutches?

Yes, that was how it must look from the outside, Lily thought to herself. And it was sad that she doubted any of them, even Severus Snape whose dark eyes had burned so brightly with self-loathing, bitterness, disappointment, and rage as he fought for understanding when he’d first seen her lingering in the hallway, were capable of truly grasping the true story.
Then again, could Lily herself, given that it was a tale without beginning or end. In her hand, the time machine was so cold that it almost seemed to burn the flesh of her palm and fingers.

At Wizard Lenin’s attention, Malfoy startled looked back down at the map in subservient submission, likely giving some eloquent retort that disguised his own inattention. Wizard Lenin, dressed in dark wizard robes without a hint of red amidst the black, barely hid his disdain before returning to the task at hand.

It was a look similar to the one he had given Severus Snape on hearing part of a prophecy so many years ago…

How Wizard Lenin loathed these people, it was written in every gesture, every look, every breath and word, and it was a wonder that they couldn’t seem to see it. Just glimpse it out of the corner of their eyes even as they desperately curried favor with their fearless leader.

Likely, within the hour, after the meeting was over, Malfoy would find himself seizing and crawling on the floor under the force of Wizard Lenin’s spells and displeasure. An example to those who found themselves too easily distracted by oddities like girls who lived. The others would shake and pale but would say nothing, just internalize that one did not ask questions about Lily, more than Eleanor Lily Potter was a thing not even to be seen let alone heard.

Wizard Lenin, for his own part, did not glance at Lily even once.

He had pointedly been not looking at her for some time, not since she had returned from her memory then his. They’d just stared at each other in perfect silence and then… Then he’d walked out of the room, leaving her sitting there, fingers curled around air and all the memories pounding inside of her head along with all their implications.

It’d been up to Lily to later stand, shove her hands into her pockets, and slowly explore the grand and opulent Malfoy estate until she’d run into a stunned and horrified Narcissa Malfoy who, in her panic, had resorted back to some maternal instinct and insisted Lily be fed then put to bed. All while blathering that she had no idea what Ellie was doing here since Draco wasn’t home yet for a few more days from school (but he’d be delighted to see her, of course), and who had brought Ellie here, and where had she been since she’d left and…

Lily’s unnerving blank stare towards the blonde woman, wondering why something as small and petty as Draco Malfoy had any bearing on her life, likely hadn’t helped things.
And just like that Wizard Lenin was at the helm of his revolution again, returned from Saint Elba and preparing to march again across the continent, while Lily was left to her own devices. Wandering the halls, the library, keeping out of the way and out of sight as she tried and failed not to think of memories and the weight of time machines in her hand.

So light and yet so very heavy. The cold metal, the golden wires, and the strange dial at its center the answer to some question that she barely even knew how to ask.

She sighed, stood from the seat she’d taken on the grand staircase, and wondered if being Morgan Gaunt really had been easier than this. Morgan, for all the weirdness that came with living with Wizard Trotsky, and for all the bitterness and betrayal that Lily felt over Morgan’s contrived existence (over Wizard Trotsky’s desperate need of this pointless, pathetic, charade), had not faced the same burdens that Lily herself did.

In many ways it had been so terribly easy to be Morgan Gaunt.

“Still,” Lily said to herself as her eyes slid to the great evergreen tree, its white burning candles, dancing fairies, and glittering ornaments, “I would rather have the truth than a mildly pleasant fiction.”

The words fell flat, not untrue, but lacking the conviction that Lily would have preferred. With that, and one final frown as she looked at Wizard Lenin’s profile once again, emblazoned with passion at the thought of his comrades of yesteryear rotting away inside Azkaban, she slowly began to ascend the staircase again, lost in her own thoughts.

Lily was stalling, she’d been stalling for days now, and she knew it. Perhaps even Wizard Lenin knew it, but in his own way he was stalling too, driving his revolution forward at a fast and furious pace if only that he never had to stop and think about what Lily herself had to stop and think about.

In that sense she almost wished Draco Malfoy was here, because he, at least, could be something of a distraction.

Her eyes drifted over her surroundings, the regal staircase, the ceiling, the walls, and all the furniture that lined up against them.

Everything in the Malfoy manner was grandiose almost to the point of ridiculous. The walls were lined with moving portraits that looked down on her and her cheap muggle attire in disdain,
chandeliers of fluttering porcelain and crystal peacocks hung from nearly every visible spot in the ceiling, serpents were carved into just about every piece of wooden furniture. Point being, all of it screamed not only wealth but age, as if to flaunt status in just about every direction the eye could or would look.

However, this leant the place an almost overcrowded look, rather than the refined and aristocratic eloquence that the Malfoys had probably been going for. In a way, it really did suit Draco Malfoy to a tee, Mini Pimp, she imagined, also believed that he was quite suave and sophisticated for a twelve-year-old.

Lily, of course, looked as absurdly out of place as ever. A patch of bright reds, oranges, and yellows, along with brightly dyed blue sweaters and cheap off-white sneakers, in a place that seemed to abhor any hint of red or the mundane, poverty, or muggle trash.

She looked even more out of place than Wizard Lenin in his dark lord robes made of black silk, sneering down like some dread king at his minions, never mind the fact that none of it suited him. Or at least, suited the Wizard Lenin that Lily knew beneath all of that.

“Except he’d hardly appreciate the thought,” Lily said to herself with a sigh as she stopped in front of the library.

Staring at the oak doors she noted to her empty surroundings, “I really don’t know why I’m here.”

She really didn’t, it wasn’t as if there was anything exciting in the Malfoy library, mostly really old tomes on really boring old spells that Lily could literally give zero shits over. Even if the idea of Lily pursuing the Malfoy private library had nearly caused Lucius Malfoy to have an aneurysm, until he’d glanced at the entirely unamused Wizard Lenin standing behind him, and then decided it was perfectly fine for the girl who lived to wander his ancestral library unsupervised.

(Except, Lily got the distinct impression that this wasn’t so much to keep her entertained as it was to passive aggressively punish Malfoy for setting Wizard Trotsky loose on the school. A fact that Lily would probably have forgotten herself if Wizard Lenin hadn’t made it a subtle point to bring up at every available opportunity.)

Although she would say, that after the first few times, she’d maybe gotten a good idea of why Lucius liked to believe he was keeping these books out of the hands of children. Not that it was much use to Lily, but some of the old Malfoys and pals could get vindictively nasty with their revenge spells. Such as the graphic description of the spell that would curse someone to eat their own intestines repeatedly until they choked and died. Or the one that slowly but surely removed all five senses from
the victim leaving them little more than a gargling comatose doll at the end of it, only fit to be put out of their misery by whatever kindly nurse at St. Mungos happened to walk by.

It was nice that most of them had engraved pictures to accompany the written description of the agony the next vengeful and jilted lord of Malfoy would enact on the upstart bastard who crossed his family.

The sad thing was though, over the past few days, without much to do, with nowhere to go, and with Wizard Lenin ignoring her for more important things this really was the most entertainment she was likely to get. The Malfoys, as it were, were not connoisseurs of television or the cinema.

With that, and yet another unheard sigh, Lily opened the great doors to reveal the shelves upon shelves of dangerous books all about the magical equivalents of running with scissors, building your own bombs, and how to measure out an exact pound of flesh to pay off greedy merchants in Venice.

Or at least, that was what she expected to see and did see, until she noticed Rabbit standing at the window.

“Oh, shit,” Lily said under her breath, Rabbit had made something of a disappearance since Lily’s trip down memory lane (which probably should have worried her now that she thought about it), but at the sight of his pale profile glowing in the midday winter sunlight streaming through the window she could feel her heart plummeting.

“Oh, Rabbit, hello,” Lily said as Rabbit, soulless and emotionless as ever, turned to glance at her, “Funny seeing you here.”

Now that Lily had her memories back she found herself vaguely concerned about the Rabbit problems that she’d conveniently forgotten about while being Morganned. Such as, what had Rabbit been doing when she’d been kidnapped and brainwashed? When did he leave Hogwarts? When did he find the initiative to leave Hogwarts? Was Luna really the worst Rabbit-sitter ever? And exactly how much unseen mayhem had he caused while Lily wasn’t looking?

“And by funny I mean…” Lily trailed off, slinking inside with a shudder and making her way towards the book she had last opened here, all about how to get down with the ladies with wizard versions of roofies and seductive charms to make you look blazing hot (but had the side effect of making your children horribly mutilated sociopaths who you’d have to pass off as changelings to your horrified bride.)
“Right,” Lily said, answering her own question and instead moving to a table, determining that the least she could do was ignore Rabbit as duly as he ignored everyone and everything. Except Rabbit seemed in a strangely self-aware mood, and instead of staring at the wall or out the window turned with her and moved to lean over her shoulder, dark eyes lingering on the image of a swooning woman falling for the dark necromancer’s irresistible charm.

And it wasn’t an empty stare either, or well, it was, but not as much as usual. There was something, eons and eons in the vacuum of his eyes, staring out at her. Something utterly alien and terrifying in its ineffability.

“Yes?” Lily asked, edging ever so slightly away from Rabbit in his too perfect twelve-year-old form.

His lips quirked upward, polite, and distantly amused.

“Please tell me that there wasn’t something you wanted,” Lily blurted out with a shudder, “You know, since you’re not usually capable of wanting things.”

Rabbit stepped back a move that would have been reassuring if it wasn’t, well, movement from a being who had made it an artform to be a living vegetable and then took the seat across from her. With that same polite, amused, smile he said, “I see you’ve recaptured your own image.”

For a moment Lily blinked, then rubbed the back of her head sheepishly with a small and entirely too awkward laugh as she remembered back to the arcade, Mortal Kombat, and Rabbit’s alarming cameo in Morgan Gaunt’s life, “Oh, right, funny that, I suppose I’m supposed to thank you now…”

Not that Rabbit seemed to be looking for gratitude, or any kind of acknowledgement on that end, he just… Stared. And then kept staring. His eyes, they were like black holes that sucked you in and kept pulling until there was no light at all anywhere, only the crushing void and…

“So, you left Hogwarts,” Lily said, interrupting herself and leaning back in her chair, while Rabbit himself hadn’t moved at all since sitting down.

Naturally, Rabbit didn’t bother to answer that unvoiced question.

“Did… Was there a reason you…”
“I had no reason to stay,” he said simply, and at his words Lily threw the book at his head, only for him to gracefully dodge and the book to fly through the glass of the window and out onto the Malfoy’s peacock decorated lawn. Lily winced, she should probably go get that later…

But there were bigger problems as she stood, slamming her hands on the table and asking, “Since when do you talk?! This is an alarming amount of sentience you’re showing, Rabbit! A really really alarming amount!”

He gave her a look, a look that wasn’t quite a look, but rather, a look that was almost this dry disappointed thing as if Lily was engaging in shenanigans again and it’d be cute if it wasn’t so tiresome.

Lily pointed at him in horror and accusation, “What did you eat when I wasn’t looking?!”

Again, the look, sharper and even more pointed, close enough to an actual human expression that Lily could vomit. You leave for one, maybe two or three, weeks and suddenly Rabbits are going and getting things like expressions, and feelings, and words!

“Seriously, Rabbit, it better not have been important and…”

Rabbit had the gall to look away from her, back towards the window as if dismissing her and her pointless concerns about what he’d devoured out of reality today, and answered dully (not just emotionlessly but dully!), “It was entirely superfluous.”

Lily paused, mouth open, finger still pointed in accusation, and felt as if she could almost feel a tumbleweed rolling through the room at his casual admission.

Finally, gritting her teeth into a too stretched grin, Lily sat back down, steepled her hands together, and tried to stay calm. “I don’t know, Rabbit, isn’t that for someone that’s not you to decide?”

He blinked, once, then twice, then pointed out, “Have you noticed a difference?”

Lily opened her mouth then stopped, considering, trying to think back to the idea if anything seemed… missing. Well, that was the trouble, usually it was something that had never been around
in the first place, since, you know, Rabbit ate it. So of course she couldn’t notice a difference because as far as Lily was aware, it had never been there, unless it had and…

And Rabbit was still giving her that look, Lily was starting to really hate that look.

With that Lily groused, crossing her arms and huffing. “You know I haven’t, everything you’ve eaten has never been there in the first place. The ghosts, that Hufflepuff, whatever else you’ve eaten that I’ve entirely forgotten about or never noticed in the first place…”

He spared her a side-eyed glance, a knowing thing filled with some terrible alien knowledge that perhaps, if Lily looked hard enough, she could understand herself, “True, but there are consequences and prices to playing with the memories of gods, things become… unstable. Holes are left open, rules bend, things are made entirely… superfluous.”

Lily paused, eyes wide, feeling herself pale even as she leaned forward, “What’s that supposed to mean?”

“You’ve said it often enough yourself,” Rabbit said, looking at her directly with his dark terrible eyes, “This experiment you call life is ending.”

She… had. She said it almost every minute, of course no one ever listened, and she’d said it so often that she herself had stopped listening. It’d been shelved, put to the side in her head, something true but not really worth concerning herself over. And perhaps this was still true, the end was the end, there was not much one could do or say about it. Except when Rabbit said it…

She swallowed, determined to ignore Rabbit’s inherent creepiness for now, as well as thoughts about the end of the world and the splintering of reality, “So then, it is something I’ve run into before but something I… didn’t notice or even care about?”

He nodded once, ever so slightly, and acknowledgement of her words and their truth.

She really didn’t want to write this off, but she had a feeling that for whatever reason Rabbit was going to make her play twenty questions to guess whatever it was, and it could be just about anything. It could be a toaster she’d once seen in the Dursley’s kitchen, it could be Dudley’s skinny friend Piers or something, it could be any number of Hogwarts students that she’d never paid attention to…

Her only thought was that, like Rabbit said, if it really had been important then Lily probably would
have noticed except... Except that didn’t sound right, didn’t feel right, to write off whatever this was or was supposed to have been.

Lily could only sigh, feeling her will and panic leaving her body, a dull exhaustion in its place. Almost unthinkingly she pulled the time machine out of her pocket, staring at it once again, still glinting in the sunlight. Filled with so many possibilities, and yet, no possibilities at all.

“An ouroboros,” Lily said, eyes tracing the light on the golden wires, so very clearly homemade and yet having yet to ever fail her. Itself, its creation, a mystery from her.

“Only because you insist on giving him entirely too much freedom and prowess,” Rabbit said, apparently needing no context at all for that word, and there was a hint, just a hint of something dark and cold in his expression as his eyes lingered on the time machine.

“Do I?” Lily asked, because it hadn’t seemed like that, not then and not now. Even now the decision that wasn’t really a decision dangled like a guillotine over her neck.

Just as, once upon a time, she had endlessly repeated Monday without reason or rhyme, so now she would travel back to 1937 and Wool’s Orphanage to befriend a small Wizard Lenin, Tom Riddle before he’d split himself in thirds, and she’d be trapped in the wheel of time just as much as he himself was.

Perhaps more so, because unlike Wizard Lenin or Wizard Trotsky, the threads of fate were easier seen in retrospect and she was the one who’d live with the knowledge that they were wrapped around her neck like a golden noose. This inexplicable prophecy that had been written long before she’d ever been born and long after Wizard Lenin had been Tom Riddle.

(And he’d been so small, in his own memories, so terribly small and filled with vibrant hope and life.)

Eleanor Lily Potter was not a person, she was an idea, and Lily had always known that. Except it extended far deeper than Lily had dared to imagine, not only was hers a role already written with clearly define lines, but a role defined by the actions that she herself had not yet taken.

She felt like a train barreling down the tracks without breaks, hurtling into the dark, no control at all as she moved towards the known and unknown…
“You are without beginning or end in and of yourself. You are beyond the mortal fragile form you’ve made for yourself. He is intrinsically tied to all he is, his soul, his name, his body, no matter how desperately he tries to escape it,” Rabbit said, jarring her thoughts, his face unreadable yet not impassive, rather it seemed to burn with all the emotions it couldn’t or wouldn’t portray, “That he reaches beyond himself in any true manner, is because you have indulged him, and if that eats at his soul and mind then that is the nature of such things.”

Rabbit reached across the table, took her face in his hands, leaning close enough so that she could feel his breath against her lips, “You made the suns and the worlds, you are the playwright, he is an actor on your stage who pretends the stage is his own. If you wish it, it would be nothing for you to rewrite the script.”

“You mean I could choose not to do it,” Lily said, prying Rabbit’s hands from her face as she leaned backwards. She hadn’t thought of that, hadn’t thought of simply damning the consequences and refusing to go whatever the cost. Wizard Lenin would probably thank her for it, at first except…

“Except I was there, I know I was,” Lily said, and she had been important, whether they liked it or not Lily had in so many ways been Tom Riddle’s own Wizard Lenin. An integral, defining, shape in his life that he’d never be the same after touching.

Without that, without her, Wizard Lenin would not be Wizard Lenin at all. She would have to content herself to a world without him in it. And that was too bleak and desolate a place for her to even imagine.

At best, he would become, a paradox. A man out of time and place who persisted despite his lack of a reason to exist. Constantly waiting for a Lily Evans who wouldn’t be travelling back in time, had never travelled back to his own time, while reality kept splitting at the seams, people, places, and things falling through the cracks and through Rabbit’s hungry jaws.

And the idea that this, avoiding this, would not simply relieve Wizard Lenin but would be indulging Rabbit…

Lily grinned, stood, her mind more than made up.

“You know, Rabbit, I suppose I should thank you,” She said as she summoned the book from the lawn back into her hand, brushing off the dew of the grass and placing it back on the shelf along with all the others.
“Oh?”

“If you feel strongly enough, think strongly enough, to advocate anything then it strikes me that it’s probably a good idea do the opposite,” Lily said, a grin growing on her face, and there was nothing again on Rabbit’s, he didn’t move, didn’t breathe, had been reduced to a barely lifelike doll once again.

She stepped back from the table, pushing her chair in, and feeling perhaps, for the first time in half a year, a true and undiluted confidence in the road she was about to take. No matter how winding or long or painful it might be.

“I’ll trust that you won’t eat anything, or at least, not anything important while I’m gone,” Lily said as she waved her final goodbye, Rabbit watching all the while, eyes perfectly black and reflecting nothing at all.

Of course, she’d probably have to leave that task to Wizard Lenin, but he could handle it. Besides, perhaps if she timed it right, then it’d be like she never left in the first place. With thought and new buoyancy in her step, she made her way back down the hall and then down the regal staircase to where Wizard Lenin was loitering, the comrades all apparating out for the day while the Malfoys went to sulk and or panic in some other corner of the house.

“All done then?” Lily asked.

And at her appearance, at her cheer and certainty, he spared her a dry and suspicious look. Finally, he nodded, folded his arms as he leaned against the bannister, and said simply, “Yes.”

It was the first thing he’d said to her in days.

“So, I take it you’re finally getting around to busting your comrades out of the capitalist wizard gulag,” Lily noted as she hopped down the final steps so she was at the level of his head. He spared her a pair of raised eyebrows that questioned her excellent word choice.

“I’d hardly call it a gulag, Lily. Wizards do not believe in capital punishment via slavery. For whatever reason, they find it more efficient to use unfortunate convicts to hold off the tide of soul sucking demons,” Wizard Lenin corrected, sounding as if he knew exactly why wizards preferred feeding prisoners to the wizard version of Nazgûl like buckets of fish heads versus putting them to work in death labor camps, “But yes, now that I have a body of my own and the Death Eaters
reunited but for a few rats and expatriates, I do believe it’s time I paid Azkaban a visit and truly caused some panic in the ranks.”

He looked relaxed as he said this, pleased, as if the thought of his own memories were now far behind him. He looked… More enthused, truly enthused, than she could remember him being for a very long time. It was right that he would look forward, as he always did, past death, past being bodiless, and that it would be left to Lily to look behind him.

“Well, I’m glad you’re looking forward to getting the band back together,” Lily finally said and at her words and her bright grin Wizard Lenin’s enthusiasm dampened into something truly withering and dry.

“Please don’t call it that,” he said, and then, darkly, added, “And to be honest, if it weren’t such a terrifying statement, then it might be easier if I left one or two of them in there. Bellatrix was… Bellatrix before they put her in there, I can’t imagine what ten years in Azkaban might have done to her.”

From what Lily vaguely remembered of Wizard Lenin’s statements on the woman, Bellatrix had been something akin to Wizard Lenin’s own overly enthused Charles Manson cultist. Only, if Charles Manson hadn’t really been all about Helter Skelter but had more been reading the cult-leader how-to manual and had been surprised by the success of his own results.

Lily then paused, thought about the rejuvenation of Wizard Lenin’s long lost cult, Severus Snape, and what all of this would mean, “I suppose I’m not a problem with this plan of yours?”

He spared her an assessing look, one that seemed to see through her, to her very soul. Perhaps, in that moment, he thought about the memories she’d wandered in and how much she’d seen and how much she hadn’t. For a moment his eyes burned, something jagged and hidden inside them as he looked at her, but then he smiled, a rather sly and amused thing, “No, a complication, perhaps. A problem, though, not hardly. This will give Dumbledore pause, but he didn’t trust you already, your friend Trotsky more than burned those bridges. More, if the public finds out, why, I imagine morale will hit an all-time low. And as far as power is concerned… The Death Eaters, I’m afraid, will simply have to learn to make do with the new world order.”

And in those words, it was clear that he didn’t think she was going anywhere at all, not now, not even for a little while. He had already written off his own dire fears, hidden them in the depths of his mind, and expected Lily to as well.

Except there was a homemade time machine in her pocket.
For a moment though, everything was fine, for once everything was more than fine. There weren’t any lost memories, no new body standing between them, the future stretched out ahead and if it didn’t look bright it at least looked…

Except, except if he was to have this moment, have any moment like this then…

She took a breath, closing her eyes, and held onto this moment for a little longer. Engraving it in her mind, the warmth of the Christmas tree, Wizard Lenin’s sly grin, herself on the stairs looking down at him and at the doorway. Then she opened them and said, “You know that I won’t be here for some of it, don’t you?”

Just as she thought he stiffened, almost imperceptibly, but it was there all the same. A wall rising up between them.

He glared, the heat of it enough to have had Neville dying of a heart attack, but Lily didn’t flinch beneath it.

“What are you talking about?”

“1937,” Lily said simply, hands in her pocket, “In 1937 you met your first and only friend, a red-haired girl you thought was Lily Evans, but you really think is me. And I have a time machine.”

For a moment he just stared, stared and burned, and then he laughed, “Is that what you think?”

“It’s not just what I think,” Lily retorted pointedly but he dismissed her with a wave of his hand, an amused smile on his face, as if Lily had just gone and done something terribly precocious and adorable.

“Oh, Lily, I realize you like to believe you inherited nothing from your parents but…”

“You can choose to believe that,” Lily interjected harshly, voice rising in volume to drown his own words out, “But I won’t take that chance.”
“Take that chance?” he asked, voice cold once again, “Have you even thought about what you’re saying? Do you realize what it would mean, Lily, if you were right, if Trotsky was right, and I was desperately wrong?”

He motioned to himself, to his robes, in anger and derision as he echoed the words of his desperate subconsciousness, “It would mean that this, all of this, everything I’ve ever done or worked for means nothing! It would mean that I am the universe’s, your, cosmic joke. That everything I am is merely a product of your meddling, only for the reason because you can’t take a chance! I will be a side-show freak to your own grandeur!”

“But if it doesn’t happen, Lenin, then you will still cease to exist,” Lily said coldly, harsh reality slipping through her voice, “And I refuse to let that happen.”

He then saw how unmoved she was, and she imagined she looked like Uncle Death in that moment, standing in purgatory, wearing the face of a distant god and idol who could never be touched by the masses. And she imagined that Wizard Lenin’s terror and rage was their terror and rage as he grabbed her by the collar of her sweater and hissed out, “If you do this, Lily, if you catapult yourself back in time on this whim, then you will ruin me and everything I have ever believed in!”

Lily dangled in his grasp, legs kicking, no longer touching the floor but he didn’t let her down even as her sweater inched upwards. All at once along with her own determination, her own distant certainty, she felt her own frustration and anger and betrayal bleeding through, “And what am I, Lenin?!”

She looked up at him, watching her flushed reflection in his pale eyes, the callous disregard on his face as he prepared himself for her own callous disregard, “You at least know what’s made you what you are now, you at least have some sort of guiding linear reason, a purpose no matter how contrived it seems! What the hell am I supposed to be?!”

She laughed, a bitter cold thing, as all those memories washed over her like an unwanted tide, bringing everything back with them.

“Everything I’ve ever done, everything I am, is some role that’s been scripted out for me. The freak Dursley niece, Ellie Potter… I play the roles that I am given, even when they kill me, even when they ostracize me and turn me into a monster and messiah! Even when I am alone in the dark and the infinite game knowing that I can never really win! And I have pretended, tried to delude myself into believing, that I didn’t care.”

Her smile twisted itself into a cruel, self-deprecating, grin, “And even this, even Lily, even here I am
defined by the consequences of actions I haven’t even taken. Actions that I know will hurt you, perhaps even ruin you as you so love to put it, but the very idea that I would have never met you in the first place means that I must take them no matter how nonsensical and painful they might be.”

And he wasn’t just angry, he was afraid, so terribly afraid and so much younger looking than he ever should be as he stared down at her. For perhaps the first time in her life, despite all her godlike powers and all her abuse of them, she felt like the cruel and fickle god that Wizard Lenin had always painted her as.

“You know it’s soon, you know it’s me, and you know that there’s nothing that either of us can do about it. If it was anyone else, anyone other than you, then you know that you’d be telling me to shut up and do it before something breaks.”

She laughed again, or tried to, but it bordered on something far more broken. Distantly, she could feel tears gathering at the corner of her eyes, rolling down her cheeks and blurring her vision even as she tried to smile, digging the time machine out of her pocket, “I’ll miss you.”

“Wait, don’t!”

Lily twisted the dial harshly, years and years backward, jerking herself out of Wizard Lenin’s grip, and in a flash of golden light, Wizard Lenin’s look of anger, betrayal, and horror the last thing she saw of her own world, and propelled herself back into 1937.
The Origins of a Beautiful Friendship

In which Lily travels back in time sans DeLorean and style, becomes an orphan of the stereotypical Charles Dickens’ and or Little Orphan Annie variety, and meets a young and unfractured Tom Riddle who likes to pose as the antichrist in his free time

If time had a taste then it was something both sweet and bitter and so very rich, and Lily was positively choking on it. She was on all fours, wheezing on the floor, feeling as if her lungs were filled with lead, her tongue plated in time masquerading as golden light, and her limbs replaced with wood as the world still seemed to vibrate like a string that had been plucked.

She groaned, looked at the time machine still clutched in her hand, wires a tangled mess, warm from the heat of her hand as well as the time space continuum itself though still mostly intact. And looking up from the lush carpet of the regal staircase she had landed on, Wizard Lenin was nowhere in sight.

A sign, perhaps, that for once things had worked out the first time around without completely going off the rails. Well, as far as definitions of working out went, Lily wasn’t entirely sure terms like that could be applied to this current existential, time travel, mess.

She stood, clutching the railing for support as she pulled herself upwards, then blinked as her surroundings wobbled their way further into focus and stability. Everything looked almost exactly the same, the same entryway, same chandelier, same carpet, Lily couldn’t see an item out of place from where she’d left it except for Wizard Lenin and the Christmas decorations.

Still, she kept staring at the space he had just occupied, as if she was still searching for him even now.

“Mother?” a boy’s voice called, somewhat familiar, or at least that entitled tone to it rather familiar though Lily’s head hurt trying to place it.

At the top of the stairs a small pale boy, probably around ten or eleven years old, with pale blonde hair, gray eyes, pinched features, and posture that spoke of desperately good breeding appeared to look down towards the entryway, “Mother? Father? Is that you?”

His eyes then landed on Lily loitering on his regal staircase, who somewhat awkwardly, with a
forced grin that was more tired than cheerful, waved up at him, “Hello.”

And that was when she realized it, as he looked down at her in surprise, affront, and fear, emotions she was all terribly familiar with on the faces of other people when they looked at her, that he could be Draco Malfoy’s twin.

“Miffy!” the boy cried, and with a great crack a shriveled, shivering, house elf appeared, landing on the step not too far from Lily herself, squeaking out a high-pitched, resigned and yet fearful, “Yes, young master?”

Mini Pimp’s miniature doppelganger pointed at Lily without even looking at her, like he could barely stand the sight of her staining his home, “Some strange mudblood girl has broken through our wards!”

For a moment, she wondered at his unthinking insolence at what he presumed to be her unthinking insolence, that Lily had travelled for so far and so long to get here, had perhaps been unconsciously preparing herself for this moment all her life, and this little brat thought he could simply hurl her out onto the street like yesterday’s trash.

Like Lily was just some strange mudblood girl who had somehow found her way into his house.

And where perhaps, some other day, Lily would remind herself that Draco’s unfortunate twin could hardly know what he was dealing with today she only remembered the Draco Malfoy she used to know, and how he’d been so eager to laugh at every available opportunity until he’d had the reality of his circumstances pounded into his thick pedigreed skull.

Before Miffy could so much as snap her (or his, it was kind of hard to tell) fingers Lily banished it back from whence it came with a loud crash. Lily winced slightly at the noise, wondering if it had hurt as much as it had sounded, and yet even with that thought when she closed her eyes it was still Wizard Lenin’s desperate fear looking back at her rather than anything in this present-past moment she found herself in.

(“Wait!” his voice, even now, seemed to echo through time and space, to reach her years before he would ever think to say that word.)

The boy’s head whipped back towards her, towards her wandless hands, and with that same pointing finger asked in a rather demanding tone for a boy smaller than her, “Who are you?”
Lily paused, sweat drying on her skin, legs still feeling somewhat shaky, and really not prepared for this sort of question. And what a difficult question it was, not to anyone else of course, but to Lily? So many answers to give and so many of them only partially true.

“No one of consequence,” Lily finally said, voice cracking, still burned dry by the passage of time in the wrong direction. She cleared her throat, swallowed and tried to ignore the dry feeling in her mouth and down her throat and asked, “You wouldn’t happen to know the date, by any chance?”

“No one of consequence?!” the boy asked, possibly more insulted than even before, “Do you even know where you are?”

Well that was Draco Malfoy to a tee, wasn’t it? His unthinking arrogance and narcissism appeared to be hopelessly genetic. She wondered if this one also used his daddy as a constant threat and source of accomplishment, he hadn’t so far, but perhaps he was saving it as his big guns.

“Yes,” Lily replied dully, “It’s the when I’m uncertain of.”

Here he drew back, eyebrows rising and looking at her like he was taking her in for the first time, “You’re an utter loon.”

And Lily sighed, realizing that she wasn’t going to get anywhere, and slowly hobbled her way down the staircase and towards the kitchen. She really needed a glass of water or cup of tea or even just a grilled cheese sandwich if the Malfoy’s had the ingredients for something that unrefined.

“Hey, where are you going?” Malfoy cried, feet thudding on the staircase as he followed her down.

“To raid your fridge,” Lily replied shortly, not even bothering to look at him as she took a right towards the back of the manor where unsightly but necessary rooms were kept out of view of polite company, “I have just had a very long… Well, it’s really been more of a long year, if I think about it too hard.”

This hardly seemed to placate the latest and greatest Malfoy as he tried to keep pace with her, his voice starting to sound desperate as he realized his own helplessness and frustration, “You can’t just…”

“You’ll find that I can and that I will,” Lily said, effectively shutting him up for at least a good
second, and though he might look like Draco he appeared to have at least slightly more common sense as he didn’t immediately try to pummel her or summon the elf again.

Of course, glancing down Lily noted that there wasn’t a hint of a wand on him, so that could make him at least slightly more cautious than Mini Pimp in his prime.

With a satisfied smile she stepped into the kitchen, all polished, silver, and gleaming, like something that belonged in a five-star restaurant rather than a three-person family’s reclusive estate. With a flick of her hand Lily opened the cupboards and surveyed the stock, then with another flick sent the pots, pans, and what have you to make her a decent meal while Malfoy du jour watched with his jaw practically hanging off his face.

“Who are you?” he asked again, though this time less accusing and demanding, and more in wonder and a trace of fear.

Lily just moved to sit on one of the counters, probably used for chopping vegetables, and held out both hands to receive the cup of tea and plate filled with slices of grilled cheese, “If I didn’t tell you the first time why the hell would I tell you the second?”

“Well,” the boy said, looking now somewhat annoyed as well as dreadfully conceited for a boy who hadn’t even given a fight at Lily stealing his food, “I’m Abraxas Malfoy, and one day, I’m going to be head of the Most Noble and Ancient House of Malfoy.”

He looked at her like this was supposed to impress her somehow, like she hadn’t already met one head of the house of Malfoy and then his heir already. So, she just sent him a flat look and quoted, “And I am become death, the destroyer of worlds.”

“What does that mean?” Abraxas pouted, actually going so far as to put his hands on his hips like a huffy housewife. God, this whole family just had no bloody shame at all.

No wonder Lily had practically dying in Slytherin her first year. It’d been this but times twelve.

“It means that I’m goddamn terrifying and if you don’t shut up and let me eat my goddamn sandwich I can’t be held responsible for my actions,” Lily said as she stuffed the first of said sandwiches into her mouth, then, mouth full of cheesy and buttery goodness she asked, “Now, date please?”
He flushed, looked like he was going to say something to that, maybe something about telling his father, but then he scowled and bit out like she was some kind of an idiot he was only pretending to put up with, “August thirteenth.”

“Year too, jackass,” Lily cut in as she took another sandwich, and this just seemed to affront him even more.

“You don’t know the year?” as if to say that Lily, even an idiot toddler knows the year, what’s wrong with you?

“I must have hit my head on your over decorated stairs,” Lily quipped back, “Now, year please.”

“1937!” the boy cried out as if he really couldn’t believe he’d just had to say that, but apparently Abraxas Malfoy, Draco’s great uncle or grandfather or something, completely lacked any sense of imagination.

Good, that was good, 1937 was good, that was what she’d been aiming for and…

She slowed eating, trying to think of just what she was supposed to do from here, there hadn’t really been much of a plan it’d just been biting the bullet and going. And now that she was here, well, when really, she just…

Well, step one was find Wizard Lenin, no, Tom, Tom Riddle the orphan and to do that she needed to find Wool’s Orphanage. That was easy enough, Wizard Trotsky had so helpfully pointed it out to her. Step two was, well she wasn’t entirely sure what step two was but there probably was a step two in there somewhere that she’d remember along the way then…

“Oh, oh shit,” Lily said slowly.

“What is it?” Abraxas asked, sneering at her common vulgar language or perhaps at the fact that she was still unashamedly stuffing sandwiches into her face. But if time travelling back a few hours was exhausting, doing it years back was positively grueling. No wonder it killed just about anyone else.

At any rate, sitting there on the gleaming counter, Lily realized that this was, essentially, a one-way ticket. Time machines, for whatever strange reason, exclusively went backwards. That was something Wizard Lenin had been very clear about, had ranted about multiple times while he’d been
comatose in Default’s basement, only backwards, never forwards.

Of course, Lily probably could just spring herself forwards whenever she accomplished whatever it was she was supposed to be doing but…

But if Wizard Lenin was here, or in her head, he’d probably be screaming something about the spacetime continuum and don’t break the universe by taking the easy way out, Lily! And given that part of this was so that she didn’t break the universe…

Except, thinking about it further, she must find some way out by 1938 or something because it’d been pretty clear that the red-headed friend had vamoosed pretty quickly. So, one way or another, reality breaking or not, Lily did have a certain time limit to this whole ridiculous venture and…

“Are you even listening to me?!”

“What?” Lily asked.

He huffed again, scowled even, the red of his angry flush practically fluorescent what with his pale skin, and said like he was repeating himself one too many times for his liking. “I said, are you a Hogwarts student?”

Lily looked down at herself, then down towards him, and decided to admit honestly, “I think at this point I’ve all but dropped out.”

“Dropped out?!“ he looked as if such an idea was inconceivable, and it probably was, but nonetheless quite true. If she thought about it Lily wasn’t even sure she’d attended a year of Hogwarts even cumulatively.

And after last year, even if she wanted to go, she wasn’t sure they’d take her back. Like it or not her hat was thrown in with Wizard Lenin’s now, and when she returned… She didn’t know, but Hogwarts seemed further away than it ever had before.

Funny, between Morgan and well… Mostly Morgan, she hadn’t really thought about her status as an ex-Hogwarts student. It just, Hogwarts had seemed so far away and entirely irrelevant.
“You really are a loon,” Abraxas scoffed, Lily’s distaste for Hogwarts apparently all but solidifying that opinion. That was fine, his grandson hadn’t thought much differently.

“And yet, I am more powerful than you yourself can ever hope to be,” Lily said, feeling rather like Wizard Lenin as she let that particular observation roll off her tongue, “Imagine that.”

“That’s not true, I just don’t have my wand yet but when I do…”

Lily cut that particular threat off before it could even start as she finished the last of her sandwiches, “You’ll be even more of a brazen upstart than you are right now.”

He looked like he dearly wished he had his wand right now so he could blast her in the face, but, though he didn’t know it, it was better that he didn’t. Because Lily really was not in the mood right now and as she’d noted earlier, she really could not be held responsible for her own actions. Despite how much responsibility liked to land square on her shoulders.

Although, hopping off the table, downing her tea in one gulp, she did feel better than she first had on the stairs. She turned to look at the boy, now blinking at her and taking a step back in uncertainty and trepidation, and with a smile she said, “Well, it’s been fun Malfoy, but I’m afraid I have to go.”

“Wait, what?!”

“God willing, you’ll never see me again,” Lily said, and with that, she teleported through the Malfoy wards and into London’s east side without a hint of regret for the stunned little boy left behind. Well, at least until she landed, where she remembered that vaulting oneself through time and space was not always great for your stomach.

Even before she landed she could feel the tea and sandwiches rolling around inside of there and she shuddered, hunched over and trying not to vomit onto the old-fashioned pavement that really did look reminiscent of a movie set rather than reality, “Oh god.”

Eventually, after a few shuddering breaths and close calls, Lily looked up and with bleary eyes took in her latest and greatest surroundings.
They were not an exact replica of Wizard Lenin’s memories, but in every shadow Lily could see the source material he had derived his inner world from. There was color here, three-dimensional space, all those little details you barely even noticed that reality had to offer, and yet staring at the faded letters of the sign reading “Wool’s Orphanage” she didn’t wonder if she was in fact still looking through the memory of Wizard Lenin’s eyes.

The sign was, after all, somehow so very gray without even trying.

And it was at once so… alien.

More so than the Wizarding World had been, that place had simply been too ridiculous, and even then, she’d had Wizard Lenin as her terse but helpful guide. This world was an out of time reflection of her own, before the blitz, before so many things, and in her modern clothes and mannerisms Lily knew that in many ways she was more alien here than she had ever been to the wizards.

And the entryway loomed overhead like the entrance to a great and foreboding temple, where either gods or demons lurked inside, and one could never tell which it was by staring at the exterior…

“Come on, Lily, it’s now or never,” Lily said to herself, insisted, the hard part after all was done and over with. Surely, wrenching herself backwards despite the pain, despite the dagger of betrayal…

That had to be the hardest part.

She knocked on the door, there was no answer, she knocked again and still no hint of an answer. Frowning Lily pushed it open and stepped inside a small, drab, entryway composed entirely of neutral and faded colors. Browns, beiges, off-whites, and grays that all bled into one another casting a distinct and almost impoverished look to every corner.

A creaking stair, Lily looked up to see a wide-eyed girl, a few years younger than her, with big blue eyes and big blonde curls staring down at her in alarm. She looked like she was trying desperately hard to be Shirly Temple, but circumstances had forced her to be too thin, too sickly, and the gray woolen uniform that hung off her frame did nothing for her image either.

“Hello,” Lily said, stepping forward rather awkwardly, waving again, “I’m an orphan, my parents died in a… car accident and my relatives are all dead, so I just thought…”
Lily trailed off as the girl ran past Lily, shoving past her and shouting, “Mrs. Cole!” as she tore off down the hallway, leaving Lily to brush herself off and frown.

Before Lily got too much of a chance to look around Shirly Temple’s anemic understudy reappeared with a middle aged, cantankerous looking, woman in tow. There was a sense not only of authority forced upon the woman, of years of looking after children she only vaguely tolerated, but something more worn than even that.

Like seeing Lily standing there in the doorway did nothing but rise her suspicions rather than her sympathies. The woman looked down at the blonde, now worriedly looking up at her with those too large eyes, “You can go now, Amy.”

The girl, Amy, nodded, curls bouncing, and without a word disappeared around some corner and into the rest of the orphanage.

The woman then looked at Lily, looked her up and down in some distaste, then said, “I suppose you’re going to say you’re an orphan.”

“Yes,” Lily said, stepping forward and putting on her best pitiable expression as she explained her tragic backstory, “My parents dies in a car accident and my relatives are…”

“Well, even if you aren’t just running away from home or the circus it hardly matters,” the woman said, looking away from Lily and past her shoulder towards the door, “We’re out of room. Try some other orphanage.”

Lily’s mouth opened somewhat, her eyes wide, and she took a step forward, forcing herself to keep smiling so widely that it hurt her face, “No, but I have nowhere else to go and…”

“There are other orphanages in London,” the woman said without any sympathy whatsoever, and it was clear from her expression that she didn’t believe Lily was an orphan at all. Like she could look at Lily’s bright sweater, her shoes, her pants, and think to herself that this was a girl who had run away from somewhere but hardly the gutter.

“There are no other orphanages in London,” Lily said, her own sympathy and good will disappearing with the words, and she felt her will slipping into her voice, taking on that Obi-Wan Kenobi persona again as she twisted the woman’s mind, “You have room, and you will take me, because there is nowhere else!”
“There is nowhere else…” Mrs. Cole repeated, eyes glazed over like a fish’s.

“There is nowhere else,” Lily merely confirmed stepping ever closer until she was only a foot or so away from the woman. Then, just like that, Mrs. Cole was back, blinking down at Lily and realizing that for better or worse there was nowhere else.

“Well, you’d best follow me then,” the woman said, and then they were turning, going up the stairs, the woman talking and not even glancing back at Lily as she pulled linens, an extra orphan’s uniform, and more from closets along the way, “The uniform you are to wear on all days except for Sunday, for Sunday service you will be donated a set of formal clothes, do not ruin either set.”

The woman piled the sheets and the clothes into Lily’s hands, so high that Lily could barely see as she was pulled through the hallway. And Lily got the feeling that maybe pushing the woman into this had somehow made it worse, as not even a name had been asked for, and instead it was just going through the motions, no thought on any of the details of the situation, and if Lily couldn’t keep up then so much the worse for her.

A few curious heads poked out as she was pulled along, all whispering, eyes wide, a few gasps and giggles as they caught Lily’s eye.

“Unfortunately for you, girl, there’s only one bed left in the building, but desperate times call for desperate measures. And besides, you look something like the circus folk yourself, perhaps you’ll get along with the demon child.”

The woman pushed open a door at the very end of the hallway, revealing a small drab room that really looked no different than any other, two small cots sporting thin woolen blankets and truly flimsy mattresses, a single scratched wooden wardrobe resting between them, a chair and a desk, and then a small window with a bleak view of the front yard and the street beyond it.

The other bed had been made impeccably, looking as if it was trying its darndest to be featured in a magazine advertisement for a luxury hotel or apartment, but at the sight of it Mrs. Cole sneered in distaste as if it was the shadow of something loathsome. She then turned to Lily, eyes cold as stone, and voice flat as she warned, “If you can’t live with the boy then you can’t live here, so if you are so set on being in this orphanage, for lord only knows what reason, you will have to somehow work it out with him.”

And from the woman’s steely expression, this was a task she fully expected Lily to fail.
At her forceful staring Lily dropped the linens and clothes onto the bed with a soft thunk, grinning up at the woman who did anything but grin back. The woman then said as she walked away, not even glancing back at Lily, “Change into the uniform, dinner’s in half an hour downstairs, one of the other children will show you the way and tell you the rules.”

And with that she walked out the door, slamming it in Lily’s face like she could barely stand the sight of her and leaving her alone in her new surroundings. She looked it over, inspecting the corners and the space of it, it actually was a step up in Lily’s world compared to a cupboard. Really, it wasn’t too shabby at all.

And actually looking at it there was something…

“Oh, it looks like his room did,” Lily said with a grin to herself, Wizard Lenin’s room in the orphanage in all the memories he’d shown her, or rather, the few memories he’d shown her. Yes, yes, this must be the wardrobe and there was the bed and…

And she hadn’t remembered there being a second bed, but then, as Lily now full knew memories were sometimes very tricky and subjective things.

Suddenly it felt much too distant and much too real all at once, and Lily collapsed back onto the bed with a flop to stare up at the gray ceiling. It was hard and uncomfortable, more so than even a mattress in a cupboard beneath the stairs, and it creaked something awful at even the slightest hint of movement. Still, staring upwards, Lily said, “Oh, well, at least I don’t have to go to Hogwarts.”

Wizard Lenin would have been so offended by that, she thought with a grin to herself, probably would have chided her now that it was only ever Lily who made Hogwarts unbearable for herself. Never mind that Lily wasn’t the one filling it with murderers, scoundrels, fiends, History of Magic, house points, and quidditch.

How long had it been since they’d had a conversation like that?

She sat back up, stared at the empty room, that seemed at once both too big and too small, then before she could think further picked up her clothes off the pile of supplies so kindly given to her by Mrs. Cole.

Changing into the woolen, slightly scratchy, Wool’s uniform Lily found she still looked out of place as she stared in the mirror in the inside of the wardrobe. Not only were they a bit too big for Lily’s
frame but there was just something intrinsic about them that was off-putting. It was like the clothes just made her hair, eyes, and skin that much brighter, not in a good way but in a juxtaposing out of place way. Like for Lily this was little more than a cheap disguise even more so than Hogwarts’ uniform had been…

Then, looking closer at herself in distaste and horror Lily realized, “Oh shit, I look like Little Orphan Annie!”

The hair was red and curly enough, though not as short, all she needed was a mutt of a dog, a cheerful song about suns coming up tomorrow, and a hard-knock life and she’d be all set. Lily really didn’t know how she felt about that, staring at her reflection she noted, “I don’t think I really fit the part.”

Of course, Lily always had been an orphan, but somehow it hadn’t really sunk in until now if only because the Dursleys had always been around (until they hadn’t), and well, maybe because in some ways Lily never thought of herself as being something that sprung from a set of human beings. She’d just… appeared one day in a cupboard beneath the stairs and that had been that. Giving names and faces to James and Lily Potter, taking her mother’s face in its entirety, that was something Lily hadn’t ever considered before.

Well, not before her trip down memory lane with Wizard Lenin.

Except now she realized, that perhaps, there could be some strange world in which she grew up with them alive and…

“And they would have been so disappointed,” Lily whispered to herself, not quite sure how she knew it, only that she did know it. Her reflection’s smile a rueful one, perhaps a touch bitter, but not in any way surprised.

They had been so young, so terribly young, and Lily knew that they would have had no bloody idea what to do with her. And that, perhaps in part, was why they were dead.

“Oh, what fools these mortals be.”

And whether she was talking about Wizard Lenin caught in his ouroboros with Lily beside him, her naïve and stupid school children parents, all the Malfoys that had ever been or ever would be, or anyone else was entirely beyond Lily as she leaned her head against the wood of the wardrobe door
Strange, when she caught the eye of her reflection, she couldn’t help but think that they looked nothing like Lily Evans’ eyes had.

She stepped back, giving her mirrored-self one last grin before the play once again commenced, “Well, it’s time to get this show on the road.”

Stepping out of the room she followed a few children all headed down the creaking staircase then down the hall into a larger room with several wooden tables and benches all lined together as well as the kitchen in the back which looked like it was serving, rather stereotypically, gruel. Either that or some gray and mysterious stew of mystery whose contents were either soylent green or else cardboard. Lily grimaced, glanced at her fellow orphans, and decided that even if she looked like Little Orphan Annie transported into a Charles Dickens’ novel she didn’t have to act like one.

With that she stepped out of the line, created herself another plate full of sandwiches out of thin air (easier this time with the taste of time and space outside of her mouth) and sat at the only empty table in the room, the others sporting at least one or two other children.

Though, not all of them were children. Sure, they all looked more or less under seventeen or sixteen, but there really was a full range of ages here, past even Hogwarts’ extent which had the starting point of eleven.

And they were all staring at her, not at her plate of mysterious sandwiches (which you think would have drawn the most attention and envy) but instead directly at her in stupefied horror as if she had no idea what she was doing and was about to get herself killed. Like she was playing with nail guns and chain saws in the backyard with a cheerful and stupid grin on her face. Yet no one stepped near her, not a word was said, they all just kept looking, like they wanted to see what happened and didn’t at the same time…

“It’s still not Hogwarts,” Lily reminded herself stiffly, even if that kind of staring rather was indicative of Hogwarts and about the last thing she wanted from Wool’s Orphanage, and she still had no idea what she was even doing, and had no idea how she was even going to get out of this mess or what this mess even was and…

“You’re at my table,” it was a high oddly commanding voice, the voice Abraxas Malfoy would have liked to have but simply failed to possess, and looking up Lily stopped because…
Well, because it was him. Him as he once was more than fifty years ago, so small, far smaller than Lily herself, dark haired, pale skinned, but eyes that same pale blue that glared across at her with both Wizard Trotsky and Wizard Lenin swirling in their depths, inseparable entities of Tom Marvolo Riddle.

Yet, they looked so different from his eyes, both Wizard Trotsky’s and Wizard Lenin’s the last time she saw them, both crying out to her in the same voice with the same desperate word, “Wait!”

There wasn’t an ounce of recognition anywhere in them now.

“You’re at my table,” Tom Riddle hissed, leaning forward on the table and glaring further, no glowering as Lily stupidly refused to move and refused to recognize the threat for what it was. A grin, devilish and too jagged crawled up his lips, “You’re new, aren’t you? I’ll still have to punish you after dinner, but I’ll be nice and give you some advice. Don’t ever sit at my table, tart.”

And suddenly Lily was very much in the present moment, being put in her place by ten-year-old Tom Riddle who had no idea who she was or what he was dealing with and acting like he was a king already, and suddenly Lily was all too reminded of Hogwarts.

She hadn’t realized, she thought to herself, how hideously much Wizard Lenin and Draco Malfoy had ever had in common.

Lily reached for a sandwich, and without even glancing at him, took a bite, eyebrows rising slowly to silently challenge tiny orphan Tom Riddle masquerading as Oliver Twist with a serious ego. A challenge he understood perfectly and seemed determined to grind her into dust for her dared insolence.

And with that, she gave him an equally silent salute as if to wish him the best of luck and accept his challenge.

The matron Mrs. Cole entered the room, Lily casting a slight bubble of indifference around herself so that she could continue eating while the rest of the orphans, at the sight of the woman, bowed their heads in prayer.

“Oh Lord,” the woman said, “We thank you for the food you have so gratefully provided us as well as the shelter over our head and…”
Tom’s eyes were not closed they were instead burning, burning too brightly as they landed on her, and she could see him wondering how she was getting away with this blatant show of disrespect when clearly this was one of those lines even he couldn’t cross and also hating her for it.

Lily just kept eating.

Soon enough it was finished with an amen said in unison, and then they were all digging into mystery stew, well, everyone except for Wizard Lenin’s prototype who was now mulishly glaring across at her and her plate of sandwiches.

Wordlessly he reached for one, only for Lily to swat down his hand before he could even think of touching a single one, “I’ve had a long day and I can tell you’re bloody well determined to make it longer. If you want a sandwich you can bloody well get your own.”

Tom didn’t point out that Lily had an overflowing plate of them (that she was really demolishing her way through at an alarming rate given that it wasn’t too long ago that she was at the Malfoy’s eating through their kitchen) or that he couldn’t just go and get his bloody own. Instead, with a glance around as if to note who was watching, he held out a hand and furrowed his brow in concentration, watching as the topmost sandwich wiggled its way towards him.

At least, until Lily herself swatted down his attempts at summoning just as she had his wandering hand.

He fell backwards, almost off of his bench entirely, stunned, then shook himself and tried again, tried entirely too hard as his face grew red, his eyes bloodshot, and blood even began to dribble out of his nose.

“She tried not to give yourself an aneurysm,” Lily said with a mouth full of sandwich, although she had to hand it to him, even now, even before being Wizard Lenin or Wizard Trotsky, he still had both the same drive and pride that had been evident, in some respects, in both of them.

Tom Riddle glared at her, looked around to see who was watching (which at this current moment was no one as Lily’s bubble of perfect indifference was still going strong), then hissed, “You did this!”

Lily said nothing, merely kept eating, waiting for him to say something more interesting than that.
And there was something… Something bitter and disappointing in seeing him look at her like this, like she had unconsciously expected and wanted more from him, even a him before he was himself. And even though she knew it wasn’t the case she just felt like she was looking at Wizard Lenin’s pale reflection of what he would someday become.

He leaned forward, still hissing, hissing apparently being baby Wizard Lenin’s primary means of intimidation, “I will destroy you!”

“That’s nice,” Lily said with a sigh, one that was weighed down by far more than just her present exhaustion, but just this moment in general and all of her life leading up to here. Because she didn’t really want to be here, Wizard Lenin hadn’t wanted her here, and even Tom Riddle didn’t want her here.

Yet, here she was all the same.

Now he looked like he was physically restraining himself, gripping the wooden table with white knuckles, shadows seeming to rise up around him with his rage as he grit his teeth to keep from screaming in rage.

Lily, naturally, just kept eating and wondered vaguely if now was the time to tell him they’d be rooming together or not.

Judging by his expression that was a fact best saved for later.

Unfortunately, he decided that he wanted to talk, glaring across at her and demanding, “Who are you?”

It was almost a willed question, like the words themselves demanded her unthinking answer and obedience, and perhaps against some lesser mortal it would have been enough but Lily had played that game for far longer than Tom Riddle had and against far more dangerous opponents.

“No one of consequence,” Lily repeated, her same answer given to Abraxas Malfoy, but with a fonder smile added, “But my friends call me Lily.”

He sneered at that last bit, like Lily even saying the word friend and smiling was just far too sappy for any sane human being. He looked away for a moment, at the other tables, still not even glancing
at them then back to Lily, “You did something to them.”

“I made them care as little as I do,” Lily said, which apparently was about the last thing the boy wanted to hear.

“You will care,” he warned, thunder brewing in his eyes, but Lily couldn’t quite feel the heat of the threat. After all, it would come true, but far past any immediate future she thought that this interpretation of Tom Riddle could see. Many years from now, over fifty years from now, Lily could be said to care entirely too much.

So much, that in this moment, she felt almost hollow.

Then, staring at his hands for too long of a moment, beginning to slowly but surely pick at his dinner, he said, “You… You can do it too, can’t you?”

“Do what?” Lily asked dully, her mind thousands and thousands of miles away.

He looked up at her, and his expression was almost vulnerable, eyes larger and wider than she’d ever imagined they could be, expression fearful, hopeful, and awed all at the same moment, “Move things with your mind, make people do things you want them to, you’re, you’re like me…”

She nodded and with a shrug stated, “You’ll find I’m something of a master of the universe.”

“Master of the universe?” he repeated, then glaring, filled with desperate pride and authority, he stated, “You know, I can do it too, I can do it even better!”

Lily felt her expression falling, something resigned and exasperated and so very tired settling in her stomach like an impossibly fat and lazy cat, “Are we really measuring our dicks now? Can’t I finish dinner first?”

He flushed, tensing, but ignored her own questions and said, “I can talk to snakes and they’ll do whatever I tell them to! I could even make one bite you right now or sneak into your bed while you’re sleeping!”
Oh god, they were really doing this now, suddenly Lily wondered why she’d thought this was such a grand idea or even a necessary one. If it was this, for months, or even a week, Lily had no idea what drastic measures she’d resort to.

“I’m not overly fond of snakes,” Lily noted absently, what with her recent run in with the basilisk and that whole fiasco.

His face became impossibly redder, he even stood from his seat to lean forward and look at least slightly more intimidating despite his tiny size, “And whatever you can do I can do better, I can do anything better than you!”

“No, you can’t,” Lily responded, mouth full of the last, delicious, sandwich.

“Yes, I can!”

“No, you can’t.”

“Yes, I can!” he slammed his hands down on the table, eyes narrowing, plate of sandwiches rising and wobbling like a flying saucer piloted by a drunk until, when it was several feet above Lily’s head, it fell back down to the table and shattered, sandwich debris flying in every direction into the unsuspecting laps of children.

Lily could only stare, and then, quietly, with a flick of her hand vanishing the debris, putting her hands into her pockets and walking towards the stairs.

“Hey, where are you going?!” Tom’s voice cried out behind her.

“I’m done,” Lily responded, not even looking at him, “I’m going to sleep.”

And if he even thought about waking her up or putting snakes in her bed or doing anything at all then, Wizard Lenin’s previous incarnation or not, she was going to squash him like a teeny tiny bug and stick him naked to the ceiling for at least twelve hours.

It would be good for him, probably.
And that was how, without even a DeLorean to her name, Lily found herself back in time and having, perhaps, some form of a hard-knock life.
In which, in a fit of PTSD triggered by an adorably competitive and angry antichrist, Lily murders snake, Lily rediscovers that life is a meaningless charade and free will only a comforting illusion, and a young Tom Riddle considers the terrifying possibility that not only is he not alone but that perhaps he is outmatched.

“You know, you brought this on yourself,” Lily said as she looked over at the opposite wall in her new tiny orphanage bedroom where, for at least five hours, the equally tiny Tom Riddle had been stuck with invisible bindings. He said nothing to this, couldn’t, given that Lily had stolen his voice hours ago. However, he did wriggle ominously and mouth some rather dirty words for a ten-year-old boy.

With the Dursleys, certainly, Lily would never have gotten away with what he was silently screaming at her. Then again, Lily couldn’t get away with saying the word ‘magic’ so the Dursleys had an infamously low bar as far as dirty words went.

More, it said a lot, Lily thought, that even with the morning light sneaking into the room, even half-dressed and with dark haggard circles under his eyes, he could still glare so ferociously for hours on end.

Even when she’d turned her back to him in the middle of the night, forced herself to stare at the off-white wall and try not to think of times yet to come and times gone, she could feel his eyes against the skin of her neck like the ghost of a tip of a blade.

Now, hours later, Lily, with a thought and a casual hand motion, returned his voice to him. He immediately took advantage of this to hiss at her, eyes burning and wriggling harder as if the movement, his concentration, and will alone would be enough to free him, “You will regret this, witch!”

“One cannot impersonate the antichrist,” Lily said with an air of wisdom, looking away from him to instead stare out the window, at the bleak view of an unfamiliar London stretching before her, painted flat in that gray early morning light, “And expect to be taken seriously, especially when one’s elders and betters are not in the mood for such melodramatic bullshit.”

To be honest, Lily wasn’t sure she’d ever be in the mood again if she ever had been to begin with.
He seemed beyond reason, his voice hoarse from silent screaming throughout the night even as he cried out, “I will kill you!”

“Yes, you said that already,” Lily noted, her own voice quiet and distant. He’d made sure to repeat it, scream it loudly in the dark before Lily had thought to just shut him up and then mouth it over and over until Lily hadn’t seen any point in looking at him anymore.

And, she’d note, there was some bitter irony in that he would more than live up to that promise. In one capacity or another, Tom Marvolo Riddle would kill her more than any other being would dare to try.

A day and a morning in, Lily thought, and she was almost drowning in the unspoken, bitter irony. How had Wizard Lenin stomached it? No, he hadn’t, had chosen not to. How had Wizard Trotsky stomached it?

“Hey, look at me!” he commanded, the words almost echoing, if not against the wall then against his will and hers, trying to find some crack or some weakness in the walls that guarded her mind and her heart.

For that alone Lily didn’t want to look didn’t want to indulge him. Couldn’t bring herself to no matter that she was doing all of this for him. No, for that fact alone, she didn’t want to do it. Couldn’t just… humor him like that.

Even after hours of sleeping, she was still so damn tired.

“I said look at me!”

Lily sighed, spared one last glance towards the world outside her window, towards her own rather miserable reflection inside the glass, then turned back around to Tom Riddle and without further ado finally dropped him from the wall.

He fell to the floor in a heap, brushing himself off and glaring, doing his best to look as if he wasn’t out of sorts at all and had this all perfectly under control. Like he’d meant to go and stick himself to a wall all night and if he was there it was only to humor Lily and make her feel as if she was important.
Finally, with a sneer, and crossing his arms as if that alone was the only thing keeping him from crossing the room and throttling her with his tiny fingers, he asked, “So, Mrs. Cole gave you the empty bed then?”

“It seems like it,” Lily said. He hadn’t asked about it the night before. No, Lily had just woken up to the sight of him leering over her with affront, rage, and sadistic glee written all over his tiny pale aristocratic features. That, of course, was when he ended up being stuck to the wall the whole night.

He snorted, pouted, then said, “She’s never given anyone that bed, well, not since the beginning. They’ve all learned their lesson about that. Or at least, I thought she had. She must really loathe you.”

This last was said with an oddly speculative gleam in his large pale eyes, as if the morning was helping him see at least part of Lily in a new light, or else from a different angle than yesterday when she’d had the gall to sit at his table.

“I think she believes we deserve each other,” Lily noted rather drily.

Lily may have convinced the matron to do her bidding, but she’d probably been subconsciously yanked around so many times by baby Wizard Lenin that her subconscious was now trying to get rid of Lily the easiest way possible. Which, in her head, was probably watching Lily and Tom Riddle eat each other alive behind closed doors.

“Deserve each other,” he said dully, giving her a flat unimpressed look, like he was trying decide if anyone could truly deserved to be in his presence.

“You don’t think so?” Lily asked, tilting her head to get a better look at him. He really was such a tiny ball of rage. Granted, as an adult she supposed both Wizard Lenin and Wizard Trotsky and perhaps even the original were all just bigger balls of rage that expressed themselves in different ways, but when he was compressed like this it was just so much more evident and almost odd looking.

Like along with his head and his too large eyes, his body had yet to grow into the all-consuming rage he held in his soul. It gave him this sort of wet angry kitten type look that just… Well, one did not use those words to describe Wizard Lenin.

“Who do you think you are?” he asked instead, to which Lily blinked, mind wandering down the
philosophic avenues of that question that he no doubt hadn’t really intended.

Who did she think she was? Who did the world think she was and who did she think she was beneath all of that? What did he see when he looked at her, even now, no especially now when he didn’t truly know her at all?

“I’m not sure,” she finally said, “I’ve… been having a more difficult time than you’d expect with that sort of question recently.”

That wasn’t the answer he expected or wanted if his unamused look was anything to go by or his flat, “What?”

“It’s not an easy question,” Lily mused, “Who are you? Think about it, for a moment. It’s not just a name, not just what you want to be or wish you were, but something far beneath all of that. Beneath everything you thought you were, everything people tell you that you are, even beneath all the memories shoved in your head that might not belong to you at all. And who do I think I am… I, I can’t say I know anymore, if I’m being honest. Perhaps I never really did.”

Perhaps, at the heart of things, no one did.

Lily, now staring past little Tom and at the wall behind his head, wasn’t sure that she liked being honest with herself anymore. It was… a stark and cold thing, honesty, far more blunt and cruel than she had ever given it credit for.

“You’re a little touched in the head, aren’t you?” Tom Riddle finally said, and there, there was something of Wizard Lenin in his expression, that uncontained dubious disbelief that widened his eyes and stretched his dark eyebrows up his forehead as if he could no longer contain them.

All she could do was grin in hopeless nostalgia and say, “Perhaps, but then, who do you think you are?”

The eyebrows were lowered, unamused once again, as he huffed, “I’m Tom Marvolo Riddle, and whatever I am, whatever you are, I’m worth ten-thousand times more than that.”

She just blinked, took in the certainty of him saying that, the way he almost glowed with confidence and said, “I wish I could answer that question so easily.”
He sneered, an apparent automatic response of his, and then sat back down on his bed, observing her with narrowed blue eyes. Finally, he said, “You’re like me though, not as good obviously but… I didn’t think there was anyone like me.”

“It’s a big world,” Lily said with a shrug and a wave of her hand, as if to dismiss his words, “And you live in a tiny orphanage.”

He didn’t seem to like the idea of that if his expression was anything to go by, and as each silent second passed by, he seemed to like that idea even less. Finally, he said slowly, “So, there are more out there after all.”

Lily opened her mouth then closed it, wondering if now was a good time that there were plenty here in London, but they were all just ignoring Tom and others like him until he was conveniently eleven and age appropriate for Hogwarts. Somehow, that didn’t seem like something Wizard Lenin, Wizard Trotsky, or especially this tiny prototype of them both, would take well.

So, she just said, motioning to herself, “Well, there’s only one me.”

He just looked at her, stared for a moment, then said, “I don’t like you. It’s a pity, the only other person I’ve met… And you’re just so presumptuous, I think I might hate you more just because of that! I really am going to have to teach you a lesson. Worse than I taught Billy Stubbs with his stupid bunny, or even Amy and Dennis!”

“Oh, dear lord,” Lily said, rubbing at her head and feeling a headache come on and all that exhaustion of the previous night coming back, “Please don’t, I’ve had a really long…”

This only seemed to spur him on further. He stood, hands balled at his sides, glass on the window rattling and the furniture shaking beneath his rage-filled magic, “You think you can just walk in here and sleep in my room and sit at my table just because you have… You have some, some small portion, of what I have! Like that makes you equal!”

“Look, Le… Tom, I’m really not…” she started but oh, he was in no mood to listen to her talk as he stalked closer, shadows rising behind him.

“No, you’re really not,” Tom hissed, voice oddly warped as his grin grew too wide and too jagged, “And I’ll prove to you that you’re really not! Show you that you’re only better than them because I let you be better than them!”
This was said with a point towards the window, towards the men outside in London’s east side beginning to go to work in the morning, worn and impoverished and rough around the edges. As if only Tom Riddle’s passing attention, his momentary interest, made her even slightly worthier than them.

Lily said nothing to this, just followed his finger to the view outside, to a London so very unfamiliar to her. Suddenly, she realized that she didn’t have to do this, she didn’t have to stand here and do this at all. Then, without another word, she stepped out of the room and into the hallway, conjuring a less scratchy sweater for herself out of nothing and stepping down the stairs even as Tom Riddle poked his head out after her.

“Where do you think you’re going?” he called after her, and at the question Lily felt the step beneath her tremble and buckle, to the point where she would normally then tumble down the rest of the stairs and probably break something if not for the fact that, with the slightest defying of gravity, she avoided that pitfall all together.

“Out,” Lily said without even looking back, “To London.”

“London?!” Tom darted out, apparently unconcerned that he was barely wearing anything at all, was still in his half undone 1930’s orphan pajamas, feet pale and bare as he practically sprinted after her, “You can’t go into London!”

“Can and will,” Lily said shortly as she opened the front door to the world outside, breathing in the air that was not quite clean yet was a different sort of smell than the London she herself was so familiar with.

“I won’t let you!” Tom said, darting out the door in front of her, “You and I have business!”

“People to be, places to see, you understand how it is,” Lily said shortly as she stepped around him, shoving him out of the way with an almost unthinking glitch and hurling him to the ground even as she made her way to the orphanage’s front iron gate, “I’m sure you’ll find some way to entertain yourself in the meantime. Look, why don’t you compare the size of your dick to one of the other orphans? I’m sure you’ll slaughter the competition and it will make you feel very superior.”

His face burned bright red as he staggered to his feet, then whipping out with his own force of will to slam her to the ground with him, unfortunately meeting her invisible impenetrable wall of magic.
He spluttered, tried again, face growing redder with the concentration even as he wheezed out, “You can’t… You can’t do that!”

Lily didn’t even bother to answer that she in fact could and did and that perhaps Tom Riddle needed to acknowledge that, when something you didn’t believe in refused to disappear, perhaps it was time to accept it as some sort of reality or another.

She set her hand on the handle to the gate, leaving a whisper of her presence in the orphanage, something no one would think to second guess or else even miss, and with that she pushed outwards and stepped outside into the great unknown, the prototype of her own world, and turned off towards the direction of the Leaky Cauldron with unhurried footsteps.

Only, looking behind her at the sound of soft feet pounding on the pavement, she caught sight of sprinting Tom Riddle catching up to her, still in his pajamas and without any shoes on, holding a tiny snake.

“Oh, sweet Jesus,” Lily said, increasing her pace and moving quickly down the sidewalk, past bleak storefronts and rundown apartment buildings, but Tom Riddle just ran that much faster until finally he was right next to her.

“Mrs. Cole’s going to flay you for this,” Tom Riddle the tiny antichrist said, with some mix between amusement and true annoyance, as if Mrs. Cole should have the chance to flay Lily until Tom himself did, “No, she’ll throw you right back out on the street. You only just got here yesterday and you’re already running away!”

“First, I’m not running away,” Lily said rather shortly, “I’ve learned that we’re all stuck on some metaphorical treadmill or another and that running faster just gets you nowhere at all that much quicker. You can’t run from yourself, not truly.”

His eyebrows lowered, softly holding onto the snake as it curled around his wrist as he asked rather derisively, “What’s a treadmill?”

“A metaphor,” Lily said shortly before continuing with her list, “Second, I was going to come back anyways, I just needed a bit of a break.”

“A break, from what?” he looked like he honestly had no idea, like he hadn’t been screaming at her a
day and a half, like he wasn’t everything she hoped he wouldn’t be and only showed the seeds of what he one day would be.

“And third,” Lily said instead of answering, “None of them are going to notice I’m even gone. You on the other hand, well, if I was you I’d scamper back home before anyone catches on.”

If he was smart he’d scamper back before anyone on the street paid him any mind either. However, he seemed entirely unconcerned by the possibility of being noticed in his outfit, or even of stepping on broken glass or what have you with vulnerable feet. Still, Lily wasn’t sure if he unconsciously realized it or not, but he probably was perfectly fine. Maybe it was pity, or maybe it was something instinctive, but around both of them Lily was deflecting attention as well as adding an extra unseen layer to the bottom of his feet.

He’d never thank her for it, she thought glumly, he’d probably never even notice.

“What do you mean?” he asked, but by the blank almost unwillingly awed look on his face he knew exactly what she meant, “You mean you made them think…”

“Something like that,” Lily interjected, “It’s more of an impression of my presence than anything else. Not any real illusion, if that’s what you’re getting at.”

He said nothing for a moment, just quietly looked at her, seeming to see nothing of the street, of the early morning London and all its inhabitants as they slowly made their way westward through the city. Finally, he quietly asked, voice small and still containing that soft note of awe, “You can do that?”

He then frowned, looking down at his hand and then the snake happily staring back up at him (well, for all that snakes could look happy). Suddenly, with a look of determination he was shoving it into her face.

“Oh god,” Lily said, the memory of the basilisk, of Morgan and the crucified snakes on the Gaunt shack, suddenly very present in her head as she made eye contact with it, “Snakes, why is it always snakes?”

“I can talk to him,” Tom said smugly, unnaturally proud of his innate ability to impersonate either a Disney princess or else the satanic version of Aqua Man, “Watch!”

He then tilted his head, looked down at the snake, concentrating and began to hiss unintelligible
sweet nothings towards it. No, that was a lie, it was… Almost intelligible. Like it was a language that
she had known intimately once, could know again, but was at the edge of her hearing, fuzzy as if she
was only half listening to fuzzy words from the Dursley’s television with the vacuum cleaner on.

Lily watched as it the snake wiggled its head in an unnatural sort of nodding motion, curled up his
wrist and flicked its tongue out a few times.

“That’s… super,” Lily said slowly, and at her unenthusiastic reply Tom seemed to realize just how
unimpressed she really was.

He turned, looked at her, face flushing a bright red and then, looking down at the snake again he said
something particularly menacing through a series of hisses. The snake then reared as if it was a
cobra, hissing at her, then lunged across the divide with its tiny snake body, aided in speed and
ferocity by Tom Riddle’s force of will.

Lily at a speed far too fast not to be some glitch in the universe stepped aside and, as she moved,
instinctively set the snake on fire. They both watched as it dropped to the pavement, curled and
writhed in agony, hissing a sound of dying despair, until finally it stopped moving at all.

For a moment, neither Lily nor Tom said anything at all, just stared at its charred remains now
littering the street.

Finally, in the tense and terrible silence, Lily said, “I’m sure it lived a good, if short, life.”

Tom just looked at her, for a moment his face blank, and then twisting into uncomprehending agony
as his face reddened further and tears gathered at the corner of his eyes, shaking his head as he
looked at her in disbelief, “Why would you do that?!”

And somehow, even now, in this inconsequential morning on this inconsequential street, she could
feel her heart ripping in half.

“I… I am a thing of destruction,” she said slowly, reaching out for his thin, small, so small shoulder
and squeezing it. Squeezed even as he kept staring at the departed snake, that brief flicker of life, and
anywhere but at her, “And… And there are consequences to all the actions we take, things we can’t
even begin to predict. And I… I really am not overly fond of snakes.”
Life was such a small thing, such a bright flicker in the long endless dark, there and then gone again, with only a memory left for mourning…

That wasn’t enough, she was sure, not nearly enough. So, instead, still holding his shoulder, she said, “I’ll take you back.”

With that and no other warning she teleported them back into the orphanage bedroom, leaving Tom to stumble forward as he tried to orient himself and his new surroundings, looking at her with wide and fearful eyes.

She just smiled, ever so slightly, certain that the twist of her lips wasn’t reaching her eyes as she promised, “I’ll be back later.”

With that she was gone again, teleporting with a loud crack straight past Diagon Alley instead into the heart of London’s magical black market, her own strange home away from home, that…

“The hell?”

She turned and looked, took three steps back, looked to her right, to her left, then looked again. Where Riddle Inc. normally was, with its intimidating warning sign and terrifying vampires lurking inside, was instead an empty run-down building, surrounded on all sides by the homeless, the hags, and the prostitutes.

She took a few more steps back, stared again as if that would put things in the right order, or somehow summon an exasperated Frank from the ether but it remained the same.

“Oh, oh wait, oh wait a minute…” Lily said to herself, and she thought back, years and years ago to when she had inexplicably been drawn into this whole business, when Wizard Lenin had said something about Lily Riddle appearing out of nowhere and when had that been?

Had it… Had that been 1937 too? Had she appeared in 1937, disappeared in 1938 and…

Lily fell to her knees tearing at her hair, looking at the sky as if to ask god himself, “Do I even have the illusion of free will anymore?!!”
God, predictably, didn’t answer, just left her with the clear summer skies, the twittering of birds, and a completely empty building that was supposed to be a drug lord’s shady lair. Suddenly Lily laughed, shaking her head and shuddering with laughter at the thought that none of this was funny but was somehow hilarious.

It was like, like everything she ever did, or everything that fell into place and everything that didn’t, was something that had already happened or was somehow already written. Like everything really was that inconsequential, as unimportant and inconsequential as Lily had always claimed it was.

Except, even when Lily thought she had accepted and internalized that truth, some part of her must have forgotten or refused to believe it.

Because if she had then she couldn’t laugh at it now, could she?

“Well, Lily Riddle,” Lily said with a smile as she picked herself up off the street, “I like it, it has a ring to it, a nice… A nice homage, I would have picked it anyway.”

Part of him and part of her, not really his style, not an anagram, but with a nice ring to its simplicity as well as its true nature. Because wouldn’t Lily Riddle become in and of herself quite the riddle? One solved only by looking backward?

“You hear that?” Lily asked, looking up at the clear sky with burning eyes, throwing out her hands wide as if to encompass everything she was and could be, “I would have picked it anyway!”

She would have found Frank anyway too, Frank and all the rest, fed the wizarding world muggle narcotics the likes of which they’d never seen or dreamt of before, built this and her terrifying and terrible reputation from scratch. Maybe it was scripted because it was natural, because there wasn’t a reason that she wouldn’t, flung in the past without reason find them and find what Wizard Lenin had once been at the same time.

Why in the world would she do anything else?

Wasn’t it her destiny, her glorious purpose, to at once both destroy the wizarding world and save it?

With that she turned, walking away from a memory of a place that did not exist, through Knockturn Alley and into the brighter and friendlier Diagon Alley. There she would walk the streets, noting
how it really hadn’t managed to change at all in over fifty years, and would sit outside the marble steps of Gringotts and think about money and the flow of money and how she bet her ass they didn’t check for counterfeit muggle money.

And if not that, then well, there was always a philosopher’s stone, out of time and out of place, resting somewhere inside of her bottomless pocket.

“This will be fun,” Lily said to the building and oblivious wizards and witches who passed by her without a thought in the world, wearing the same robes and same hats they’d be sporting more than half a century later, “I’m tired of being the absurd heroine, I think, or even the anti-hero. It’s hard work, endless pointless hard work, and no one will ever thank you for it. Or, if they do, then it’s always for the entirely wrong reasons. I can play the dark lord for a turn, can’t I?”

Plus, Lily suspected that she’d be more than halfway decent at it, enough to even, more than fifty years from now, impress the ever-unimpressible Wizard Lenin. And that, she thought with a strange smile, a lighter smile than she’d had in ages, was maybe more than enough.

Perhaps it was best, she thought, that he didn’t know she’d picked up so much of that from him.

In the end it was well into the afternoon when she returned, the children all returned from school lessons and in the orphanage’s small back yard. Beneath a small tree, in the shade, she appeared in front of Tom Riddle.

Even now he glared out at the other children, separated from them as if cut off by some invisible and impenetrable bubble, only Lily daring to appear in front of him. At the large crack of her arrival he didn’t even turn to look at her, just drew his knees closer to his chest and looked past her, past her and into his small and familiar world.

His own little fiefdom, she thought.

Finally, looking down at him, at how it was still so strange to see him both smaller and younger than her, to acknowledge that he had once been this and had somehow grown and transformed into what she would later know, she said, “I’m sorry.”

He said nothing.
With a sigh Lily moved next to him, sat down beside him so that her back was also resting against the tree, so that she too could stare out at the other children. They were now also looking at her with abject terror, fear for her and of her, that she could sit so close to him.

Absently, Lily wondered just what he’d done to them.

“It’s a small world you live in, Tom,” Lily finally said, trying to think of what to say, what Uncle Death might say if it was her except that Tom would never be her at all. Death, she thought to herself, how long had it been since she’d seen him? Had he thought of her or did he look at her the way she couldn’t help but look at Tom Riddle?

She wanted to see him now, she suddenly thought, she wanted to sit and drink tea and talk and ask why. Why had any of this happened? Why did she ruin so many things in her life without even meaning to? And what would he say, what could he say, to Tom Riddle in her place? Except, except just as Tom Riddle wasn’t her she couldn’t really be Uncle Death.

No, she could only say what she thought he might need to hear, to move him past this small moment and towards something far greater if more terrifying for it, “That’s not a bad thing, not a bad or good thing, but it is something you should think about. More, I think it’s something you’ve allowed yourself to grow content with.”

Finally, he looked over at her, stark disbelief written on his face, even while Lily tilted her head towards him with a smile and said, “It’s nice, isn’t it, to be a big fish in a small pond?”

“I’m not…”

“But it is a small pond,” Lily interjected before he could finish, “And you’ll never really know one way or another, where you land in the world, until you leave it.”

He said nothing, buried his face further into his knees, looked as if he was contemplating setting the grass beneath her feet on fire. However, no one said Tom Riddle, even a young angry Tom Riddle, couldn’t learn from his mistakes.

So, he just sat, staring ahead not saying a word, as if looking away from her would be enough to make her disappear.
Still, she thought as she rested her head against the tree, there was something oddly nice about it. Something that almost reminded her of those early days before Hogwarts, when she had been in her own small suburban pond, and she and Wizard Lenin had sat together and watched the summer clouds roll by while he dreamed of worlds so much larger to conquer…

And when he was quiet, when he was staring out into the horizon with that dark and determined look in his eyes, Lily could almost imagine that nothing had changed at all.

Almost.
“Hey, Prince of Darkness,” Lily said as she sat across from one Tom Riddle at the table for breakfast, not just any table, but his table that she had been a tart for daring to defile it with her presence. Tom Riddle didn’t look up, just moodily pushed around his porridge with a dull metal spoon.

This was unsurprising, he’d been like this since the day before.

Ever since Lily had gotten back from Diagon Alley it was as if the fire of his soul had burned out. He’d just sat there without a word, staring out at the children, at walls, at the ceiling after they’d gone to sleep, and now at his porridge with his dull and glazed eyes.

Even now he seemed to have no intention of eating, just stirring the food idly clockwise, forming a whirlpool of hot water, oats, and the small sprinkling of raisins the orphanage could afford.

“So, Tom,” Lily repeated, a little more forcefully, knocking her hand on the table right in front of his bowl.

Still nothing, only that haunted, empty, expression that echoed something of Wizard Lenin’s existential despair and Wizard Trotsky’s wretched agony. The fear, Lily supposed, of being inconsequential, meaningless, and so terribly alone.

She wondered if, more than death, more than oblivion, that hadn’t been what every iteration of Tom Riddle had truly feared.

And he looked so small, sitting there, so much smaller than she could have ever imagined.
Lily sighed, looked down at her own porridge glumly, not particularly inclined to eat it either. Now, Lily had never been exposed to particularly great meals in her youth. The Dursleys had given her scraps if anything at all, and a lot of that had been her cooked bacon or sandwiches. She supposed that during her tenure as Lily Riddle she’d suddenly had the funds and the means to go get her own food (which she frequently did) and certainly at Hogwarts she’d had all the food she ever wanted, but none of that made her some sort of gourmet snob.

None the less, she really couldn’t handle this 1930’s orphan food, even three days in she felt like she and it were in a battle of wills and she was losing desperately.

That, or maybe it was the fact that Lily, due to her god like abilities, had something of a choice in the matter.

With a larger sigh she summoned herself a pot of tea as well as a china cup to accompany it and a slice of good old treacle tart (one of the few good things about Hogwarts was the near endless supply of treacle tart). She looked up to see Tom glaring at her and the tea, eyes suddenly burning with the visceral and unadulterated hatred that had been missing for over twelve hours.

Numbly, Lily summoned a second cup and poured it for him as well, but he didn’t touch it. Instead, he just kept staring, eyes boring into hers with a force that was unnatural on his childish features where it had been so at home on his grown adult face.

She supposed, staring back at him, that they could be having one of those intense moments right now where he’d look into her eyes and she into his and their souls would fight to the death on some barren plane where lightning struck. However, maybe it was just Lily, but the whole thing felt a little awkward as they were currently seated in an orphanage and sharing cups of tea. And he was tinier than her, still looking more like a wet angry kitten than anything really intimidating yet. Yes, that last bit was probably the real reason Lily wasn’t quite feeling it.

Clearing her throat and sipping from her tea, a hearty and very English earl gray, she decided that she might as well throw him a bone already and announced, “I thought I should tell you that I’m going into London again today. You can come along, you know, if you want this time.”

It felt a little forced, maybe a lot forced, but there was something about the hours of silence that had just grated on her until she’d felt that she had no choice. That and, well, she didn’t really know, but she was determined in her heart of hearts to look for something of Wizard Lenin inside him. Plus, in the end, she and Wizard Lenin had never really gotten a chance to walk side by side in London or Diagon Alley.
He said nothing, his lips curling downwards into a grimace, and the shadows beneath him seemed to grow darker and writhe in place.

Lily, sensing the imminent danger or at least the likelihood of her shoes to be set on fire, amended her statement, “Only if you want to, you don’t have to come if you don’t…”

Every window in the room shattered. There was no rattling, no build up, just a sudden, startling, shattering and then glass falling all over the floor and the screaming terrified children.

“Jesus Christ,” Lily muttered under her breath, waving the glass back into its original position with the slightest of glitches, and then taking another sip of tea declared, “Alright, then do come, dammit, I don’t give a shit!”

And at this point she really didn’t anymore, she was starting to reach the levels of frustrated exasperation that had the Slytherin’s wands auctioned off to the whole school. He was just lucky that he was proto-Lenin or else she would have kicked the shit out of him ten times over. Clearly, tiny Wizard Lenin was not appreciating Lily’s unusual displays of saint like patience and generosity.

Tom Riddle’s fingers shook, his whole body trembled with rage, and finally, for the first time in half a day she heard his voice as he hissed out, “Why would you fix it?”

“Sorry?” Lily asked, losing track of the conversation entirely (although she was going to go ahead and blame angry Tom Riddle for this particular tangent). This, apparently, was the entirely wrong thing to say.

He leaned forward, eyes burning in a way that was almost familiar yet not quite, and he repeated himself, “Why would you fix the windows?”

Lily glanced back towards the once again perfectly whole windows, looking like they’d never been broken in the first place, as well as the children staring in abject terror at their table and its two inhabitants, “Well, why wouldn’t I fix the windows?”

That, judging by the sheer rage coming off him in almost visible waves, was also the wrong thing to say.

Lily nodded her head slowly, not entirely sure what it was she wanted to do or say here, only that
something had to be done. Except there was the nagging problem that everything she did do or say somehow just made him ten times upset (though at least he was talking again).

Deciding there was nothing for it Lily brought them back to wear they started, absently shattered every single window, watching as the children once again screamed and covered their heads to avoid the shards of glass sprinkling down like deadly snowflakes, “Alright, there we go, I have now un-fixed the windows.”

“I didn’t want you to break them!” he hissed, fingers clawing against the wood of the table as he leaned forward, close enough that she could feel his breath against her face. It would all have been, again, very intimidating, if he wasn’t currently the level of adorable that belonged on family sitcoms where he starred as the sassy precocious youngest child who kept all of the adults in their place.

“Well then what do you want?!” Lily said, throwing her hands into the air, more than past her limit when she still had the full bloody day ahead of her, “Because I am tired, Tom, I am tired of your melodramatic bullshit and I just can’t keep playing this ridiculous guessing…”

“I want you to leave!” Tom shouted, and at that, at his apparent complete disregard for everyone watching this shit show (and their eyes were certainly glued to this shitshow as if they were witnessing the red sea part), Lily placed the good old “these aren’t the droids you’re looking for” wards around them and watched as everyone turned back to their own meals even as Tom screamed, “I want you to leave and die and no one to remember you! I want you to have never been born in the first place!”

He breathed heavily, panting and staring her in the eyes, his own at once so familiar and foreign, daring her to say something to this. Lily though, she just stared, and she felt…

So empty, so cold, and so tired. Finally, she said, “I can’t erase my own existence.”

It was almost an admission, a confession, as if this was something she should have indeed tried at some point but simply failed to accomplish. That the way she jarred with reality, caught in its cogs and wheels, perhaps meant that she should never have been there in the first place. Even if it was never real and had never tried to be real, she had always existed outside of it, perhaps she should have respected that.

She looked down into her tea, stared at her own reflection, at the vast wastelands contained in her rippling eyes, and repeated, “I’ll be going into London again… Not just London, but the London where people like you live.”
That got his attention, the anger receded, his eyes growing large and softening in the process, suddenly infused with a great overwhelming hope that had never been present in Wizard Lenin, “People like me?”

“Wizards,” Lily said, the word dull and tasteless, like a stone on her tongue, disappointment and resignation in every syllable, “Witches, people with magic.”

He paused at that, that blank look dimming, anger beginning to brew there like a storm out on the horizon that had yet to be blown completely overhead, “There are… others in London?”

Well, it seemed he had a hint then, or a nagging suspicion in the back of his head. That if there were others, as close as London, if Lily was now in his orphanage, then why had he been left here? Lily supposed she could tell him, but he wouldn’t appreciate it from her, and he’d figure it out soon enough.

That and they’d probably broken enough windows for one morning.

He then, with an open mouth, considered her again and narrowed his eyes in suspicion, “You said ‘people like you’, don’t you mean ‘people like us’?”

Lily just stared at him, looking at the way that for all his intensity he did belong in this world, more than she ever would even if she wore the same uniform. He wasn’t… entirely out of place here, no matter how much he wished he could be. Finally, she said, “There are no people like me.”

He scoffed at that, appearing to misread it for arrogance, instead of the desperately lonely and terrible truth that it was. The same sort of truth that formed the scales of an ouroboros or the spotlight of destiny.

To be unique in all the world… It was a truly terrible thing.

With a magnanimous sigh he mulled it over then nodded his head as if this was all suddenly acceptable, mood swinging to one direction and then the other almost as impressively quickly as Wizard Trotsky’s so often did, “I suppose I can come along then.”
No, that wasn’t quite right, the anger still lurked beneath. This was like Hermione Granger, after Christmas 1991, looking at Lily and seeing the tool that needed to be used for now to restore her parents’ memories. Lily was Tom Riddle’s guide and transportation to get him from Wools to Diagon Alley, she was a tool of convenience, and at the nearest opportunity she’d be discarded without a second’s thought.

Yet, she wondered, wasn’t that what friendship was?

“Alright,” Lily said, standing up and vanishing the tea and all of its evidence with a wave of her hand, even as Tom was in mid-sip, “I suppose there’s no time like the present.”

“I wasn’t done yet,” Tom said with yet another glare, though this one more annoyed and affronted than truly spiteful. If he really was that upset, Lily thought, he could have drank the damn thing when it was still hot instead of throwing his little fit.

“Yes, well, I have business to attend to,” Lily said as she began waltzing out of the room like she didn’t have a care in the world, willing her orphan’s uniform back into more familiar clothing of the second-hand variety before Hogwarts, bright oversized castoff sweater, jean shorts, and faded white tennis shoes.

“Business?” Tom asked, hurrying after her as she stepped out into the orphanage’s front yard and sparing her clothing an even more annoyed and perplexed glance as he crossed his arms, “What kind of business could someone like you have with people like me?”

Like wizards and witches, by even being comparable to Tom, were far beyond lowly Lily. The irony, oh lord, she didn’t know if she wanted to laugh or cry.

“It isn’t with people like you, per se,” Lily said with a shrug, then, seeing Tom Riddle’s unwavering look, like he could peel the answers out of her lips if he stared hard enough, she added, “I’ve got an interview with a vampire.”

Well, she would, she should. If she really started this Lily Riddle business up from scratch and then turned a good chunk of the wizarding population into drug addicts, then the first order of business was finding Frank. More, if this was really kismet or what have you, fate, then finding him and convincing him to become her secretary was probably something doable in a morning.

Then tomorrow she’d set up an account with the goblins and flood them with more money than they
could handle, she’d buy that run-down building in Knockturn Alley, she’d decorate the place and she’d… Well, she’d figure out that part later.

It couldn’t be that hard, could it? It all seemed to come together very nicely by 1991…

“An interview,” he said dully, and there was the spark of Wizard Lenin hiding within him, “An interview with a vampire?”

Lily barked out a laugh, unable to contain it even as she held the gate open for Tom, who regally walked through as if he was a prince and herself his vassal or else serf. Though, she supposed there was some truth to that, she was more than content to be Wizard Lenin’s knight with himself as the revolutionary king. It was the role she had always taken on his chess board.

Still, she said, shoving her hands into her pockets as they took a right and started the long path towards The Leaky Cauldron, “Trust me, it’ll be much more enjoyable than an interview with a wizard.”

At seeing his growing mulish expression Lily decided, that perhaps, it’d be best to break this to him gently rather than throw him to the wolves and wish him the best, “You know, they’re… a very disappointing people.”

“Like you?” he asked, clearly meaning for it to be a very biting insult, but Lily just shook her head.

“No, nothing like me, that’s the trouble they’re… I suppose you’ll like them, or some byproducts of their existence at any rate,” Wizard Lenin certainly at least had the appearance of a die-hard fan of Hogwarts which was maybe the most wizardly thing Lily had ever encountered, “But as far as they go I’m not so sure. Essentially, they’re people with magic.”

“You said that already,” he huffed, rolling his eyes upward like he just couldn’t handle her stupidity, even as he kept careful track of where they were going, likely so that he could find his way there without her.

“No, I mean that they’re just people but with magic,” Lily said, emphasizing the word people, trying to force him to see the implication that Wizard Lenin had so bitterly understood. That they were no different than the muggles, the mudbloods, or anyone else, they just had slightly more power than the rest of them and were thus three times as disappointing.
That, more than anything else, Lily believed was what had driven him to destroy them.

“Why should I trust a word you say about it?” he asked, clearly having made up his mind to listen to nothing Lily had to say about anything, if only out of spite. Lily supposed that pointing out that she was older, that she knew these people better than he did, would mean nothing.

So instead she just sighed, wondering if she should bring up Hogwarts or something else Wizard Lenin would have liked, but instead letting the words die on her tongue. They walked in a stiff and awkward silence, separated from each other as far as they could get on the sidewalk with strangers constantly walking between the pair of them.

The longer it went the more Lily’s mind drifted over where she’d rather be and what she’d rather be doing and again wondering why she was doing this at all. It’d seemed so... necessary, inside Wizard Lenin’s head, and then again out in the real world. Like a valiant sacrifice that Wizard Lenin would never understand or appreciate but had to be done none the less.

Now though, she still felt... Anticlimactic, like it didn’t really mean anything, like she wasn’t really wanted or needed here anymore than she was at Hogwarts. Like the world kept trying to shove her out of its door.

Finally, they reached The Leaky Cauldron, Tom staring at its painted sign of the overflowing cauldron rather dumbly. His expression morphed into something more stunned as they stepped inside, where, as was usual, the place was filled with wizards and witches of all shapes and sizes gladly acknowledging that it was five o’clock somewhere in their bathrobes and pointed hats. His eyes though, were caught on the wands and bright spots of light, of glasses filling themselves, paintings dancing, and all those small bits of magic that made a wizard.

Whispering down towards Tom, Lily advised, “Don't stare.”

He shook himself, seemed to realize he was gawking and that the truly confident never gawked, and he schooled his features.

This didn’t help them staring at Lily or Tom, though, strangely enough, more Tom than Lily. Lily might not fit the style of the times at the moment, wizard or muggle, but she was at this point so unfashionable and oddly dressed that she was almost right around to dressing like a wizard again. All she needed was some ridiculous hat and she wouldn’t stick out too much.
Tom, on the other hand, in his drab gray Wools’ uniform looked hopelessly lost as he instinctively reached out a hand towards hers as she pulled him along through the pub. Even without the word yet, even with only side-eyed sneering glances towards their clothing and Tom’s wide-eyed look, mudblood was undoubtedly ringing in Tom’s ears.

Lily quickly pulled them towards the back wall of the alley, then kept staring. She’d actually never done this part before. She’d seen it once, with Snape all those years ago, but otherwise she tended to just teleport directly in. Either to whatever shop she was going to or else Riddle Inc. down in Knockturn. She would have now too except…

Well, if Tom wanted a way to get here without her then she supposed it would be good of her to give it to him. Except, she thought dully, she couldn’t because if she just blasted through this thing like she always did then he wouldn’t really have a way to replicate it. So, they might as well have teleported.

“Did you really just bring me all the way here for a wall?” his voice interrupted his thoughts. It was a little strained, more strained than she would have expected, and glancing over at him she could see an odd sliver of nervousness inside of him.

He kept glancing back at the pub, craning his neck to look inside the window, then looking away again before anyone could catch him staring.

Lily, personally, had been so done with wizards for so long that she could barely comprehend his taking them in any way seriously.

“Relax,” Lily said, before sighing and deciding there was nothing for it, Tom would just have to figure it out himself or else have her take him every time, “I was just trying to remember something.”

She then tapped on the wall, spreading restless energy out from her fingertips, and watched as the bricks rearranged themselves beneath Tom’s stunned gaze to show the overcrowded Diagon Alley filled with every family in wizarding Britain desperately getting their shopping done before the start of term.

“Behold,” Lily said, trying not to sound dull and failing slightly, “Diagon Alley in all it’s glory. Here you’ll find…”

She trailed off, watched somewhat stunned as Tom immediately sprinted away from her and into the
large crowds, quickly disappearing inside and leaving hero own explanation hanging. Well, Lily thought to herself blinking, that just happened.

She somehow felt like the uncool parent and or uncle also starring in the same family sitcom as adorably sassy Tom who was always trying and failing to reconnect with the youth today. Although, at only twelve, Lily felt she was perhaps a tad bit too young for the role and not nearly as outdated enough. If anything, Lily was decades ahead of the times.

Still, none of this changed the fact that, staring off into the crowd, he was already lost among the far more colorful robes and hordes of schoolchildren.

“Well,” Lily said to herself, shoving her hands into her pockets and considering the situation, “I guess I’ll just… find him later then?”

It was probably for the best, she guessed, as it’d be a little awkward to recruit Frank with tiny Wizard Lenin hanging around at the same time asking questions, shattering windows, or lighting things on fire.

Plus, thinking back, he’d been very adamant about Lily not having been Lily Riddle, and therefore his childhood friend having not been Lily Riddle, and therefore he probably hadn’t been hanging around for this prat.

Which, well, was obvious since he was no longer here.

“Paradoxes are hard,” Lily summarized to herself with a sigh, and then without further ado, glitched her hair into the familiar noxious shade of cheap store-bought black hair dye and meandered her way through Diagon Alley with her internal compass pointed in a Frank direction.

“Now, if I was a vampire secretary,” Lily asked herself as she wandered, “Where would I be?”

The trouble was she didn’t really know, she hadn’t asked and Frank hadn’t volunteered. As far as she knew he’d just always been there, since the very beginning, which in this case turned out to be 1937. Before then he’d been Hungarian or something from the Eastern Bloc but that had all seemed like ancient history…

Lily stopped dead in her tracks, backed up a few steps, then looked to her left, then looked again
doing a double-take. It… It was definitely Frank, it had to be him, it was his face and everything but…

His hair was grown out and sticking out all over the place almost like Death’s, his cheeks sunken and hollow, his crimson eyes not glowing but instead glazed and muddied, and he leaned against the wall as if he could barely stand upright. Accompanying all of this was tattered and stained borrowed wizarding robes and the white stick of a blood pop hanging out of his mouth.

He stared out at the crowds of children and shoppers dully, a resigned apathy within them as if he couldn’t even bring himself to care anymore, the sort of glazed disinterest that one would expect, from, well, a bitter crack head.

Frank, glorified secretary never caught out of a well-pressed suit, hair always in place, and always with a notebook in hand, who barely even looked anything like what a vampire was supposed to, was a two foot fully inside the gutter crack head.

It was almost like… Well, not like seeing what Wizard Lenin had been when he was little, but the equivalent of if she’d suddenly stumbled upon Wizard Lenin as a crack head, Crack Lenin or something. Except even weirder.

She opened her mouth, closed it, suddenly not sure what to say.

She didn’t know what she had been expecting, but thinking back, it was almost like she’d just been expecting him to be, well, Frank already. She’d just walk up and say, “Frank, you’re my secretary now, hold my beer while I go invade Albania!” and he’d politely nod and say, “Yes, of course, and how high would you like me to jump today, boss?”

And it would all be that easy.

The idea of a Frank before Frank, a pre-Frank, proto-Frank, threw her entirely off balance.

She cleared her throat, stepped forward dramatically until she was standing directly under him. Unfortunately, this did not draw his attention, his eyes were still trained hopelessly on the horizon like he was desperately searching for the meteor due any day now that would wipe him off the face of the planet.
Finally, perhaps a bit loudly and with a bit more gravitas than was necessary for the situation, Lily addressed him, “Yo, tall, dark, and shady.”

Well, no, gravitas was not the right word. Her tone was one of gravitas but her words were, well, the ones that just happened to fall out of her mouth.

Finally, he glanced down at her, red eyes blinking into awareness as the twelve-year-old brunette registered. However, even with Lily Riddle in his pupils he kept blinking as if to clear away the blood pop induced hallucinations. He ended up giving her one of those weird vampire-not-quite-human-bird-like tilts of the head, the one he did when he just couldn’t parse anymore and was trying and failing to put everything together.

He glanced around, eyes looking over Lily’s shoulder, then to her right, to her left, then finally over his own shoulder before he looked back appearing more confused than ever as he was the only one remotely tall, dark, and appropriately shady in appearance, “Yes, are you lost?”

Wasn’t that the question of the century?

“No, well, I mean in the fourth dimension, yeah,” Lily rambled, not quite sure if she had ever gotten into this whole time travel nonsense with Frank or if she even wanted to. Probably not, that wasn’t a need to know thing for Frank. Still, on seeing his rather dazed look she added, “But the third is a cake walk. Please, I am perfectly capable of handling Diagon Alley.”

Then, getting more into her role, she pointed a pale dramatic finger towards him and asked, “The question is, sir, are you perfectly capable of handling Diagon Alley?”

He hesitated, seemed to fight an instinct to glance around and see if anyone else was watching what he was watching, and finally he said with no small amount of disbelief written on his pale face, “Yes, I believe I am.”

Lily, looking at his outfit, his clearly starved features, and the fact that he was sucking on the blood pop like it was made of ambrosia was very clearly not capable of handling Diagon Alley at the moment and they both knew it. Lily certainly knew it, even if Frank happened to be in anemic denial.

With that, Lily settled into her groove with the easy elevator pitch that would win her Frank’s undying vampire and secretarial loyalties, “I notice, Mr. Vampire, that you appear to be without a
castle and have substituted it with a rather dingy looking alleyway on the side of the wizards’ most famous and useless shopping district in London.”

She glanced meaningfully then towards the blood pop still sticking in his mouth (knowing full well that Frank found them both disgusting and grossly insulting and refused to even look at them), “I also notice that you’re living on the vampire equivalent diet of instant ramen. Now, I’m no one to judge anyone’s life choices, but I can tell by that really glum look in your eyes that you aren’t pleased with the present situation. Unless, you are pleased?”

Frank said nothing, just kept staring with an expression that was now fish-like, eyes too large and mouth slightly gaping as he just blinked at her over and over. Lily decided she would take that for a no, that Frank was not pleased with his current crack head hobo state of affairs.

“Excellent,” Lily said as she loudly clapped her hands together, “Now, you could continue your homeless lurking state that you seem to have gotten yourself stuck into or you could do something completely awesome instead.”

Lily dramatically straightened, made herself as tall as her twelve-year-old body was willing to go, and attempted to look very authoritative and intimidating as she explained, “You see, I recently… moved here, I guess, and I realize that I have absolutely no money whatsoever and have become accustomed to being richer than God. This is not a state of affairs I would like to continue.”

Lily then paced in front of him, while he just kept standing stock still in the morning shadows, watching as her hands flew about in rapid and inspiring gestures. The kind of hand gestures, that, frankly, aligned with a dramatic speech would inspire masses everywhere into rebellion for justice, liberty, or in Lily’s case economic gain through narcotics and the stability of the timeline.

“The way I see it, there’s a huge gap in the market here that’s just begging to be taken care of,” she then motioned magnanimously to her own glorious self as she added, “Now, normally, I’d do this all by myself, but the trouble is that I also expect to take ridiculously long vacations every once in a while for no apparent reason. Also, secretarial work is for the weak. So, with that in mind, I’m going to need some hired help.”

She then gestured to Frank, in turn, in all his current crack head glory as she said, “You look appropriately shady, not busy, and totally bored enough to help me, help you, help… people.”

He looked stunned, like she’d just gone and hit him over the head with a steel pipe or else bashed said hair into a chair. There was then a truly awkward pause as the sales pitch lingered like a lead zeppelin in the air, going absolutely nowhere fast.
Perhaps the sales pitch, Lily suddenly thought, wasn’t good enough.

Chewing on her bottom lip Lily tried to think, then, pulled out a notebook from under her sweater and quickly scribbled out a recruitment flyer. She listed out her current address at Wool’s (good enough probably for an owl to find), a list of benefits, and a picture of herself giving a very large thumbs up to endorse this once in a lifetime deal that Frank absolutely must take.

You know, or else the universe might explode.

She shoved the flyer into his startled face, “But wait, there’s more! I offer complete health benefits, munchies that aren’t manufactured in a candy shop, excitement, dividends, and lots of terrified peasants. So, tell me, what do you say?”

He numbly grabbed onto the flyer, barely holding it between his pale spindly fingers, and with that same dazed expression crushed her soul into tiny pieces, “I’ll have to think about it.”

Think about it? He had to think about it? Suddenly Lily felt as if she was the one who had had her head bashed in by Quirrell again. He wasn’t supposed to think about it, Frank did it, was supposed to do it.

The awkward silence was suddenly not simply awkward but oppressive.

“Goddammit!”

Frank took a step back as he watched Lily’s latest bout of existential rage. Why did she have to put up with this? If she was supposed to start this drug thing wasn’t it supposed to be easy?! Wasn’t Tom Riddle supposed to be half-way to Wizard Lenin or even Wizard Trotsky already?

What was the point of a script, of fate, of a lack of free will, if it was still bloody difficult?

She shoved her hands into her pockets, trying to hold onto her anger and shove it deep inside herself, inside of a little box she would never open. She shuffled away from the dazed and homeless Frank, back onto the main street and into the inner sanctum of Diagon Alley. She didn’t even wait to see if Frank had gone and thrown the flyer away or was still standing there and staring at her like she was
some kind of lunatic. Instead she just muttered to herself under her breath, “If I didn’t have to be richer than Malfoy, then I swear I wouldn’t even bother…”

She sighed, stopping in front of Gringotts and glancing up at the face of the clock tower. All of that had taken a disappointingly short amount of time. More, looking around at the crowds again, Tom Riddle was nowhere in sight.

She probably should do something, but she didn’t want to go back to the orphanage, and after proto-Frank she really didn’t want to deal with proto-Tom. She also didn’t want to move forward with Lily Riddle, with any of the money or the buying or the setting up, if Frank wasn’t going to be involved.

Mostly though, she thought to herself rather glumly, she just had absolutely no idea what she’s doing.

With that, she walked to the marble steps of Gringotts, then stared out to face the crowd, sitting in the same spot she had in the summer of 1991 when Snape had brought her to Diagon Alley then abandoned her for hours. Strange, that had felt so frustrating at the time, but she’d…

It’d been easier, sitting on those steps then, if only because there’d been a yellow brick road for her to follow.

Such nicely paved and tended yellow brick roads were gone now and so too were the emerald cities on the horizon.

Again, as with the day before, there was a sudden and overwhelming longing to talk to Uncle Death. To sit there again in the train station with him, even without Wizard Lenin and just…

Looking out at the crowds, filled with families and cheerful eager children with textbooks in hand, Lily was suddenly struck by how alone she truly was. The most alone she’d ever been since she was five years old and had never heard of a train station called purgatory.

Now, she decided, was as good a time to meet her Death as ever.

Lily stood, brushed off her shorts and deflected attention from herself, then with confidence and glitches besides, bounded her way up to the Gringotts roof. There she looked down on Diagon Alley, Knockturn, then across the horizon to the greater London and Saint Paul’s cathedral in the
Looking down it was not so far, but, it would have to be far enough. Lily walked to the edge, balanced there on her toes, then with her arms spread wide and facing the sun still arcing over the sky from the east, she pitched forward as if to fly.

She didn’t fly though, no, Lily fell, tipped forward until she was falling headfirst to the pavement below without anyone below her the wiser. Unremembered, unmourned, if only for this single instant, just as Tom Riddle had wanted.

The air in the train station, as always, was clear and bright and tasted of the ethereal and unearthly. Staring into it, the way the light fell in soft curtains, and at the train still glinting and waiting as it always would wait, Lily suddenly felt tears growing at the corners of her eyes. She had no idea why, only that they did and the more she stared the more she couldn’t seem to stop them.

“Lily!”

Lily was turned then, away from the train and the tracks and into the dark, warm, and tight embrace of Death as he threw her arms around her. She tried to smile, tried to think of when she last saw him, and remembered that it would have been with the basilisk.

She had told him, in despair, that she had failed.

She had faced the monster, played her role of the knight, and had fallen and left the village to be destroyed in her apathy and despair.

“Sorry,” Lily finally said after she cleared her throat, “I… had to take the long way around.”

Death moved back, crouched down so that he was on eye level with her, and framed her face with pale warm hands as he searched for something in her. Finally, he noted, with a strange mourning note in his voice, “You look so much older.”

“Still twelve,” Lily said with a wry smile that understood every word he said.
“And the diary?” he asked, with that cool and clear confidence that he had with so many of the mysterious objects that found their way into Lily’s life.

“Trotsky is…” she thought back, remembered Wizard Trotsky and the fire, standing and reaching out for her in desperation as he pleaded with her not to leave him behind beaten and broken by the other half of his soul.

“I don’t know,” Lily finally said, “I suppose it doesn’t matter.”

He looked like he was torn between smiling harder or else crying himself even as he wiped at Lily’s eyes, “Trotsky? Why Trotsky?”

“Because he’s the one that didn’t win,” Lily said, and even for all he had done to her, for the great mockery he’d made of her in the guise of Morgan Gaunt, the playing with her memories even before then, and the basilisk itself, there was something in her that pitied him and thought that this was more than true.

At his core, in the very soul of who he was, Wizard Trotsky was the one that could never win. After all, he was the part Wizard Lenin and Voldemort had chosen to amputate from themselves. He was everything, that once, Tom Riddle had not wanted to be.

He pulled her into another bone crushing hug then, perhaps reading something more to Lily’s words than Lily herself did, and he said, “I am so sorry, Lily, that I… That I never tell you and that I’m never there.”

Lily frowned somewhat, patting his back, and asked, “Why would you?”

That had never seemed to be an option, from the very beginning, but pulling back he looked afraid, guilty, and something more sorrowful that threatened to tear him in half and give him the illusion of humanity again.

“That you have to ask me that question, Lily,” he said slowly, “Is reason enough why I…”

He trailed off, tore his eyes away from hers and looked about at the station, settling on the train, and with nostalgia settling into the forests of his irises he said, “Our worlds, Lily, so often do not line up. With your Lenin, the stone, even the diary that my own experiences seem so… Superfluous in comparison. Yet sometimes they do, and every time I hold my tongue I end up regretting it.”
“What would you have said?”

Death shook his head, “I don’t know, that he was a diary, that perhaps Ginny had it, that…”

Lily, grimly, interjected, moving to sit over on the pale white bench with a sigh, “It wouldn’t have helped then. I already knew all of that, at one point or another, it didn’t mean anything.”

She opened her mouth, wanted to spill out about Tequila, about Wizard Trotsky and his surreal kingdom inside a notebook, about Wizard Lenin’s leaving Hogwarts and entering the word once again, about Morgan Gaunt and her short existence, about the time travel and the ouroboros, about Wizard Lenin’s friend, fate, everything and more, but the words wouldn’t come. They seemed stuck in her throat, lodged there, and all that was left of them was a sticky white haze without any words at all.

There were simply too many of them to count let alone speak.

“I… I wanted to lose, I think,” she paused then, swallowed, then said with a colder darker confidence, “No, I know I did. I suppose it could continue forever, but I don’t want it to. I don’t want to go to Hogwarts, I don’t want to find philosopher’s stones or slay monsters in basements, and yet it just keeps on going and every time I think it’s done there’s some new script handed towards me.”

Then it was like the words couldn’t stop, even as Death sat beside her, looking down at her with eyes that glittered like distant stars.

“Except even when it’s a script it’s like there’s chunks missing. There’s never any dialogue, never any actions, just snippets of words here and there and vague descriptions of actions and outcomes. So, I try and play a part that’s both written and not written at the same time, stumbling over lines, and wondering if I’m even on the right path anymore. And I just wonder… Why does everything happen and what am I even going to do now?”

Anything and everything, like he’d once told her, just didn’t seem to cut it anymore. Silence hung in the air, uninterrupted by any earthly noise, only by Lily’s shuddering breathing and the light rustling of her and Death’s clothing.

Finally, Death said, “I believe that’s an essential part of life.”
She looked up, blinking, eyebrow furrowing as she tried to grasp at what he was trying to say.

“Life is filled with uncertainty, reaching forks in the road that are instead thousands upon thousands of paths to choose from, and the act of having to choose is, in itself, what life is,” he looked down at her, smiled fondly as he reached out to brush red hair away from her face, “Nobody knows what they should do, Lily, all anyone ever can do is try.”

“Did you try?” she asked, and he nodded, still smiling that father’s smile that she had never seen from anyone else.

“I tried so very hard,” he said, “And sometimes, often, I chose poorly, but I tried all the same. Even when I was Harry James Potter, even when I wasn’t, I tried.”

Then, tilting his head a little bit, his smile tilting into something mischievous, he asked, “No, the true question, Lily, is what do you want to do.”

“What do I want to do?” she repeated, and he nodded, motioning out past them, as if to the great expanse of opportunity awaiting her wherever and whenever it was that she found herself.

“What you want, Lily, is far more tangible, obtainable, and important than merely doing what you believe you should.”

When was the last time she’d asked herself that? Had she ever really asked herself that question? She wasn’t sure, she felt instead as if she’d always been a leaf on the wind in some sense, directed where the strongest wind would blow her. Happiness, she’d once thought, was the simple avoidance of catastrophe.

Still, thinking on his words, she wasn’t so sure. What she wanted seemed so far out of reach. She wanted something simple yet something she could barely describe. She wanted… that promise, the promise of holiday specials, of warmth, family, miracles, and happiness, that had always been denied to other.

She wanted tea in purgatory with just the three of them, the strangest of companions, Death, a revolutionary, and a messiah, once again.
However, to get what she wanted, to ever have obtained it in the first place, then she had no choice to be where she currently was.

“You know, despite everything you say, I don’t think you have done too badly,” Death said, jarring her out of her thoughts. He was giving her a rather shrewd and assessing look, a little more like one Wizard Lenin might give.

Lily decided she should probably blurt it all out right then before Death got some very wrong ideas, “Trotsky infected the school with Shakespeare soliloquys and suicide attempts, Lenin got the band back together, Trotsky brainwashed me into being his cousin and future bride for a few weeks until Rabbit showed up to bring Lenin to get into a bar fight, Dumbledore and Neville and a lot of other people all think I’m the heir of Slytherin and I’m basically expelled, I found out that I ruined Wizard Lenin’s life by travelling back in time to be his best friend in 1937, but then I went and travelled back in time to 1937 anyways because he wouldn’t become Wizard Lenin if I didn’t do it, and so now I’m in the past with no money, a very surly, tiny, Tom Riddle who thinks I’m presumptuous overpowered gutter trash, and no idea what the hell I’m doing.”

Death blinked, blinked again, then said, “You make my Hogwarts career look tame, Lily.”

Still, after thinking over her verbal dump for a moment (clearly having a lot of questions), he swallowed them and said, “None the less, no matter how much of a mess it is, think about… Well, think about Lenin. Lenin, perhaps even your Trotsky, they are something I never thought could be possible. In my world, Tom Riddle wasn’t simply a madman, he was heartless and hopeless, he was a soulless machine that destroyed himself and everything he touched. Every part of him was a stain on the skin of the world. Lenin, for all his many faults, for all his glaring flaws, is not that man.”

He let those words stand, paint the image of the absent member of their triad beside them, staring moodily off into the distance and pretending he wasn’t sitting on a bench between Lily and Death.

“He is so much more human than I ever thought any Tom Riddle ever could have been capable of being, and I think, no I know, that it’s because of you. So, Lily, I choose to believe that means that you couldn’t have chosen wrong then and you aren’t going to choose wrong now. Even the slightest redemption of Tom Riddle, no matter how many basilisks I slaughtered, was something I was never able to accomplish.”

Lily…

She hadn’t thought of it like that, still wasn’t sure if she did, but all the same she felt some small spark of brightness appear inside of her soul once again. She stood from the bench, smile no longer
forced as it grew into a grin, and said to Death, “I’d better be going, then, I’ll visit on Sunday.”

Death just laughed, “I’d like to say it’s been too long but then I remember that you’re killing yourself every time you see me,” he paused then, his smile warmer and fonder as he took her hands in his for a moment, “Sunday works for me.”

She nodded, took her hands from him, and made for the exit. However, before she could get there she stopped, turned back to look at him with a speculative glance, “By the way, while we’re on the subject, is there anything I should be expecting in good old 1993?”

Death considered this for a moment, lips still curved upwards, “Well, our worlds have differed on many an occasion, so I wouldn’t get your hopes up but I’ll just say that perhaps, Lily, you can expect to meet your godfather soon.”

Lily balked, eyebrows raising, “My godfather?”

She didn’t even know she’d had one, or what the hell they’d even been doing while she’d been with the Dursleys, but Death didn’t say anything, just kept smiling like this was his own private and delightful secret that she’d just have to wait and figure out for herself.

Still, stepping out of purgatory and back into her body lying on the sidewalk, she supposed she had asked him to give her some cryptic hint about the future. She really shouldn’t have expected too much.

Groaning she sat upright, cracking the kinks out of her back and neck that always came when plummeting from great heights to one’s death, then stood with a grown fixing the pavement and cleaning up the rather messy debris of her unfortunate demise. Although, Lily thought with a grimace, there was something very unsettling about throwing chunks of your own brain into the great void of nonexistence.

Right with that she’d go and find Tom and…

To her left there was an explosion, small, but close enough to where she was standing to draw her attention as well as the attention of the many other onlookers crowding through the streets. There, in front of Diagon Alley’s main bookshop, surrounded by a crowd of shouting, screaming, wizards and witches, was none other than Tom Riddle hunched over a whole pile of books, the manager hanging over his shoulder with his wand out and pointed at him, while the air around the boy sparked as if trying to ignite itself.
Lily blinked, took in the scene, then blanched as she realized exactly what was going on, or the important part of it, “Jesus Christ, he’s trying to burn down the store!”

(Something, Lily thought, about this seemed dreadfully ironic. Though she was a bit too distracted to really put her finger on why.)

She sprinted over from the steps, arriving next to Tom Riddle to ward off the apparating wizard fuzz who already had wands out and blazing ready to haul Tom Riddle’s tiny ass to wizard prison. Lily waved them off with a cheerful grin, glitching their attention the hell away as she tightly grabbed Tom’s hand and pulled them threw the mob, “Nothing to see here, nothing to see, show’s over, go about your business and have a pleasant rest of your day.”

Tom Riddle struggled against her, feet dragging and arm tugging as he said, “Let go!”

Lily hissed under her breath beneath the reassurances, “Do you want to go to wizard prison and get your soul sucked out by demons?! Because this is how you go to wizard prison and get your soul sucked out by demons!”

“That’s right, move along, move along, and oh my god it’s the Weasleys,” Lily said, or, she thought it was the Weasleys. Certainly, it was a whole herd of red-headed children all now blearily stumbling from the book store which was, thankfully, no longer on fire.

At her distraction the little antichrist to be tugged harder, almost managing to release himself, “I said let go!”

“And I said that you do not want to tangle with the wizard fuzz for arson,” Lily said, “They do not take kindly to that in these parts…”

She trailed off, thought about that for a moment, then asked, “Wait a minute, what the hell were you even doing trying to light it on fire anyway? And where did you… Did you try to steal the books?!”

He didn’t say anything, just glared sullenly, dragging his feet harder while the air around him still shimmered as if it would be ready to blow at any moment.
“Goddammit, Le… Tom!” Lily said, catching herself in the nick of time, “You are not at the power level to go casually stealing books from wizards and then lighting their stores on fire.”

“And you are?” he asked, rather spitefully.

“Frankly, yes, yes I am,” Lily said, which in retrospect was rather good as she’d done half the shit Tom Riddle had just tried to pull off and gotten away with it as well, “But you’re not and just… Oh, we’re not doing this here.”

Then, stopping in the street and preparing to teleport, she looked down at him and instructed, “Hold onto your lunch.”

“My what?”

But it was too late, they were already stepping through space and time and then back to their quaint little room in the orphanage. Tom stumbled from her, looking thoroughly pale and almost green in color, and slowly, carefully, he moved onto his bed where he curled on his side.

He breathed in and out, slowly and deliberately, and did it until the green faded from his cheeks and was replaced by a healthier red, then finally, quietly, he said, “They called me a mud blood. They said I was only ten, so they wouldn’t let me get a wand, I didn’t have any money, so I couldn’t get any books, and I have dirty blood so I’ll never be any good at magic. It was like… like every door was suddenly there, everything I’d ever wanted, and then every single one of them was slammed in my face.”

“And I just wanted…” he trailed off, looked away from her as he righted himself into a sitting position.

“I told you,” Lily said, not in a smug manner but instead in a simple statement, “That wizards are the worst.”

He glared at her at that, but then it softened into something a bit more bitter and a little wiser, “I always thought my father was a wizard.”

It wasn’t his father, Lily remembered from Morgan’s memories, it had been his mother, and she had been dead now for over ten years.
“They hate me too,” Lily said, not knowing if this was much comfort to him or it would mean anything, but at least it seemed to grab his attention. That maybe, even from today, he’d seen that Lily was far more powerful than they were and thus that much worthier than them.

Finally, with a wry smile, she concluded with words he probably wouldn’t understand, “They’re automatons, Tom, machines programmed to believe they’re thinking when they only run on clockwork. Nothing of actual importance.”

“What about…” he trailed off, looked uncertain, then a dark determination crossed his features as he forced the question out, “What about small ponds? You said I was a big fish in a small pond, and they said I’ll be a much weaker wizard because of…”

“London,” Lily said with a sense of finality not to be questioned, “Is an even smaller pond than Wools Orphanage.”

Lily settled on her own bed with a sigh, flopping back and staring at the ceiling, suddenly exhausted even though it was still only the afternoon.

Idly, staring at the ceiling, she said, “When I get a bit more money, then I’ll buy you all the books you want. I can’t guarantee that you can burn down the stores, but the books, that I can probably do.”

He scoffed at this, probably not believing she had any money or means to get it given that she was in an orphanage, but he didn’t outright say no either. She felt, somehow, like some great wall between them had begun to crack ever so slightly.

And Lily, lying back and staring at the ceiling, couldn’t help a small, fond, and hopeful smile.

(And if, in the middle of the night, an owl arrived at her window with the name Lily Riddle in Frank’s looping handwriting on the front, then Lily would say that things weren’t half bad.

Although Tom Riddle did not, apparently, appreciate being woken up in the middle of the night to her joyous cries of success at winning herself a secretary or her rather confused question of, “Who the bloody hell is Constantine?!”)
“Lily,”

Lily, deep in thought and eyes closed and breakfast in Wool’s Orphanage in the year of the lord and savior Jesus Christ 1937, on her third day on her perilous journey through time and space, now at her third breakfast in Wool’s Orphanage considered how best to proceed.

“Lily,” a voice sounded with an edge of impatience, familiar and yet a little too high-pitched to be truly heart-wrenchingly familiar.

She had found herself a Frank, vampire secretary extraordinaire, and now that she had a Frank on board she needed a lair in the cheapest and most dangerous corner of Knockturn Alley, then a few supplementary vampire minions, then she needed product and some hapless customers looking for a good time, followed by a truly fearsome reputation that had aurors twitching at the thought of her in all her twelve-year-old glory, and then a very long vacation that would last her until good old 1992.

“Lily!” that impatience had now turned into a hiss, silverware rattling in warning as tiny tempers once again reached their boiling points. Lily, however, was a little too deep in thought to care. That, and, even if she did go back to focusing on the food in front of her it’d only be 1930’s era depression food again which was, well, in a word quite depressing.

So, she preferred to think on the grand and glorious plan instead.

Step one, you could say, was now complete. And if Lily wasn’t going to worry about that whole Little Lenin friendship thing, which was currently going in Lily didn’t even know what direction, then that meant she needed to focus on a concrete step two in this whole Lily Riddle thing. Step two being purchasing the lair which meant, first and foremost, getting the money.

Was this a little out of order given that Lily had only come back to this time and place because she’d only known about the Wizard Lenin friendship thing? Perhaps, but Lily was becoming very fond of
concrete goals and goal setting and the ability to check arbitrary things off arbitrary lists. And, since Death had told her that she needed to do what she wanted to do, then by god Lily was going to do it.

“Lily, are you even listening to me?”

Now, how to get the money? Well, the way Lily saw it there were two options. The first was to use the philosopher’s stone which, as far as Lily knew, was still rattling about somewhere in that extradimensional pocket of time and space where she threw all her junk. It was kind of amazing, if she thought about it. That after everything that had happened, Wizard Trotsky, Morgan, falling through time, space, and definitions of self, she’d managed to hang onto it. It was a strange sort of… not a constant, but a reminder. That this red unpolished stone had been that thing in the center of her life for so very long. And here it was, little more than a paperweight now that it had served (or rather) not served Wizard Lenin’s intended purpose.

The second option was to make counterfeit muggle money, show up putting on some serious airs with a butler or something in attendance, and trade it in for galleons from the bedazzled goblins. This was a lot riskier, or at least, it seemed riskier at first given that it was essentially stealing from goblins which anyone sane avoided, but probably panned out to be the safer option in the end.

The second provided an explanation of how and why this little girl out of nowhere would have so much money. The first, while it was real money (by goblin and wizard standards at any rate), would leave so many open questions of how this little girl with a muggle last name had so much gold lying around. The philosopher’s stone likely wouldn’t be the first answer people came up with, since Flamel here still had it and there could only be one, but still…

Enticing people, at this early stage, to come looking for where Lily Riddle might come from did not seem… wise.

Especially, as Lily thought with her eyes finally opening to take in moody little Tom Riddle staring back at her, since it could very well be enticing enough to eventually lead them right to here.

Perhaps, she thought to herself, Riddle had not been as wisely chosen a last name as she’d lamented two days ago.

“Finally,” Tom grumbled on seeing Lily finally considering him after he’d been nagging at her for god even knew how long. He looked not simply impatient, but more than a little annoyed, like if Lily was anybody else she’d be ruing the day she was born for daring to ignore him and she should be grateful for his saint like patience when it came to her.
Lily couldn’t help but think to herself that it was more likely that every time Tom Riddle did try to make her regret ever being born he ended up being stuck to a wall or else shoved to the ground. A young Tom Marvolo Riddle was many things, but she doubted that even at this young age he had ever truly been stupid. Proud, yes, but not stupid enough to keep trying what clearly wasn’t working.

“Aren’t you going to eat anything?” Tom asked, eyeing her rather critically and then looking down more critically at her as of yet untouched porridge and or gruel. Lily glanced down at it and blanched, it somehow looked… both grayer and chunkier than the day before.

“You know, Mrs. Cole isn’t going to give you different food or any food at all if you keep throwing it out.”

“Somehow,” Lily said, and with a wave of her hand defying the laws of physics once again to produce tea and scones, “I think I just might manage.”

There was a bright spark of triumph in Tom’s eyes that he couldn’t quite quell and then hands flying towards the scones and shoving them into his mouth at a truly impressive rate. Lily, for her own part, just sort of blinked at the display while sipping her tea wondering if this was some sort of omen for how the rest of the day was going to go.

“You know,” Lily noted to the unresponsive Little Lenin, “You could have just asked.”

He shot her a rather annoyed glare, as if merely asking was far beneath him when he could (in his mind) subtly manipulate her into doing what he wanted. Lily wasn’t sure she’d give him that much, but she would note that it was at least a pleasant change from the window shattering of the day before.

Still broken, at that, Lily hadn’t fixed them on the way out the day before and hadn’t gotten around to fixing them when she came back. Now, with the matron having sent cold glares to Tom (clearly blaming him for the incident), she was caught between wanting to fix it and wanting to leave it as a reminder. A reminder for what she didn’t quite know, Tom Riddle’s temper, her own limits of patience, but a reminder of something.

For now, with the heat of August, it was fine enough if a little stifling at times. However, when the autumn rain and then winter set in they’d best be getting that glass fixed…
“Why are you always doing that?”

Lily glanced back over at Tom, not looking at her but over her shoulder towards the uninterested masses all making their way through breakfast. His eyes, in particular, landed and lingered on a rather beefy looking kid around Lily’s age and his lips twisted into a rather cruel sneer.

“Doing what?” Lily asked, not quite following what he was getting at, especially as other than Shirly Temple Two Point Oh she’d yet to have any real interaction with any of the other orphans besides Tom Riddle.

She supposed she hadn’t seen much of a point in it.

“Deflecting their attention,” Tom said, looking back towards her rather meaningfully, the accusation practically burning in his eyes.

“Oh, I don’t know. I spend enough of my time getting stared at for no bloody reason.” Lily said with a shrug and a sigh, suddenly thinking back on those good old Hogwarts days when she’d had to all but flee to Default just to get away from the pestering and staring she’d known would be coming in her second year.

And that still hadn’t helped at the end of things.

“Why?” Tom asked, but not as if he didn’t know the answer but like he wanted to hear her say whatever he thought the answer was.

Lord, Lily thought, rubbing her temples, it was too early for this.

“It’s a complicated story,” Lily finally settled on, not sure if she was willing or able to talk about her backstory as wizarding Britain’s personal messiah.

“Really,” Tom Riddle drawled, as if he found that answer quite uninspired and rather dim. Which, once again, was one of those strange expressions on his face that was just so… Wizard Lenin in nature. Every once in a while, a seed of him, a small green bud, would peek through Tom Marvolo Riddle’s features and it always threw her off balance. With a sly grin he leaned forward and declared, “I think it’s rather obvious.”
“Really?” Lily asked in turn, wondering when the whole Wizard Jesus thing became obvious to anyone at all, especially since Lily didn’t really look the part at the moment in her orphan’s uniform.

“You’re a bit of a freak,” Tom Riddle said, with no small amount of pride, “Even for your own people.”

Freak, there was something ironic in his using that word to describe her. That had been the Dursley’s word for as long as she could remember.

Still, Lily was pretty sure she had said that to him, and rather plainly too. So, he didn’t need to go acting so proud about having managed to put those dots all together. It was also, she couldn’t help but think, the understatement of the bloody twentieth century. Lily was so outside of the realm of “her people” that she wasn’t sure she belonged in the category of “the people” at all. Wizard Lenin himself, years later, would say as much on many an occasion.

“Congratulations,” Lily said dully, “You’re very clever.”

He seemed to realize, at least, that Lily wasn’t particularly impressed by his deductive skills because for a moment he got that rather dangerous frown and baleful shadow in his eyes. Except, apparently, after two days of throwing a fit he’d learned to respect the new world order and allowed the rage to pass on and instead shrugged and bit into his scone.

“I’m a lot more than just clever, Lily,” he said with a sneer, lips curling oddly about the syllables of her name, as if truly tasting it for the first time and wondering even now how it might be said softly or harshly or in any manner at all.

Lily just, staring at him and seeing both what he was and could be in the same moment could only simply and without a hint of doubt respond, “I know.”

That stopped him. He paused, his dark eyebrows raised dubiously, and he gave her this funny half-disbelieving look, as if he couldn’t quite comprehend that he’d heard what he’d thought he’d heard, “You know?”

He coughed, cleared his throat, and seemed to regain his footing ever so slightly as he asked, “How can you know that? We barely even know each other. You only showed up here two days ago and then you spent the whole bloody time walking around London!”
“I did invite you along the second time,” Lily interjected, but Tom Riddle seemed too insistent on rewriting history to pay that any mind.

“All you’ve heard about is from Mrs. Cole and none of that’s true at all,” he paused, glanced at the other orphans and then back at her with the antichrist’s smirk. “Well, except the truly awful parts.”

She wasn’t sure if he wanted her to be impressed or terrified by that. The strange thing was though, she was willing to bet that he didn’t know if he wanted her impressed or terrified either. He seemed to vacillate between the two desires as well as his own impressions of her, not sure whether to be contemptuous, unsettled, or perhaps even begrudgingly impressed.

“You know,” Lily mused as she glanced over at the matron who, even under the influence of Lily’s impulse to not give a shit about the resident prince of darkness and new roommate, still managed to glare at the pair of them as if she just knew they were up to something even worse than a few smashed windows, “She actually didn’t say much about you.”

“She didn’t?” here, again, he looked a little stunned as if he’d been all but certain that Lily had been duly prepped on all the nastiness Tom Riddle had inflicted on this little kingdom of his.

“No, like I said, I think she was hoping you would murder me in the dead of night, drop my body in the Thames, and she’d never have to deal with me again,” Lily continued, and by the way Mrs. Cole was looking at her, she probably still was hoping that would happen. Or, at the very least, she was desperately hoping that Lily and Tom Riddle would form a rivalry over who could be the most likely to cause the end of days rather than become best friends forever.

Mrs. Cole was likely banking on the fact that there could only be one lord of the rings, and he did not share power. Unfortunately for her, Lily was not interested in the throne of Wool’s Orphanage and felt Tom Riddle was more than welcome to that particular seat of power.

Tom, small and pale as he already was, blanched and swallowed stiffly while looking at her wide, shocked, blue eyes.

“What?” Lily asked, gesturing towards him in all his adorable glory, “You’ve been threatening to dismember me for days and the Thames is too much for you?”

“No, I just…” he paused, swallowed again and tried to regain his poise, “I didn’t think you’d say it that… casually.”
His eyes though couldn’t hold hers as he said it, flickered to meet her stare only for a moment before settling back onto the table, the uncertainty all too clear in their pale depths.

“I see no point in beating around that particular bush,” Lily said after a thoughtful pause. Not that it required much thinking, since it really was Lily’s usual modus operandi. There generally, as she always saw it, wasn’t a point in beating around any bush even if it spared people’s feelings here and there.

It didn’t change the heart of things.

“Even your death?” he asked, and something about this must have hit home or unwillingly fascinated him, because for once there wasn’t a hint of anything condescending in his expression but instead a wide-eyed sort of fear, bewilderment, and perhaps wonder.

“Especially my death,” Lily said, an unintentional smile spreading across her lips at the very thought. Yes, Lily, of all the people in all the worlds, would never go out of her way to avoid her untimely demise.

He looked more than a little disturbed by that, the persona of arrogant king he’d built for himself teetering ever so slightly on its foundations as he took that in, and for a few moments was left only to quietly sipping tea and eating scones.

Lily left him to it, letting her mind wander back to Riddle Incorporated and everything she’d have to decorate it with. Except “have to” was the wrong term. A part of her was almost looking forward to putting it all together. There was a certain fondness and nostalgia in the idea of painting the sign, enchanting Oz the Great and Terrible as well as his accompanying green curtain, creating all those movie posters and anachronistic doodads and knickknacks out of nothing.

She’d never considered too much the original Lily Riddle having put it together more than fifty years before but now the idea seemed… Well, like a bit more fun than Lily could remember having had in some time.

“Tell me about the wizards.”

Lily, once again jarred out of her thoughts, looked back over at Tom Riddle who appeared to be back in his element once again. She liked how he could do that, so convincingly put on this show
and pretend that it had never faltered in his life even when she’d seen it almost crumble two seconds before. She’d say this for Tiny Tom, orphan extraordinaire, he had great recovery.

And wasn’t that a remarkably vague and unsavory command? Tell him about the wizards, oh, Lily could tell him entirely too much about the wizards. More, despite what he’d seen for himself, she doubted he’d appreciate any distasteful truth coming from her lips.

Lily sighed, rubbed at the back of her head, then noted, “Look, not that this isn’t a nice change of pace, but aren’t we… Oh, I don’t know, not on speaking terms?”

Granted, they’d already had themselves a bit of a conversation, but she could chalk that up to “give me food” and “why are you so weird?” Which, in a horrible way, was rather reminiscent of many of her conversations with Dudders. Wizard Lenin probably would have died at that thought.

Tom, for a moment, hesitated and seemed at odds with himself. Finally, with a disgruntled look (that flash of Wizard Lenin showing through once again) admitted, “Look, if I’m going to go and compare you to someone like Billy Stubbs, then you’re clearly better. Even I can admit that you’re… better than the rest of them.”

And that sounded like it was almost painful for him to admit, like pulling out his own teeth with a set of steel plyers, as if he’d never in his life envisioned having to say that someone was even close to approaching his own glory.

Lily suspected that lackluster sentence right there was the highest praise Tiny Tom had ever given anyone. She wondered if that was supposed to make her feel flattered or even gracious, as it was, she kind of just felt exasperatingly amused.

“So, tell me about the wizards,” Tom insisted, leaning forward over the now empty plate between them and all too eager to put his admission of Lily’s slight superiority over the other orphans behind him.

“What about them?” Lily asked, aware of the weariness entering her voice as she thought back of all the wizards and witches she was so dearly familiar with. You had Snape, Snape was a real winner, then there was Dumbledore who was his own barrel of eccentric fun, and then you had the mostly better Hermione Grangers of the world but who still had their own… quirks.

Tom Riddle frowned, apparently not liking to be asked for specific questions in answer to his own,
but then seemed to find what he really wanted as he asked, “Why do they wait until I’m eleven?”

“Because wizards insist on doing ridiculous things,” Lily responded blandly, then, seeing his unimpressed expression gave him an answer that he would find more suitable, “It’s… politics, I believe.”

“Politics?”

“And maybe ethics,” Lily continued quietly after a moment’s more thought, more thought, really, than she’d ever bothered to put into this question, “The truth is that, I think when it comes to children with magic who are born to those without it, they have no idea what to do and haven’t made up their minds in over five hundred years. On the one hand, do they intrude into the lives of this humble couple who has unwittingly produced something far beyond their own power? Do they introduce this pair to their world and all it has to offer? Or do they wait until the child is ready for school and reluctantly offer them an invitation into the great wizarding world?”

She didn’t know where half of this was coming from. Maybe she had thought it the whole time, just had never bothered to actively think about it beyond brushing it off as just another thing wizards insisted on doing, but some part of her liked to think it was some remnant of Wizard Lenin still within her speaking for her. Explaining, as always, all the innerworkings of the world they lived in and how it all fit together in this greater flawed machine they called Britain.

She could almost hear Wizard Lenin in her head, staring out into the distance as if out there he could see Wizarding Britain and all its flaws as a society, and in her mind, he whispered that this, the neglect and disregard of muggle born children, ignoring them until they couldn’t be ignored any longer, was a direct consequence of the statute of secrecy.

The statute of secrecy would be perfect, after all, in a world where mudbloods simply did not exist.

“And did they even think about…”

Lily cut him off before he could finish that sentence, “If they did, then they didn’t care, and many assume they’re being quite generous in extending an invitation to their world at all. Even when we all know that not extending you that invitation could have disastrous consequences beyond their imagination.”

Because if Lily had been left to her own devices she suddenly realized, if Wizard Lenin had, then the statute of secrecy surely could not have held even a few years. Lily would have become… She didn’t know what, in time, but far more than she should have if she was without the ability to
manipulate the laws of physics.

A God Emperor, perhaps, akin to what Uncle Death sometimes claimed he had once been. That possibility alone should have been terrifying to the wizengamot.

“So, they won’t come for me until I’m eleven,” Tom said, eyes squeezing shut and stifling down the rage, the bitterness, and the betrayal, “And if I’d had a wizard for a father or a witch for a mother then…”

“No, then you wouldn’t be in this orphanage,” Lily answered for him.

The shadows beneath his feet swirled, forming a dark whirlpool that caught at the attention of everyone in the room despite Lily’s best efforts to keep them indifferent. Hair rose on the back of necks and heads, goosebumps formed on shivering flesh, and every piece of their surroundings seemed to twist into the spiral of rage and despair forming beneath Tom Riddle’s feet.

He crossed his arms, clutched at his clothing too large for his frame, and hunched in on himself while biting down on his lip as if to keep from screaming even as he shuddered.

(“Life is patently unfair,” his subconscious had once said to her mockingly, “Best get used to it.”)

Maybe, she thought as she looked at him, Frank, lairs, and interviews with goblins and vampires could wait a day or two. The world could, would, wait as it always did until the likes of Eleanor Lily Potter and Tom Marvolo Riddle were eleven…

Lily stood from the table, drawing Tom’s eyes towards her, and they were red with fury and unshed tears. Lily glanced away, pretended not to see, and instead motioned towards their dilapidated and rather bleak surroundings, “So, since I’ve spent my first two days wandering around London instead of this place why don’t you show me around?”

He scoffed, looked down towards the table. Still, the miasma abated, and the sense of danger ebbed away into something more exhausted and resigned. His voice, when he answered, was a hoarse a bitter murmur, “There’s nothing to see.”

“No nonsense,” Lily said as she gestured about the room, “There’s a building, there’s a yard, there’s all these… wonderful people I haven’t even talked to.”
“These wonderful people,” Tom said with a bitter laugh, “You really haven’t met them, have you?”

“Nope,” Lily said in casual agreement, “So, why don’t you introduce me?”

For a moment she thought he’d say no, tell her to go off to London and do whatever the hell she wanted and never come back, but then he was standing stiffly and motioning for her to follow as they walked out of the room and into the rest of the orphanage.

Which, in this case, meant walking past the kitchen with him motioning towards it with one hand, then the living room which was filled with bins of used and abused toys which was where, according to Tom Riddle, the prospective parents would watch and evaluate their future adopted children.

“It’s all pointless, you know,” he said as Lily’s eyes caught on a wooden rocking horse with paint flaking away and faded, “Most of us are too bloody old, there isn’t a chance in hell I’ll get adopted by anyone. Not that I’d want to anyway, if it was going to be anyone then it was going to be my fath —”

He didn’t finish, forcefully cut himself off, and said instead, “The point is that I know none of them are ever going to be enough, even if they did want something like me.”

He didn’t have a father, not in any real sense, only an arrogant fool of a man who had been drugged and raped by his squib mother. No one from Tom Marvolo Riddle’s past would ever come for him, no, he would instead come to them and kill every last one of them by the age of sixteen.

As if familicide could remove the stain of his heritage.

He eyed her speculatively, with a hint of smugness, and said, “You might have to go through that, actually. Adoptive parents usually feel very generous and sentimental around the holidays.”

Lily looked down at herself, prospective adoptable child, then back at him and asked, “What, do you think I’m too ginger?”

He barked out a laugh, amused enough apparently, and then said, “Well, you’re too something, too old to start with.”
Lily couldn’t help but smile fondly back even as he continued their tour, taking them up the creaking wooden staircase down the halls of all the different rooms, whose occupants he rattled off in a bit of a holier than thou tone which sounded out of place enough to be cute on his ten-year-old persona.

“That one there belongs to Billy and Dennis,” Tom Riddle said with a sniff, “Which, if you ask me, it’s delightful that those two bastards got stuck with each other. Dennis is the large one, around your age probably, and is about as dim as he looks. Billy’s the twitching blonde who keeps thinking he’s going to get out of this place. He used to have a rabbit, you know, did Mrs. Cole tell you about that?”

“I told you,” Lily reminded him, “Mrs. Cole really didn’t tell me anything.”

Tom glanced over his shoulder at her, evaluating that, but seemed to buy it as he said, with pursed lips, “Well, at any rate, Billy Stubbs doesn’t have a rabbit anymore. And Dennis and Amy Bishop, well, they learned their place not too long after.”

“Alright then,” Lily said, not entirely sure what he expected her to say to that.

Evidently, it was not that as he stopped dead in his tracks and turned back to look at her fully, his face caught in that half incredulous and half dubious expression like he just couldn’t believe her. Finally, he asked, “Aren’t you scared at all?”

“No?” Lily asked in turn, again not quite sure what to say or what he even wanted her to say.

“I just admitted…” he stopped, trailed off, shoved his hands into his pockets to match her casual stance. Quickly, he seemed to realize that Lily’s casual air didn’t quite suit him as he took them out again and instead crossed them even as he glared at her, “Why not?”

“What?” Lily asked, wondering if the tour was now over or something else was supposed to happen from here. It felt not too unlike that first Potions class when everything just kept steamrolling ahead and Lily had no idea why they were laughing at Neville Longbottom’s public humiliation.

“Why aren’t you frightened of me? I threatened you, I threatened to kill you, and I could do it too.”
“Well…” Lily said, trailing off with a half-apologetic expression, not sure how to tactfully say that he could try but she very much doubted that Tiny Tom could do her in. At least, not yet, not until a few more years had passed by and even then older incarnations of him had yet to get it to stick.

“You’d get careless, make some stupid mistake at some point, and I’d do it,” he insisted, as if he was just daring her to verbally contradict him and goad him into gutting her in her sleep, “And either way I’ve done things to the others, to their pets, their possessions, their things. I could do something to you too.”

“You could,” Lily agreed, she’d give him that much, he could trash her things, throw her out of the room, maybe even connive some way to throw her out of the orphanage (although if that happened good god she’d probably have to sneak her way back in and wouldn’t that be embarrassing as hell).

“But you aren’t scared at all,” he shouted at her, cheeks flushed and eyes bright and seemingly torn in half by both his bewilderment as well as his anger and disappointment.

“Sorry,” Lily finally said with a slight shrug, likely only aggravating him further, before adding with a fond smile that she couldn’t quite help, “I’m afraid I’ve faced more trials and tribulations than you, Tom Riddle.”

He didn’t have to know that he, in the future, in his own way, would be at the heart of almost all of them. The world beyond the orphanage was far from him yet and so too were the dangers he could inflict.

He scoffed, looked as if he was about to outright deny that, that surely the world could not be larger and more dangerous than Tom Riddle in an orphanage, then stopped and reconsidered. For a long moment he looked at her, really looked, perhaps truly taking her in and seeing her for the first time since she’d arrived here. Finally, he asked, “Then where do you come from, Lily? And what did you face there?”

And there he was, not just a flicker of him, a pale shadow of what he would one day be but a smaller Wizard Lenin in the flesh. The way he’d look when stripped of all pretentions, all his dry and bitter wit, and would look at her in curiosity and perhaps even a bit of wonder at all she was and all the worlds she could lead him to.

“Was it the wizarding world?” he pressed when she only stared at him in silence, “Or somewhere further than that?”
“It was…” Lily started, trailing off and losing the words, not even sure how to start.

“And why come here, are you really an orphan?” he said, stepping closer, and she could almost feel him willing her to answer and answer him honestly. She was sure he made good use of that particular skill with Mrs. Cole and anyone else who didn’t ask how high when he said jump.

“I’m an orphan,” Lily said quite easily, that, after all, had never caused her too much angst despite what everyone might think. “Really, have been almost since the beginning, I was only a year old when they died.”

“A year old but then…”

Lily cut him off before he could ask where she’d been since then and why she’d only shown up at the orphanage now, “I have relatives, an aunt, uncle, and cousin and they took me in until I was eleven and I… I never went back.”

She hadn’t thought of it that way, but there it was, Lily had left and just never come back, never even looked back… And Dumbledore had once said as much, had asked her about her relatives and love, but still Lily had put them in the back of her head.

She wondered how long ago she had decided that she would never see them again.

And she suspected that was still the case, that even when she showed up again in 1992 she would simply never see any of them again.

“After that, well… It got a little complicated,” Lily said with a rather sheepish, much to Tom Riddle’s apparent annoyance. He gave an annoyed little sigh, like he should have expected that sort of useless answer from her, and walked past her once again to enter their shared bedroom. There he flopped backwards on the bed so that he was staring at the ceiling while Lily looked down at him.

He petulantly frowned as he looked straight up, kicking his legs impatiently back and forth from where they dangled off the bed, and he asked, “Can’t you even tell me if you were one of them or not? From the beginning I mean?”

“They?” Lily asked before catching onto what he was getting at, “Oh, you mean the wizards. Not really, my relatives didn’t have magic, had a severe and irrational loathing of it in fact.”
And wasn’t that the understatement of the century? It said a lot when you weren’t even willing to go around and say the word “magic” as if it was the same as calling someone’s mother a dirty whore.

He then looked up, gave her a rather pointed look, “You can’t expect me to really believe that.”

“What?” Lily asked before looking down at herself again, “Why?”

“Yesterday, you were wearing…” he trailed off, flushing, apparently having found Lily’s shorts to be entirely too revealing on her prepubescent figure.

“Oh, right, that,” Lily said, “Well…”

Well, what did she say about that? She supposed she could give another vague “That’s also complicated” but likely he’d just throw some sort of a fit again and whatever odd progress they’d made would be lost entirely. She could also try to lie, say that she came from some other other group that wasn’t wizards but weren’t Tom Riddle’s good old normal people either but then she’d have to come up with fake details which would be a pain and a half. Or, she could simply tell him something of the truth.

“I’m actually a time traveler.”

That got him sitting up. Straightening, he looked at her, mouth falling open and eyebrows raising, “You’re… a time traveler?”

“Yup, from a good while into the future as a matter of fact,” Lily said with a grin, “That’s part of why I’m here, actually, needed a place to stay while I was… lost in the space time continuum.”

“You expect me to believe you’re from the future?” he asked, now sounding incredibly dubious especially as, rather scathingly, he asked, “Do you think I’m stupid?”

“I thought we covered that earlier,” Lily pointed out but he was having none of it as he huffed and crossed his arms, glaring, and stated, “Prove it.”
“Prove it?”

“Prove you’re from the future,” he insisted while Lily just sort of stared at him wondering what on earth he thought he was getting at.

“Why should I have to prove it to you?” Lily asked, motioning towards him, “It makes no difference to you whether it’s true or not.”

“It makes a lot of difference to you,” he retorted in contempt, small pale face flushing with irritation yet again, an oddly jarring patch of color against his gray uniform.

“How’s that?”

“If I think you’re a dirty, idiot, liar and hardly worthy of my time I’ll be far more inclined to make your stay here as difficult as possible,” he must have seen some doubt or amusement in her expression as he further snapped, “And don’t think I can’t do it either! Even if you can teleport and create illusions or anything at all I can still annihilate you if I put my bloody mind to it!”

“If you say so,” Lily muttered under her breath, he wouldn’t be the first to try, she was pretty sure Snape had had the same goal in mind when Lily had first shown up in Hogwarts. Only her being in Slytherin had prevented him from raking her over the coals like Neville and Ron in that first day of class.

Little Lenin’s mouth opened, no doubt some vicious retort on the tip of his tongue, and so Lily decided to cut him off before they could get into any real shouting match or reengage in their machismo competition from the day before, “At any rate, more importantly, how in the world am I supposed to prove it to you?”

“Tell me something from the future, obviously, something nobody could guess,” and he did say this as if this was utterly obvious and only an idiot wouldn’t be able to figure this out.

“Sounds needlessly dangerous,” Lily said, feeling once again as if their roles had been oddly reversed. She wasn’t sure she liked being the responsible one who thought about the dangers of paradox and the wellbeing of reality.

“It sounds like you’re stalling,” he retorted, then, eyes moving to her bed in a hilariously unsubtle
manner he added, “Remember I know where you sleep.”

Oh, dear lord, sometimes, she just wanted to punch him if only to teach him that Lily was so far above his power level right now that his threatening her vacillated only between being cute or else being obnoxious.

“Well alright then, since you know where I sleep…” Lily paused, thought of something large, something relatively soon, and something that he might appreciate, “You know those Nazis in Germany that Chamberlain swears up and down aren’t going to go and start a second world war?”

He looked at her rather blankly, blinking once or twice, which… Maybe Lily should have expected that given that Tom was a penniless, ten-year-old, orphan who probably had larger things on his mind than Nazis in Berlin who only Churchill was currently ranting and raving about.

“Well, September 1939, they invade Poland. I mean, they’ve already annexed quite a few neighboring countries now that it’s 1937, but, you know, that’s when shit gets undeniable and rather serious.”

He blinked, blinked again, and finally with a furrowed brow asked, “So I have to wait two years, listening to the news about Poland and Germany of all places, to even know if you’re lying or not?”

“Well, I’m sorry I don’t know what pair of socks you’re going to be wearing tomorrow, your demonic highness,” Lily retorted, crossing her own arms in annoyance, “Besides, World War Two is hardly just about Poland, they’re going to bomb the hell out of London for years until there’s barely anything left of this city.”

They did call it a world war for a reason, after all.

“They’re going to bomb London?!” he asked, and Lily maybe should have seen that coming as Tom had lived in London his entire life and could very well likely imagine himself being stuck here during the blitz or even the later rocket bombings towards the end of the war.

“Well… I think you’re in Hogwarts for most of it?” Lily asked, although, she’d never really gotten around to asking Wizard Lenin how he’d fared during the blitz. Likely because, for the longest time, she hadn’t known the exact timeframe of his youth. She’d known some dates but it hadn’t occurred to her that World War Two had gone and lasted his entire Hogwarts tenure and that, during the summers, he would be expected to return to bomb riddled London.
In fact, given Tom’s utter loathing of Dumbledore, and Lily’s own experiences with him, she was certain they’d send him back into a nearly destroyed muggle London.

“That still doesn’t prove anything!”

Lily threw her hands into the air, “Well, that’s really all I’ve got, so you can believe it or not. It honestly makes no difference at all to me one way or another. Really, it doesn’t make a difference to you one way or another either.”

At least, it wouldn’t make a difference now. Except, he must believe her at some point, perhaps not now, but in the future he must believe her because he had been waiting forty years for Lily to appear. Forty years, until he’d thought he’d found her in Lily Potter née Evans.

Tom frowned at that, but seemed to have nothing to contradict it as he sighed, glanced at the door, “Classes will be starting soon, we should probably get going.”

He gave her a look, a rather suspicious and unappreciative glance, “You do go to classes, don’t you?”

“I suppose I can,” Lily said with a shrug, although it probably would be a giant waste of her time, but since she was taking the day off from Frank anyway she supposed she didn’t have much else better to do.

Tom nodded, then stood, headed towards the door without a word or even a glance behind. Except, once he reached the doorway he stopped, and staring straight ahead he said, “Afterward… Afterward, you’ll teach me to do what you can.”

And then he was out the door, leaving it to slowly close behind him with Lily staring after him wondering how, exactly, trying to teach baby Wizard Lenin the tricks of the trade could possibly go and how well he’d handle not reaching her level of glitch manipulating divinity.

There really only was one word for it, “Shit.”
Do or Do Not

Chapter Notes

Thanks to GlassGirlCeci on fanfiction for betaing the chapter.

In which Lily once again prophesies the end of the world to yet another dubious audience, Lily tries and fails to explain how Lily does what Lily does, and Tom Riddle unwittingly tries and fails to become a god in his own right but does manage to commit arson again.

Lily was a very responsible young woman.

She felt it was very important to open with that thought, to state it starkly and clearly in her own mind, that she was very responsible and accountable and that clearly things had not gotten completely out of hand.

Clearly.

"And Wool's Orphanage is certainly still standing," she said to herself with the confident tone she reserved for when she wasn't confident in any way, shape, or form, "And I'm not running away from my own problems, even after having the maturity and experience to know you can never really run away from your own garbage."

This was all a pack of lies.

Wool's Orphanage was not still standing (well, it was, but if Lily had left everything to their own devices it wouldn't be), Lily was running away from her own problems and garbage, and there was a sense of churning guilt and irony in her stomach that she was running away from her Tom Riddle related garbage after she'd chewed him out for running away from his own Lily related garbage for years.

But, you know, at least standing outside of Gringotts now, dressed to the nines and impersonating a muggle heiress to get some sweet cash, she was doing something productive. Well, more productive. The point was that progress was being made in some direction that wasn't destruction of private property.

It'd all started that morning when, at the crack of dawn, what did she awake to but the bleary sight of Tom Riddle's adorable ten-year-old face looming over her as he commanded, "You'll teach me now."

Lily, of course, wasn't really conscious at that point and not a morning person besides, so all she could do was sort of gurgle at him and ask, "What time is it?"

Once upon a time, maybe, Lily had been able to function in the early hours of the day. But that ability seemed to have been lost at some point during second year, probably when she'd started killing herself by inches with sleep deprivation and time travel. After that, at any point when Lily first stepped from the land of dreamless sleep and into awareness, well, it wasn't pretty.

Right then, for example, everything was a dull gray blur, the light was too faint and only just coming in the windows, and it seemed wrong that Tom Riddle was already dressed and looking his orphan
best while Lily just wanted to curl into her sheets and die.

"Too early," Lily concluded for herself, rolling back into her covers and the sweet oblivion that waited for her.

Except Tom, impatient little shit that he was, was not going to have that. The air suddenly grew uncomfortably cold, her sheets were yanked away from her body, and her eyes cracked open to view the boy smirking down at her like he’d just gone and foiled her schemes. "You promised, Lily."

She’d promised? What the hell had she promised?

It took a while for the gears in her mind to start turning, to compute anything other than ‘cold, too early’, and that Wizard Lenin was looking entirely too smug and he’d also shrunk several feet. From there, she had to remember the whole ‘time travel, young Tom Riddle’, thing that she’d gotten herself into (which in and of itself was not the kind of epiphany you wanted to have while you still wished you were sleeping). Finally, she put two and two together and remembered that the day before, she'd unintentionally promised to be his wizard guru or something.

The Yoda to his Luke Skywalker.

The trouble was, she thought, she was feeling about as reluctant and disgruntled as Yoda had with Luke Skywalker when he'd first shown up out of nowhere on the troll's doorstep.

"Oh, shit, right," she groaned out as she forced herself into a sitting position, watching Tiny Tom’s smirk grow broader as he neared sweet victory, "Can we do that later?"

"You're free right now, aren't you?" he asked in turn, crossing his arms.

Technically, Lily was free all the damn time, as she had no real commitments to this place. Well, other than the whole Lily Riddle thing, which was still a little bit of a confusing notion when she thought about it. Point was, Lily's entire calendar was wide open, and not just at whatever ungodly hour the sun rose at.

"I'm sleeping right now," she grumbled, but it was clear she wasn't, and that getting those sheets back and the temperature up would be far too much effort. Then she'd have to deal with the pouting, the temper tantrums, and probably the snakes as Tom Riddle didn't get his way, and…

"Fine, I'm not sleeping right now," Lily said, hopping off the bed and glitching herself into more comfortable daytime wear, "Although, I still don't see why we have to do this at god knows what time in the morning."

He didn't listen to her irate grumbling, just grinned at her—an oddly boyish and excited look for him—and then darted out the room. And it was actual darting too, nothing casual about it; he was sprinting out of there like Dudders on Christmas morning, leaving Lily to stumble and grumble her way after him, down the stairs, and then out the back door into the orphanage yard.

Because apparently whatever he had in mind required more space than they were allotted in their pitiable shoebox masquerading as a bedroom.

The grass was wet, uncomfortably damp against her cotton socks (shoes had seemed like too much effort at the time), and the sky was that pale pink color that made it seem like the sun had only just risen. Tom Riddle was ahead of her, waiting beneath his favorite spot by the tree where she'd found him the other day, attempting to appear patient and regal but shuffling a little bit too much with excitement to quite manage it.
He was… he was really anticipating this, Lily realized.

He'd never say it, never to her face, but he was really excited about this. This was probably—no it was —the first real opportunity he had not just to show off to someone like him but to also learn something new. It may have chafed at his ego to meet someone more experienced than him, but it also seemed to invigorate him, the way that the idea of a Wizarding London had invigorated him before they'd gone and slammed doors in his face.

He was looking forward to learning from her.

"Oh, hell," Lily whispered to herself, as somehow the idea of the bar being set higher had her stomach doing nervous backflips.

Suddenly, even as she kept stepping forward, her mind was blank and empty. Where words or thoughts normally were, there was this great, echoing crevasse that was incapable of holding any thought at all. She had no idea what to tell him, she had no idea how to tell him, she suddenly had no idea how she did anything and definitely not how someone like Wizard Lenin went about things.

All she could remember was the countless hours, hours upon hours, spent not paying any attention at all to any textbook or lecture at Hogwarts. It hadn't just gone in one ear and out the other; sometimes Lily suspected the lectures hadn't entered her head at all.

She'd missed over half of them completely by simply not attending at all!

He was smiling at her now, unable to contain himself, grinning like the adorable innocent puppy he was. Well, adorable innocent puppy who threatened to maim and or kill her multiple times a day while he tried to shove her down stairs, but the point was that this was a remarkably naïve version of Wizard Lenin.

Right—young, he was very young, and he didn't have a magic stick yet. That meant they could stick to the basics and it'd be fine.

What were the basics again?

"Why are you making that face?" Tom asked, making a face of his own as she finally stopped a few feet from him, as if he was torn between being contemptuous and just plain weirded out.

Lily quickly smoothed her features, forcing herself into some semblance of stoicism. "What face?"

Certainly, there was nothing wrong with Lily's face.

"Never mind," he said with a huff, crossing his arms and then giving her a very expectant look. Like this was the point where Lily was supposed to open her mouth and all sorts of important sounding wisdom would come gushing out.

Any second now, really, they were all just waiting for it.

Lily didn't say a word.

"Well?" he asked, "Aren't you going to say anything?"

"What would you like me to say?" Lily asked. Then, blinking, she realized her mistake and swiftly corrected herself, "I mean, what would you like me to teach you first, Grasshopper?"

There, he'd probably know what he could and couldn't do, right? Surely he'd start out easy, the
basics, and work his way up to things that weren't actually possible. Hell, he may even pick something he already knew how to do just to impress her or prove he was better than her somehow. Yes, that seemed like a very Tiny Tom Riddle thing to do.

Lily could totally handle this.

He pondered this for a second, considered her, and for a moment he didn't seem so small at all, or even that unfamiliar. There were moments, not often, but every once in a while, where she kept seeing the man he would become in the child's face. This intense scrutinization, the sheer focus and the way he seemed to see through every part of you, it was painfully familiar.

"I want to learn how to make food from nothing."

Well, shit.

"How about we don't do that?" Lily asked, then winced as his eyes narrowed.

"Why not?" he asked, but it wasn't really an innocent, general 'why not?'. No, it was more the 'I know you're hiding something, you dirty thief, and I will cut you if I find your answer inadequate' kind.

So, it was going to be one of those days.

Well, Lily could try to come up with some bullshit answer, or she could come up with the bullshit answer that was the truth.

She decided to go with the truth. "Food is hard; I'm actually pretty sure there's some magical law or something that says messing with food is not a thing."

Hadn't Hermione said something about that at one point? When she'd been chewing Lily out for casually breaking the laws of reality again with tea? That felt like something Hermione had said, and Wizard Lenin too, for that matter. It'd even had some sort of fancy name, of whatever alchemist had come up with the thing.

Lily, of course, hadn't bothered paying attention, because the laws of this flimsy reality were nothing to her and she could do what she wanted.

She was kind of regretting that now.

"You do it all the time."

"Let's not focus on me, on all the ridiculous stuff I can do, and instead focus on you," Lily said, motioning from herself to Tom Riddle, "Like maybe we can make stuff explode, or light things on fire. I think you'll have a real knack for spontaneously combusting everything around you."

"I think you're stalling."

"I'm not stalling," Lily retorted automatically, when she was in fact clearly stalling, "Besides, don't you find food boring? Exploding's much more entertaining, every great action movie is filled with explosions."

He crossed his arms, his dark eyebrow twitched, and that petulant and unamused look was back on his face as he said, "You're stalling, badly."

Well, she was, but that actually wasn't the point. The point was that if Lily had been in his position,
she would have immediately ditched the food-out-of-nothing idea for explosions. Sure, food was ultimately more practical, but explosions! It would get her one step closer from the Dursleys and suburbia to reenacting Die Hard.

What small, anger-filled child didn't want to fill their lives with explosions?

Apparently this small, anger-filled child. Lily sighed, raked a hand through her hair, and promptly gave up. "Alright, fine, but don't say I didn't warn you."

She took a breath then, ignoring the smug look on his face at getting her to give in, and allowed herself to state out loud the infinite wisdom that was stored inside her head somewhere. "The first step, is to... Well..."

Lily trailed off, mind once again blank, as she tried to think about what the first step of this process even was. It'd been so innate, so easy, for so long that she couldn't actually remember where she would start this whole process. It was like every time Lily tried to do something she didn't just go from A to B, she just ended up at B because she could get to A blindfolded with her hands tied behind her back.

"You do actually know how to do this, right?"

Lily promptly made a set of tea and a pile of sandwiches appear out of nothing, pouring herself and Tiny Tom the doubter a glass and shoving it in his face, "Shut up and let me think."

Tom Riddle promptly shut up and Lily got back to thinking.

"Right," Lily said after a good, long, pause and racking her brain for the very first step Lily always took before manipulating the universe to her casual whims, "The first step is to get a feel for your surroundings."

"What does that even mean?" he asked, mouth half-filled with turkey sandwich.

"That does not sound like the sound of shutting up, Grasshopper," Lily responded, watching as he closed his mouth in annoyance, resuming his chewing while Lily picked up where she left off.

Where had she left off?

Oh, right, the first step on being a badass god-leveled messiah.

"You want to be one with the universe, or at least, have a really good feel for where the threads of the universe are stringier and looser than others," Lily said, motioning towards their surroundings as if indicating the finer threads of their reality, "Because if you feel close enough, this thing is a patchwork piece of garbage that's held together through metaphorical duct tape and chewing gum, and it will probably come apart at any moment."

Tiny Tom did not look at all reassured by that last sentence. "What?"

"Well, probably not now," Lily said, suddenly uncomfortable with the unavoidable end of the universe, or at least uncomfortable telling Tom Riddle that the end of the universe was nigh and unavoidable, "But it's, well, it is what it is. I try not to let it bother me too much."

Before Tom Riddle could swallow his sandwich and ask anything else, Lily continued, "Anyway, parts of it are much thinner than others, and it's these parts that let reality-breaking garbage like magic happen. This is where the money is."
"Wait a minute," he said, voice dripping with sarcasm as he took another sip of his tea and parroted back to her, "You're saying that magic happens, not because of me or you, but because reality's breaking."

"Essentially, yes," Lily said.

"That's bullshit," Tom said with a conviction that Lily could only envy, "That's the dumbest thing I've ever heard in my life, and I live with Dennis and Billy."

"I didn't say it was a pleasant truth—" Lily started, but Tom Riddle apparently wasn't even going to let her finish that thought.

"If reality was breaking then I wouldn't be able to control any of it, and you wouldn't either," he pointed out, "And I know I can control it, even if you can't, so clearly you're just bad at your job."

"No, that's what magic is," Lily said, "Manipulating the fraying strings that make up our reality into some greater pattern that suits our needs. You people just do it on a smaller, more instinctive scale."

"So, you're saying that you're better at it than I am because reality is breaking." Now he was looking offended, borderline angry, the kind of expression that in Lenin Rabbitson had meant that something near Pansy Parkinson was about to burst into flames.

Lily warily glanced at her socks to make sure they weren't combusting yet. "Well, I wasn't going to really put it like that—"

"Then how were you going to put it?"

Lily wasn't going to put it any way at all, because no one had ever asked her for any sort of advice on how to do anything! There was a reason that everyone went to Hermione for tutoring advice instead of Lily.

Instead of answering, Lily summoned forth from beyond the very edge of existence, the great vast pit from which nothing could be made, a single red apple. "Look, what I'm doing here is essentially convincing the universe, behind its back, that there was an apple here in my hand this entire time and it just blinked and missed it. That's how it works, period. I'm not making the apple—well, I am, but what I'm really doing is convincing reality that the apple was already here."

She tossed the apple to him, watching as he had to juggle his sandwich and tea to make room for it, and as he inspected it she continued, "Somewhere out there, there is the possibility, the universe, in which this apple has always existed. I convince the universe that that reality is the one we're currently in."

Slowly, uncertainly, Tom bit into the apple and chewed. Whether he was surprised that it was in fact an apple or not, he didn't say, he just kept slowly chewing as if waiting for it to change into something else. Finally, he looked up, and asked, "And how do I do that?"

How did he do that?

How did Lily do that?

Well, shit.

He was looking at her not only with expectation, but with a growing anger and dubiousness. She better say something fast.
"First thing we do, is we're going to sit here cross-legged in the grass and become one with the universe."

Tom looked down at the grass, still covered in dew given that it was still god only knew what time in the morning. He then looked back at her with raised eyebrows and the clear thought of, 'You must be kidding me' written all over his face.

Lily, always one to lead by example, sat first.

Her jean, cotton shorts were immediately soaked through.

Lily was beginning to regret this whole morning.

Slowly, with clear exasperation on his face, Tom Riddle joined her and looked at her in silent expectation. Lily, stalling, took a long drink of tea while she tried to think of something that could distract him long enough to give her a chance to think of what to say.

"Alright," Lily said with grand authority and wisdom, like any good wise sensei in any decent kung-fu and or karate based film, "First, close your eyes."

"Do I have to?"

"Yes," Lily said, "We do not cut corners in the school of Universe Manipulation. Closing eyes is a must."

With reluctance, and a slight shift as he tried to get comfortable on the damp grass, he closed his eyes. Which probably wasn't something he actually needed to do, but Lily thought it brought this whole thing a sense of atmosphere.

This felt like one of those things where atmosphere was a must.

"Right, now that our eyes are closed, we're going to find our center." That sounded very deep and very necessary.

"How do I find my center?" It sounded like his teeth were gritted, which was not conducive to one's ability to find the inner-serenity needed to manipulate the universe.

"By not thinking about anything," Lily said, "The grass is wet, don't think about it. You're tired and want to go back to sleep, don't think about that either. Your brain is a still pond, in which there are no ripples, and you're just going to sit there and be the pond."

"How do I—"

"Be the pond, Grasshopper," Lily interjected.

It was quiet then, actually sort of relaxing. Sure, it was still cold and wet, and Lily wished she was asleep right now, but it was calm enough. If she sat here long enough, allowed her mind to drift like a river, then she could probably doze off even while sitting up. Funny, she'd never thought meditation was worth much, had indulged in something only vaguely similar to stave off the tedium of the cupboard beneath the stairs, but somewhere along the way she'd forgotten that it was kind of nice. Not necessarily productive, mind, but she could take a deep breath in and let the universe wander away from her for a little while—

A calm, high, voice interrupted her thoughts, "Are we done yet?"
Lily startled back into a more alert state, a question unthinkingly flying out of her mouth as she tried to remember where she was and who she was with, "Are you the pond yet?"

"You didn't even say what that meant!"

Lily cracked an eye open. The boy was trembling with either cold or an uncontained rage, or both for that matter. He was slightly flushed, clearly humiliated and somewhat embarrassed, and probably wasn't about to be held off by meditation for that much longer.

"Right, well, presuming you've found your center, concentrate hard and reach out towards the rest of the world," Lily said, closing her eyes once again, "And when you do that you, well, sort of part the air in front of you and make it into an apple."

And that apparently did it.

Well, it didn't suddenly grant Tom Riddle the ability to make something from nothing, but it did fuel him with enough unmitigated rage and irritation to set fire to Wool's Orphanage.

"That is not an apple," Lily remarked, as Tom opened his eyes with her and turned his head to watch as the orphanage was consumed by flames. To be fair, it was only a small portion of Wool's Orphanage, but it was August and the wooden exterior was unfortunately quite dry.

So, what started as a relatively small fire spread very quickly.

"Oh, hell," Lily said, as smoke began to grow from small thin trails to a great billowing plume.

Tom Riddle slowly, carefully, turned his head to glare at her as if this was somehow Lily's problem, when he had gone and lit the place on fire.

All she could think to say was, "I told you explosions were easier."

There was a large explosion, and the fire whooshed to a great, towering height, fueled by some unknown and mysterious force. Inside, she could hear Mrs. Cole as well as the children screaming in mortal terror.

That, apparently, was the wrong thing to say.

Right, well, it seemed like there was only one thing to do. Lily stood, brushing off her shorts and conjuring shoes onto her feet, shoving her hands in her pockets. With a thought, she sucked the fire back into the void from whence it came, while simultaneously restoring the orphanage and its occupants to their original unblemished state.

"So, I vote that we pretend this morning never happened," Lily said, "You go back inside, I go somewhere else, and we try again… some other time."

Tom had, apparently, absolutely nothing to say to that. Which, really, was probably for the best. Except, no, after a moment of thought he blandly admitted, "I've never lit the orphanage on fire before."

"You never lit the orphanage on fire," Lily responded, and on seeing his questioning glance explained, "If they don't know about it, and we don't tell them, then it never happened."

He considered that for a moment, staring at Wool's in all its depressing glory, and said slowly, "… that doesn't feel right."
"The important piece is we learned a valuable lesson," Lily said, "I'm not sure what it was about, or what it even was, but I'm sure it was really important."

The silence after that statement was both painful and awkward.

"Right," Lily said again, more to herself than to him, "I'm going to go to London and make myself a lot of money. You… don't light things on fire while I'm gone."

Under normal circumstances, a few days ago, he probably would have protested that both verbally and magically by trying to light Lily on fire and seeing how she liked it. It said a lot towards his state of shock that all he could do was just sort of stand there and nod while Lily teleported away from the yard to leave him with the nonexistent aftermath of a problem Lily refused to deal with.

Which left Lily where she currently was, in front of Gringotts, thinking that being a drug dealer was somehow so much easier than dealing with the children.

There was something that felt wrong about that thought.

"Well," Lily said to herself, "To be fair, I have been doing this sort of thing a little longer."

With that, she brushed herself up, raised herself to her full height, glanced at the homeless dark wizard she'd dressed as her snooty butler and given a chunk of gold and the promise of wizard booze, and made her way into Gringotts.

"Goblins!" she cried out as she made her way in, "This Hogwarts letter sent to me said something about a currency for the wizards and to set up an account. My butler Jeeves has escorted me, rich heiress daughter of an American heiress and lord, to make it happen."

"Yes," Jeeves, said, although how he could manage to slur a word like yes so badly when Lily was fairly sure he hadn't had a drink in the past few hours was beyond her.

But when you were recruiting from the literal gutter of magical London for fake butlers, you kind of had to deal with what you got.

The important thing was that money, unlike children, was something Lily was very good at.
In which Lily benevolently provides employment to the blood sucking unfortunates of England, Tom Riddle comes to terms with his own powers and that of Lily, and things seem to slide into place.

It wasn't as if she didn't see Tom Riddle after that disastrous and awkward morning; they lived in the same room, after all, but somehow it felt as if he was thousands of miles away from her. As distant, perhaps, as Wizard Lenin was more than fifty years removed from Lily in this strange world of 1937.

He was there, but he seemed smaller, unobtrusive in a way that for him was so unnatural, and lost in his own thoughts for days on end. Not as if he was any solemn dark-haired child, but as if he was only half inside this world and was half in some world beyond Lily's imagining.

It was late into the evening when she got back from London, after having to barter with the goblins, set up accounts, and then go back and find whatever bastard owned the building and lot that would soon become Riddle Inc. She'd been tired, not just emotionally but somehow physically tired as well. She couldn't really explain why; she had no reason to be and had certainly been through worse, but it seemed like a weight had come crashing down on her shoulders, and it was all she could do to put one foot in front of the other. The day had just been so… long.

And she hadn't really wanted to deal with anything else Tom Riddle or the universe might throw at her.

Either way, she'd thought nothing of it when she'd appeared without a word in their shared bedroom and slid under the covers and into sweet oblivion. Only the next morning did she groggily realize that she hadn't said a word to her temperamental roommate, hadn't even given him an acknowledging nod. Stranger yet, Tom Riddle hadn't demanded one.

She'd missed breakfast, slept through it entirely and found herself walking down to an eerily empty dining room. It'd struck her, then, that every morning (barring that first morning when she'd stuck him gagged to a wall) he'd made sure she knew exactly when breakfast started and that she wasn't a second late to feed him magic scones.

Standing there, she'd felt something like a ghost, a shadow on the wall of the orphanage, there but not truly. Only visible or noticeable to Tom Riddle, and this was by intention, but all the same… Even at Hogwarts, when her life had felt contrived at best, she had never felt quite like this.

As if her existence, in its own way, relied solely on the attention and acknowledgement of the orphan Wizard Lenin had once been.

She'd done her best to shrug it off, instead told herself it was for the best and she needed to get this Riddle Incorporated thing running anyway. She wanted a headquarters to show Frank before she brought him into the fold, wanted everything decorated the way it should be, like she could make an island of her childhood in this foreign land. It'd just seemed suddenly important that everything there
be perfect, exactly how she remembered it when she was only six, even if it meant she had to spend a few days in London running here and running there to get everything in order.

And he must have shrugged it off as well, or else disregarded it better than Lily ever could, because he didn't say a word. Just stared forward into space, in the way that Wizard Lenin very rarely had, when the world had drained his ambitions and dreams of grandeur from him and left the wary and fearful man in their stead. Someone who, all at once, realized how small a single human life truly was. It was how he, Wizard Lenin, often looked out at the train station called Purgatory.

And every once in a while, in those few days since the lesson that never should have happened, those pale eyes would meet hers across the bedroom or the dining hall or the orphanage yard. It'd only be for a second, a moment, but the sight would stay with her hours after he'd turned his head away. They hadn't burned as his eyes usually burned, nor had they cut; instead they'd been pale as glass and just as reflective. A single, solitary question inside of them: "Who are you?"

And for whatever reason Lily couldn't quite put into words, she found that she preferred the petty raging and temper tantrums, the overblown ego and pride. This, whatever this was, it didn't suit either of them.

More, she didn't know how any of this would lead them down the path that was Tom Riddle's transformation into the man he would one day become.

Finally, as they hit the last week of August and the end of summer, Lily broke.

It was the idea that she should probably finally talk to Frank, after giving him a week or so to pit his terrible circumstances and poor life choices against Lily's alluring offer of employment, that did it.

Somehow it just hadn't seemed right that Lily Riddle would move forward so cleanly, so easily, when the task she'd actually set out to do seemed to be slipping like sand through her fingers. That and…

If this was 1992, if this was Lily's world, then of course Wizard Lenin would be by her side. He'd either still be stuck in her head, grousing as usual, deeply uncomfortable with the fact that Lily really was Lily Riddle this whole time, or else he'd be walking along beside her stating how he had better things to do but still showing up anyway.

Because that's what they did, even when he left Hogwarts and she was brainwashed by his alter ego, or when she was decades behind in the past without any idea what she was doing. If it was anything of worth, they did it together.

And it'd taken Tom Riddle ignoring her and everything else to really cement in how much she missed him.

She'd thought it often enough, but it hadn't really sunk in – like an anchor on her heart plunging down to her feet – until then.

He was sitting by himself in the yard beneath the tree, in his usual bubble of shadows and solitude as he stared out at the other orphans. Unlike Lily's first few days here, though, there was none of the usual haughty contempt as he stared out at his peers, but instead that emptiness which was becoming worryingly familiar.

Still occupied by thoughts and concerns beyond her imagining.

Still, with a jig in her step and a plan to be set in motion, Lily moseyed towards him while, out of nowhere at all, she found herself singing a half-remembered song under her breath, "Tall and tan
and young and lovely, the girl from Ipanema goes walking, and when she passes, each one she passes goes – ah."

Wizard Lenin, despite all his posturing, had always had a fondness for Frank Sinatra and classic big band hits that had been caught somewhere between his youth and more wizened years. Often, in the back of Lily's mind during duller moments, she'd find the melody of "Fly Me to the Moon" drifting through her unconscious thoughts.

But it was a little too soon for Frank Sinatra, she thought as she looked at this younger Tom Riddle.

A smile, unbidden and unstoppable, slid across Lily's lips as she stepped closer to his hunched form. "When she walks, she's like a samba that swings so cool and sways so gentle, that when she passes, each one she passes goes – ooh."

The boy that would become Wizard Lenin lifted his head, finally recognizing her approach, but there was still nothing in him. There was not even the slightest hint of recognition. "Oh, but I watch her so sadly. How can I tell her I love her? Yes, I would give my heart gladly, but each day when she walks to the sea, she looks straight ahead, not at me…"

Lily reached his feet, letting the melody and words drift into the air, and in her mind the next line played, that final line of quiet yearning: Tall, and tan, and young and lovely, the girl from Ipanema goes walking, and when she passes, I smile – but she doesn't see.

Instead, in a voice that was far too hoarse for this early in the morning, she said, "I have a fondness for Sinatra."

He said nothing to that, not a disdainful pout and remark that he didn't know who or what Sinatra was, nor anything about how he was too good for her popular music. Instead, his eyes moved down to her feet, to her worn, off-white tennis shoes, and finally past her and out into the yard again as if she was as transparent as windexed glass.

"So, we're not talking again?" Lily finally asked. It sounded like an easy thing to say, as if Lily could be asking any question at all, and yet the back of her mind was still humming "The Girl from Ipanema" and watching a man who watched the sea.

He didn't say anything, neither confirming nor denying that the shaky foundations they'd built between them had managed to crumble in less than a morning.

She hadn't realized that she and Lenin were a castle built on pillars of sand.

She took a seat next to him with a sigh, staring out with him at the rest of the world, waiting for a word or two. She could, she thought, be waiting fifty years or more. All the same, even more than a drug empire that didn't exist but must exist, this seemed like the most important thing in the world.

Even if he was only a half-formed shadow of the man he'd become.

"I'm going into London today again," Lily said, not looking at him but instead still looking out and leaving her words only as an offering, "And I have money this time. If you want books, then you should come."

He said nothing.

"Books are better, I think, than I ever could be at teaching," Lily admitted, and here her voice did shake a little. She wished she could have been more help, she wished she could have been better, she wished she had some inkling of how it worked for someone like him.
She didn't though; she only had her own absurd gifts, and once upon a time she'd seen nothing wrong with that.

Now, though, she wished she could be worth more than a textbook written by a wizard.

"They, at least, can explain why you can't make food," Lily said with a small, bitter laugh. Whoever's last name was attached to that particular law of the universe would be in bold print, no doubt.

Finally, he looked over at her and seemed to see her again in a way he hadn't managed to for days. His voice was soft, quiet, and she could barely catch his words as he admitted, "I couldn't do it."

"What?" she asked, but he was already looking past her.

"I tried all morning after you left, all afternoon too, but I couldn't do any of it," he said, and for the first time an edge of emotion crept into his voice, frustration laced with pure desperation, "I couldn't disappear and reappear somewhere else, I couldn't make anyone think I was somewhere I wasn't, I couldn't make food or anything at all out of nothing… Just parlor tricks, that's all I can do on my own."

"Most can't even do that," Lily said softly, but he shook his head, an angry flush spreading across his high cheekbones.

"I wasn't supposed to just be most," he said, not without bitterness and more than a fair bit of longing.

"You aren't." But she didn't know how to make that obvious, that he was as much a diamond in the rough as he'd always suspected, that he really was a step above his wizard brethren. He just wasn't her.

And she wondered if that same question had haunted him more than fifty years later, in its own way. He'd accused her of making his life into a farce, that if she was what his friend had been, then his life had no purpose. That he always, would always, be standing in her shadow…

And how it didn't matter that, if it was up to her, she would never loom so large as to overshadow him completely.

"I promise, Len—Tom," she corrected herself, wincing at the name that so unthinkingly fell from her lips almost like an endearment, "You're not."

She held out her hand to him with a smile, even as he dubiously stared at her pale fingers, "Come with me, see for yourself. Let me buy you books and set you loose. You'll see."

And then, in a year's time when he was eleven and Hogwarts opened his doors, he'd take the world by storm. Casting such a large shadow, in time, that his very name would be banished from the spoken and written English tongue.

He must have read enough in her grin, gained some measure of confidence and faith, because tentatively his fingers met her and finally his hand rested in hers.

"They better be some damn good books," he grumbled, but a smile danced at the edge of his lips and threatened to take them over at any moment. Lily magnanimously let it slide.

Instead, she hurled them forward through time and space and straight into the heart of Diagon Alley.
"Bloody hell," Lily said as she was almost immediately shoved to the side by a panicking family in search of last-minute school supplies. She'd forgotten that the end of August heralded the start of Hogwarts term in September.

"Right, try to ignore the crowds," Lily said, glancing over at her stunned, winded, and slightly green companion (teleportation tended to be rough on whatever poor fool was dragged along for the ride), "They'll thin out in a week or so."

Tom just nodded, pulled himself together, and brushed himself off as he tried to regain whatever semblance of dignity he had. Which, given that he was only ten, wasn't as much as he thought it was.

"Come on then," Lily said as she pulled him through the crowds and into the overcrowded bookstore, "Right, you're going to want to start on the beginner material, which is somewhere in this direction."

Lily pulled him towards the corner that seemed most saturated with overeager eleven and twelve-year-olds, each only slightly taller and more gangly than Tom himself. Each was practically buzzing with excitement, though, even those who looked like they'd been there and done that either by being born into a wizarding family or else having an older sibling. There was that kind of tingle in the air that had always been present for Dudley on Christmas morning.

Lily herself had never experienced it, either at Christmas or shopping for Hogwarts. Christmas because the holiday was either spent slaving away at the Dursleys’ and watching Dudley be rewarded with mounds of gifts, or else filled with murder and despair. Hogwarts because, well, even in the beginning she had somehow known it would not live up to Wizard Lenin's expectations. Still, she suddenly found herself wondering if she'd missed out on something dreadfully important.

At the sight of the shelves of books, Tom's eyes widened in longing and stark envy.

"Once you make your way through those, we can come back for something a little more dangerous," Lily said, because she had no illusions that he'd devour his way through the first and second-year Hogwarts curriculums even without a wand at his disposal. He had always been the type to bend the world to suit his needs, no matter the impossibilities of his task.

He just didn't quite know it yet.

"And you'll pay for all this?" he asked, glancing over at her with narrowed eyes like he was just waiting for the other shoe to drop. If only because, she was suddenly certain, no one had ever gone out of their way to do anything for Tom Riddle.

"Consider it a gift," Lily said, and then relented at his increasingly hostile and dubious expression, "Money's not an object anymore."

Or, at least, it wouldn't be as soon as she had a decent explanation of where it all was coming from. Which she planned to work on soon enough, having sent Frank a letter that morning to go ahead and meet her at Riddle Incorporated's new address.

"Money's not an object anymore," Little Wizard Lenin repeated doubtfully, exactly how Wizard Lenin might fifty-odd years later. It was a mix not just of doubt but of a biting, scathing, sarcasm that left little to the listener's imagination of just what Wizard Lenin thought of their intelligence.

Somehow, she'd even missed that.

"Look," Lily said with a painfully casual shrug, "I have my ways and you wouldn't care about the details. So, go nuts."
Well, he probably would care about the details, but that was too bad for him, because Lily just wasn’t going there. Still, apparently he wasn’t one to look a gift horse in the mouth, because he soon enough was shoving his way through the adolescent throng and watching as Lily pulled all the first and second year textbooks and then some.

His eyes widened comically, his jaw falling open, and Lily dimly remembered that this was more books than there were in the orphanage’s shared and battered library.

He waited in stunned, eerie, silence while they waited in line for the register. Like he couldn’t quite believe what was happening, even as families argued, chattered, and noisily went about their business all around them.

It was only when they were outside and Lily was dumping the stack into his hands that he asked, hesitantly, "These are mine, then?"

"What the hell would I do with them?" Lily asked, because really, she'd never even bothered to read those books when she was supposed to and still considered them mostly bullshit. Just, you know, the kind of bullshit that would help him along. She then winced, realizing what she'd just said and that he’d view it as some kind of insult, but there was nothing of the sort; instead he just kept staring at the books in quiet wonder.

And then it started to get a little awkward.

She hadn't realized it'd mean this much to him; she'd said she'd do as much the other day and he'd seemed to view it as his god given right. Like of course Lily was going to go and buy him books and prevent him from burning down the establishment.

She rubbed the back of her head, trying to search for something to say. The trouble was that they kind of had to go their separate ways, for a few hours at least. She’d thought he'd run off as soon as he had what he wanted; he’d done that last time, after all. Now, though, he seemed content to stand exactly where he was and just stare at her like he'd never seen anything like her before in his life.

"So," Lily finally said, "You want to find somewhere to read those? Maybe grab lunch?"

Lily wasn’t overly fond of The Leaky Cauldron, but it had food, and he could occupy a booth for a solid few hours while Lily met Frank.

He nodded slowly and followed her as she pushed through the crowd, maybe pushing them to the side a little more forcefully than was necessary, and got them into the Leaky Cauldron. Which, of course, was bloody packed.

"I hate August," Lily said with a shudder.

Walking up to a booth in the back, she looked at the occupants, some teenaged couple on a date in Diagon Alley who clearly had been here forever and weren't going anywhere anytime soon, and decided that it was as good a table as any. "You have decided it's time to leave now."

They blinked back at her, not understanding for a moment, and then the compulsion kicked in and in a dazed voice the plain-looking boy repeated, "We've decided it's time to leave!"

"Right," the girl said, "I guess we have been here a while. We should get ice cream, it's such a hot day."

Then they were both walking out in a daze, leaving Lily and Tom to slide into the seats across from one another.
"That," Tom said slowly, contemptuously, like he thought she'd been trying to impress him or pull a fast one, "I'm very good at. I've been doing that sort of thing for years."

"Good for you," Lily said and then pointed to his stack of books in a deliberate manner, "Read those and find out what you're not good at yet."

He frowned but picked up the first – Transfiguration – which he might actually have a shot at without a wand. It was hard for Lily to say one way or another; most needed one, but they also hadn't bothered to say words in Transfiguration, so maybe you didn't really need the stick of wood either. Well, either way, he'd find out for himself soon enough.

"Did you read any of these?" he asked as he flipped through the table of contents.

She should probably lie, but it wasn't really in her nature to be anything but bluntly honest, and so she just sighed and admitted, "I was supposed to, but I never really got around to it. Don't use me as your example though. I'm... Well..."

Lily trailed off awkwardly, not having a way, or at least not a good way, to put it into words. He seemed to get it though, for once, as he just quietly nodded. He looked away from his book and towards the other tables, to everyone and their wands, and Lily who had none.

Finally, he said, "You really are different, aren't you?"

Lily had nothing to say to that – nothing he'd appreciate, at any rate. All she could do was, yet again, sort of rub at the back of her head and try to think of something else to say. He was just so... different today.

Had this really just been brought on by lighting the orphanage on fire?

"Right, so I actually have a few errands to run today," Lily said, motioning vaguely towards the door and the rest of Diagon Alley, "Do you mind waiting here for a few hours until I get back?"

His eyebrow ticked in irritation. "And what am I supposed to do?"

"I can drop you off at the orphanage if you want," Lily offered, and then pointing to his stack said, "But I figured you'd rather be here and rather read these."

He considered this quietly, mulling over his options, and with a sigh relented. "I suppose it's better than Wool's."

Damn straight it was.

Lily grinned back at him, a look he returned with disbelief and raised eyebrows. Still, something seemed to have changed between them, for real this time. Perhaps they were built on pillars of sand, but it was a more solid foundation than she'd feared a few hours before now.

It didn't matter if he was ten, if he didn't really know her. In this single moment, everything was fine.

"I'll see you later, then."

Her last sight of him, as she stepped out the door, was of his nose buried in a book as large as his face. Somehow, she thought, she wouldn't be surprised if he was in the exact same position when she managed to make her way back.

"Right," Lily said to herself, "There's work to be done."
She ducked out of the alley and into the far less crowded, and far more sketchy, Knockturn Alley. There was the familiar sight of wizards who looked like they were addicted to some potion or another, the prostitutes in the gutter, and all the dark creatures wizards weren't truly comfortable with.

With hair black again, Lily weaved her way with an instinctive grace through the lot of them, ignoring their raised eyebrows and whispers at seeing a little girl walk with unquestioned confidence through the gutter. She walked past each and every one of them, past the antique shops selling goods that should be banned, the brothels, and the dive pubs, until she was at the recently purchased building at the very end of the street.

And the sign, of course, that she'd painted herself.

"Riddle Inc.: Abandon Hope All Ye Who Enter Here or Just Leave it at the Door for Later."

It was magnificent.

And there he was, staring up at the sign with his jaw hanging open and his eyes wide and crimson, like if he blinked long enough reality would start readjusting itself.

With a grin, Lily walked up towards him, waving and motioning to her sign. "Pretty cool, huh?"

He opened his mouth to say something, but Lily didn't give him a chance, instead moving past him and towards the door, unlocking it wordlessly and ushering him inside. The inside wasn't quite where she'd wanted it to be yet; most everything was there, but there were still a few key aspects that weren't quite right that she'd have to find time to put together. "Well, it will be. Right now it's just the sign and stuff inside."

He craned his head to get a better view of the posters, lava lamps, and everything else Lily had conjured from nothing, but Lily kept pushing him through until they were in Frank's back office. Which, at the moment, was her own back office, as Frank wasn't quite at his most Frank yet.

She left him standing in front of the oak desk and moved around it, opening drawers to get out all those sheets of paper Frank loved so dearly in this job, the list of their costs and assets and everything that would make them run like a business. "Now, I have enough counterfeit money to get us the basics, but we need to get down to business fast if the goblins are going to buy this."

"You stole from the goblins?!!" It was the first thing he said, the first time he'd had a chance to say anything, and he looked at her like she'd just gone and told him she ate children in her spare time. Which, for a vampire, was a rather impressive sort of look.

He also looked like he was really starting to regret coming in here.

"Hell no, I'm not stupid." She sat down at the desk, at the great wheelie chair that was twice her size, and raised her eyebrows at his doubting impertinence (he really didn't have the yes-man thing down yet and it just was so not-Frank it pained her), "No, I didn't steal from the goblins, I gave stolen – well, fake – money to them."

He blinked once, then twice, then a third time, and admitted, "I don't understand."

Lily sighed and returned to sifting through the desk for his contract of employment, because he was the type who liked things like that. "Well, Frank – can I call you Frank? I'm going to call you Frank."

She didn't give Frank a chance to insist that his name wasn't really Frank (because it was and he was
just going to have to get over that one.)

Instead, in a very proud voice, she explained the beginnings of her great scheme to him (which had gone surprisingly well, even relying on a homeless drunkard), "The goblins keep a very close eye on how much gold is travelling through the market, so faking gold (which isn't easy even on a good day) would not be an option. They'd know that the money didn't come from anywhere."

With a bright look in her eyes, she leaned forward, grinning, letting him in on the dirty little secret of the magical world in the 1940's. "However, there is one currency they keep almost no track of – muggle money."

For emphasis, she produced from nothing a twenty pound note, which to a wizard would look like any other twenty pound note and hardly a forgery at all. "With the influx of muggleborns, they've had no choice but to accept it and set up a currency exchange, but they don't know how to check for counterfeit muggle money. It's only paper, after all, not gold, no magical traces, just pieces of paper with a number on it. Who can tell one piece of paper from another, I ask you?"

She then motioned magnanimously to herself in all of her glory. "So, let's say a very wealthy-looking young girl walks into a bank with a butler of some type and a briefcase filled with muggle cash and says, 'I would like to open an account for my tenure in Hogwarts, and I would like this money to be converted into whatever the peons require.'"

"It's not so hard to transfigure an outfit or to find a bum on the street who will walk into a bank with you for a sickle." Her grin became even more conspiratorial as she finally pulled out of the desk his contract as her number-one henchman. "Really, it's almost too easy."

And if Frank had nothing to say against that, the way that Tom Riddle had nothing to say against her either, well then, more power to the pair of them.

For once, she thought, everything was coming up Lily.
In which we have a time skip and Lily gives Death the clip show of her tropical vacation in Wool's Orphanage circa 1937, Lily and Tom embark on several shenanigans, and Death and Lily discuss a prophecy and what it means to be Harry Potter.

"You know, this 1930's shindig isn't really as terrible as I initially thought," Lily noted to Uncle Death on a fine Sunday afternoon in early November, in a train station that wasn't a train station at all.

It was just the two of them, as it had once so long ago just been the two of them without either Rabbit or Wizard Lenin to join them in the world beyond all worlds.

That still…

It'd been more than once now, a fair number of times—things tended to go off the rails when Lily forgot to make time for Death—but all the same, it still felt as if there was something missing horribly from this place without that pair.

Without Wizard Lenin, really.

And it struck Lily now and then that he'd never be here again. Wizard Lenin had no intention of dying; more, even if he did, without Lily's help he'd never set one foot in this place.

This world was forever lost to him now, and Lily wondered if he'd ever considered grieving for it.

Lily forced her mind away from the chronic bout of melancholy she seemed plagued with these days. "I mean, there's no television, and radio dramas are censored and boring as all hell, but it really hasn't been too bad."

"Really?" was all Uncle Death could ask, apparently still not sold, even months later, that Lily had this in the bag.

The Lily Riddle thing had been surprisingly easy to set up, or rather, to coerce Frank into setting it up for her, like usual. He somehow managed to find some equally homeless and depressed vampires who'd do just about anything for some money, Lily glitched some truly nasty narcotics into existence, and it was like they'd never left off in the first place.

Well, except that the Lily Riddle reputation wasn't quite in place yet. People would give her the strangest of looks catching her loitering around Knockturn Alley, clearly wondering if she was lost or had been abducted by dark wizard rapist pimps.

There was some recognition, months later, that the dark-haired little girl who for whatever reason wasn't in Hogwarts wasn't that odd of a sight, but none of the instinctive and overwhelming fear that had hung over her like a shadow whenever Lily had donned her alter ego in the future.
Slowly but surely, that hole was being carved out for Lily so that fifty years later she could so very easily slide into it.

As for Tom Riddle, that had somehow gotten easier, even if Lily really had no idea how she'd managed it. Apparently, books were the key to baby Wizard Lenin's heart, and he'd spent the next several weeks holed up with basic Hogwarts textbooks, his head only reemerging from the pages to ask Lily a thousand questions on the theory of magic she didn't know the answer to.

Somehow, Lily's flailing attempts not to just say "it's all bullshit" didn't deter him from asking, and in time Lily just became comfortable enough to shrug and say she had no idea because she just did what she wanted and it worked out. That, or try to remember what Hermione Granger might have said in any given situation and lamely parrot back half-remembered lectures on whatever she'd been so passionate about.

Beyond that, he seemed to accept that if Lily wasn't his equal she certainly wasn't lesser, per se, and was at the very least worthy of his company. So as summer stretched into fall she found herself more often than not in his company, just like the good old days. Those early days before Hogwarts had ever started and she could all but picture him moodily sitting beside her and looking down on Lily's peers.

It wasn't quite the same, but it was…

It was strange, how natural it'd been once Tom Riddle decided that it should and would happen.

Point being, time was practically flying by. In a few weeks they'd be in good old 1938, and… Well, maybe Lily hadn't quite figured out that time travel to the future thing, but it couldn't be that hard, right?

"Really," Lily insisted with a grin, "Look, I'll show you!"

With a wave of her hand she summoned forth a projector and screen, the ultimate slide show of Lily's vacation to the past. Death stared at it in utter horror, apparently all too aware of what was about to happen.

"Lily, I really don't need to see—"

Too late. Lily clicked the first slide, an image fueled by recent memories of herself and Tiny Tom.

"This is me and Proto Lenin at Wool's recent adoption day," Lily summarized with a smile. "It did not go well."

The memory itself was of Proto Lenin looking as if he wanted to burst into a tower of flames and die, while Lily stood next to him, awkwardly taller and looking very out of place. The whole thing had been a bit anticlimactic, in Lily's opinion. Tom was absurdly pretty enough to garner interest for the first second or so, but then they saw the expression on his face and it was all downhill from there.

Lily, for her own part, had learned that she did not have the same unspoken charisma that Wizard Lenin did.

Now, Lily didn't necessarily consider herself bad-looking, she was at that awkward adolescent age where no one was really considered all that good-looking, but something about her must have seemed off enough that they just took one look at her face and turned around to fawn over sickly Amy.

Tom Riddle had sniffed and tried to console her by saying that they typically liked them young.
Except he hadn't managed to maintain that for very long and also flat out said that Lily just wasn't adopted child material.

While he, apparently, could be if he tried.

He just didn't want to try.

(Apparently, whether he had been Wizard Lenin, Wizard Trotsky, Squirrel, or the full package deal, he’d always been a bit of a condescending ass.)

Of course, it had ended up getting even worse when Dennis had decided to show off and get revenge by pushing Tom Riddle down the stairs. Who then, of course, in his own panicked vengeance, had used his newly learned magical powers to light Dennis' pants on fire and cover his legs in some truly nasty burns. This of course was all while a horde of horrified prospective parents watched what they had no choice but to believe was the antichrist.

Lily honestly didn't know how he'd managed to get by without Lily being around to constantly wipe the memories of everyone about all the shit he pulled. Lily didn't even like doing it; these days after Morgan Gaunt, the whole idea of tampering with memory left her downright queasy. She kept staring at these prospective victims, and even if she was convinced they were barely people at all, she kept seeing herself in the Chamber of Secrets staring back.

To erase memory was the closest Lily would ever come to death.

Right, that belonged in the box of philosophical melancholia that must never be opened. Lily forcefully clicked her way to the next slide with a grin. "And here’s me and Proto Lenin with all our orphan friends."

It was a still image of the pair of them in the yard with Lily somehow engaged in fisticuffs with Dennis. Now, Lily didn't exactly know how she had gotten dragged into that, except that Tom, while feisty, was also tiny, and Dennis could kick the absolute shit out of him. All Tom really had going for him was the Shining and his wits, which often were good enough, but sometimes not enough protection from Dennis' meaty fists.

Lily herself wasn't exactly as large as the oversized orphan, but she was older and taller, and had the benefit of being a god.

So, Lily and Dennis had gone a round or two after Dennis had accused Tiny Tom of stealing his shit (which apparently Tiny Tom had done because something something he was better than everyone else something something they had to learn their lesson something something I don't have to explain myself to you), with Lily as the surprise lightweight champion.

"Why are you punching that tall one in the face?" Death asked, leaning closer as if Tom's captured expression that was half mortification and half joy could tell him something.

"You know," Lily said after a beat, "Even I'm not really sure. Let's move on to the next one."

Lily clicked, and the image changed, this time to her and Tiny Tom's shared room, which was now overflowing with books purchased from Diagon Alley at exorbitant prices. Tom Riddle's awe over having someone buy something for him hadn't lasted too long, and he was pushing to see just how far that went and how much cash he could suck out of her.

Lily wondered when he realized that she had literally unlimited money.

Probably about the same time he acknowledged that she had literally unlimited power.
"There's Proto Lenin reading through third year Hogwarts material and trying to tell the future by staring at tea," Lily pointed out as the small boy stared at his cup with a focus that would be alarming if it wasn't so painfully adorable. "It didn't work out."

He'd ended up throwing the cup at the wall just over Lily's head and claiming that the books told him his future was a cosmic cesspool of despair.

Lily...

She hadn't been sure what to say to that.

"You bought him books?!” Death asked, paling, as if Lily had just committed the gravest mistake he'd ever heard of and damned them all. Which, really, Lily had come from the future, she knew exactly how supplying Tom Riddle with books worked out.

So, maybe it hadn't worked out that well for Britain, but that wasn't really Lily's problem, was it?

"What else was I supposed to do with him?" Lily asked. "It's much better than me trying to teach him anything."

Death ran a hand through his dark hair, looking so oddly human and beyond his wit's end. "He was a prodigy as it was, Lily. Tom Riddle does not need preliminary instruction."

"I thought you said that you trusted my decisions," Lily huffed, side-eyeing Death, who looked as if he only just now realized he'd been caught in his own trap.

"I did," he said quietly. "I do, but—I have to constantly remind myself that your world isn't my world, that you aren't me, even though there are a thousand and one differences between us. You didn't enjoy Quidditch, you didn't destroy the diary, and your Tom Riddle is not mine."

He looked back at the screen, green eyes almost glowing. "I would never have trusted any incarnation of Tom Riddle with this, even though it'd be rather pointless, as he'd have access to it within the course of a few months. Any advantage I handed him, any opportunity, I was fully aware he would use it to destroy me and everything I believed in."

"It sounds like you were quite the mortal enemies, then," Lily said softly in turn, no longer focused on the picture of her and the Wizard Lenin before he'd become Wizard Lenin.

Strange; that was probably how it was supposed to be, her and Tom Marvolo Riddle on the opposite sides of a coin. They were supposed to be mutually exclusive, water and oil separating out into their factions of light and dark. Any similarity the pair of them shared would only serve to highlight the stark contrast between them.

And yet, it had never been like that. For one Tom Riddle, the original, perhaps, but even then Lily would not label him as her mortal enemy. He would destroy her, if he felt he had to, and she would certainly do him no favors, but—

But it wasn't the same thing.

"Yes," Death said with a rather wry note to his voice, "We were certainly that. Prophesied to destroy one another, neither living while the other survived."

His lips twitched. "Of course, I wonder—if I left him alive, would I have been able to remain Harry Potter?"
"What do you mean?" Lily asked, because this was new, or at least from Uncle Death it was new. In Wizard Lenin's memory, in her trip inside his mindscape, there had been that moment in the Malfoy manor with Severus Snape kneeling at his feet.

And a prophecy whose ending neither Wizard Lenin nor Lily had ever heard.

"You're nearly thirteen, Lily," Death said quietly, looking past her and into every pixel of Lily's projected memory. "Terribly young, and yet you have always been forced to be so much older than I ever was at your age. And I've learned that keeping things from you only leads to disaster. If I had told you about the Chamber, even years before it happened…"

He trailed off, leaving Lily to stare at him and try to search for words, because she'd said words about that before but it seemed as if it was still haunting him. Like when she wasn't here, when she slipped to the world of the living, his mind would turn Morgan Gaunt and Lily's lost battle with the diary over and over again inside his mind.

Searching for a way through the labyrinth of what had already come to pass in order to find a way that it never happened.

"In my world, and I'm sure yours as well, there is a prophecy regarding me, you, and the dark lord Tom Marvolo Riddle."

"I—" Lily stopped herself, trailed off, barely aware as the photo on the screen bled away back into Lily's memories. "I know, but it's… Isn't it supposed to be about Neville?"

Which she still wasn't entirely sure how to process, honestly. Except that in retrospect some of Wizard Lenin's comments, his focus on Neville, made more sense than it had at the time. Except, even then, Neville didn't seem like a host to that kind of power.

"No, Lily," Death said, looking down at her and shaking his head. "Trust me it is not."

He looked like a god again, some avatar of a crow lost in mortal human form, more like a god than he had in ages. Only this time Lily wondered if she sometimes didn't look the same, that as she grew she looked more and more like him rather than Lily and James Potter.

Lily had the sudden dawning realization that she was looking into the reflection of her future self.

"The prophecy was always… unclear at best. Albus Dumbledore spent the last sixteen years of his life attempting to interpret it. Of course, attempting to interpret that man's words for truth even with millennia of reflection is… difficult. The first part of the prophecy specified who, narrowing it down to either myself or Neville Longbottom, and the latter was how."

"I was prophesied to have the capability of defeating the dark lord with a power he knew not, and that neither of us could live while the other survived."

Lily blinked, and blinked again, trying to interpret that. "But you did live, though."

"Yes." It was a slow word, one almost hissed out, bitterness laced in the single syllable that hovered in the air long after the sound of it had ended. "For seventeen years I was Harry James Potter, son of James and Lily Potter, unwitting and unassuming hero. He, for his own part, was little better than a wraith shuffled through a barrage of mortal shells. For many years, I assumed that it meant Tom Riddle had not truly been living, that when he sealed my fate as his opponent on October 31, 1981, he destroyed every meaningful remnant of himself. He was not, after all, really living."

He continued, his voice growing louder, his hands clenching against his dark foreign robes. "And I
assumed that I destroyed him, as Dumbledore said, with the power of love and friendship. Something Tom Riddle could never possibly understand, was utterly incapable of ever knowing."

"And it was so easy because it was so very convenient. I never assumed that if it applied to him then it applied to me too, that just as Lord Voldemort was his half-baked idea at life, Harry James Potter was mine. That in destroying him, I destroyed all chance I had at any normal and meaningful life. And that maybe the power he knew not was a power that Dumbledore himself didn't know either—maybe I didn't even truly know it, not as Harry Potter."

"Your Tom Riddle terrifies me because of that," Death said, finally looking over to stare into Lily's eyes, his own wide and filled with a terror that sank all the way down into his soul. "He loves you, Lily, in one horcrux or another, that has been made painfully clear. He knows love, even if it's tinted with denial or desperation, I know that yours knows it. And if love isn't the power, and you've never truly been a Harry Potter, then—"

"Then how am I not living while he's surviving?" Lily finished for him.

For a moment they sat in stark silence, contemplating Death's words, each waiting for the other to speak while Lily considered a prophecy that she'd never heard in full and never expected to hear. She was…

She was not surprised. Ellie Potter had always seemed like something of a prophesied warrior, and yet something in her had not expected this. Still, really, did not expect it. Ellie Potter was such a divorced role to Lily; it had never struck her that it could really be applying to the her that existed beneath the mask of Eleanor Lily Potter.

That the prophecy, more than anyone or anything else, saw the truth of the world.

"Lenin said it was about a boy," Lily noted quietly. "I think everyone thinks it's about a boy."

"I don't know how that's possible," Death said, "Because Lily, it will never be Neville Longbottom. I don't know why it's me, I have never understood why I'm the way I am, but I know that it wasn't him, and not just because the dark lord didn't choose him that night."

Yes but…

"If Dumbledore knows—"

"If it's anything like my world, then he knows intimately and has kept those words engraved on his heart for twelve years," Death interjected.

"If he knows, then he's never talked to me about it," Lily said slowly, trying to understand just how Albus Dumbledore fit into the prophecy that wasn't about her but somehow was.

"He didn't tell me until I was fifteen, and only then because he had no other choice," Death said. "Albus Dumbledore is a man of many secrets and few confidences. He'll only tell you what he believes you need to know."

"No, but I mean he's really never talked to me about anything," Lily insisted. "I mean, first year I met with him a few times while I was there, but then I warned him about Squirrel and everything turned into a dumpster fire and that was kind of it. Otherwise, I don't know, he just gives me weird shit to do like being Quidditch captain."

"You're not me," Death said with a shrug. "It's likely he'll handle you far differently than he did me when I was young. I was much more easily handled, I think, than you. More, I didn't have a baleful
Tom Riddle whispering in my ear."

Death sighed, then. "I'm giving you a bad impression, though. Dumbledore is… Well, he's certainly not on your Lenin's side, but that's the natural state to be. He does what he believes is best, acts for the good of the people of England, but he will use all means at his disposal to do so. At the time, I forgave him. I named my second son after him, but… But he is a complicated man, and if he does make use of you, try to remember that there is a reason for it."

"But I'm not on Albus Dumbledore's side," Lily said, and she didn't quite know when she'd realized this, when she'd realized that even being friends with Wizard Lenin was enough to place her on one side or another, but it was true.

Wizard Lenin had given her these kinds of warnings constantly, to the point where in her first year she'd spent most of her time ignoring them. She'd never heard them from Uncle Death before.

"No, you're on your own side, and I don't know what that means for you or for England," Death said quietly, leaning into his hands. "I wish I could tell your future for you, I wish mine was more relevant, I wish I could give you all the answers, but—"

"Didn't you tell me, a few months ago, that that's what life is?" Lily asked. "Scrambling along looking for answers with no guarantee of finding them?"

He laughed. "I suppose I did."

Lily laughed in turn, smiling, and then added, "And you know, given that we're fifty years removed from Albus Dumbledore and prophecies and civil war, I'm really not sure why we've spent so long talking about it."

"I'm not really sure either," Death said. "I think I got distracted somewhere in there."

"So, if you weren't like me though," Lily asked, "Then what was Harry Potter like?"

Death laughed again. "Are you sure you want to know that?"

"Sure. Now I'm curious; I've never been a man before, but I've always imagined it really wouldn't be too different."

Well, except maybe Wizard Trotsky wouldn't be brainwashing Lily to get into her pants. Then again, the age hadn't seemed to bother him too much, so Lily had the terrible feeling that Wizard Trotsky would gladly go gay for Elliot James Potter.

"Oh, I was very different," Death said with a bemused smile. "First, I was thick as a rock. God, I look back over those years and the amount I missed because my head was stuck up my own ass is unbelievable. People would walk up to me and tell me what I'd miss to my face, Hermione did it all the time, and I'd simply refuse to believe them out of pride."

He rubbed the back of his head, oddly embarrassed and yet nostalgic in the same instant. "I loved Quidditch, more than I loved life itself I loved that sport, I loved it even after I stopped all pretenses of being human. In my fourth year when the Quidditch games stopped temporarily it just about destroyed my world."

"How could you possibly love Quidditch?" Lily couldn't help but ask, but apparently there was no answer for that, as he just sat there and tried to stifle giggles. And that was an image to behold, wasn't it, Death giggling.
"We would never have been friends. Luna was fine enough, oh but you were in Slytherin and that would have been more than enough for me," Harry said. "All too likely I'd be stalking the halls after you as much as Malfoy, blaming you for anything and everything going wrong."

"Malfoy?" Lily balked. "You took Malfoy seriously?"

"Dreadfully so," Death said. "Maybe more so than Voldemort, certainly more often than Voldemort, Draco Malfoy was my nemesis."

"But it's Malfoy," Lily said, trying to comprehend how anyone took that giant ferret seriously. "He's __"

He wasn't even harmless, he was worse than harmless, because he really believed he was a force to contend with when he was secretly just Draco Malfoy. It was very telling when your greatest threat was that you were going to run and tell your father.

Wizard Lenin was convinced that Lucius Malfoy was chronically embarrassed by his only son.

"It took me seven years to realize that," Death said. "Maybe longer, thinking about it. It hurt my pride to believe that Draco Malfoy wasn't up to something nefarious or wasn't a threat in his own right."

"Well," Lily said, crossing her arms and thinking about this strange hypothetical hybrid world of theirs, "I think we would have gotten along."

"No, Lily, we really wouldn't have."

"Why not?"

Death smiled, that fond smile Lily had missed so much in her life. He drew a pale hand through her hair, ruffling it, and said softly, "Because you would have told me the truth, and I would have never believed it."
A Hint of Deja Vu

In which Tom and Lily celebrate his birthday, the Ghost of Christmas Future comes to visit, and Lily makes promises that she has every intention of keeping

Christmas in 1937 had honestly been…

Well, given Lily’s experiences, she honestly wasn’t sure she could call it Christmas.

Before Hogwarts, Christmas had consisted of her and the Dursleys and silently and efficiently unwrapping each and every one of Dudley’s new presents and making sure she was out of each and every photograph they took of their fat beaming child. The rest of the day was spent avoiding Dudley as much as possible before he had his meltdown when he realized that even with his mounds of gifts he was still fat and bored.

This wasn’t even getting to Aunt Marge’s annual appearance accompanied by her horrifyingly large dogs or Uncle Vernon’s yearly drunken regret fueled by scotch as he bemoaned the fact that they had ever bothered to take Lily in.

The Christmases of 1991 and 1992, inside Hogwarts and outside of it, had been…

Lily had not realized how much she could miss the relative peace and safety of a Christmas among the Dursleys.

After Morgan Gaunt, no after Quirrell, the holiday lights of Christmas hadn’t come to represent good cheer and good will to all men but instead a saccharine and empty promise of something Lily herself could never know.

She hadn’t realized that Wizard Lenin, in any form, had felt the same.

He’d spent the entire month of December bitterly griping about the cold and the dark, the increased donations to orphans that only came once a year when the rich were feeling particularly generous and guilty, the increased sermons about baby Jesus who never did Tom any favors recently, the secondhand gifts all the orphans received except Tom and Lily who had received nothing for being devil children, and everything in between.
There seemed to be nothing about this time of year that Tom Riddle didn’t loathe with a vehement Grinch like passion that, like most of his stronger emotions, just looked oddly cute coming from a ten-year-old boy just now going on eleven.

For Lily though, passing off a new book to an enraged Tom Riddle, who at first cursed at her for daring to get her a gift on Christmas when he was all too likely the antichrist, and then sniffed and forgave her for her thoughtless generosity in the next breath, it was a strangely Christmas like Christmas.

Here, in this tiny bedroom with Tom Riddle, out of place and time in a world she did not belong, she caught a glimpse of the warmth and friendship she’d been missing. For once, the sight of lights and decorated trees did not stand in the shadows of murder, death, and betrayal.

Even as Tom took her gifts though, and noted offhand that he was sorry he didn’t manage to find her a time machine and that good old Saint Nick hadn’t pulled through despite her efforts (which had included deeds such as punching Dennis in the face all the way to taking Tom to witness underground wizard gambling and Russian Roulette), she wondered if he didn’t feel the same as she did.

Wizard Lenin rarely mentioned Christmas one way or another in the future, except for a mild disgust for its garishness and overzealousness, but she hoped that he held the memory of this strange Christmas as fondly as she did.

Either way, Christmas had come and gone, winter trudged on, and the holiday was coming to a close with New Year’s Eve and Tom Marvolo Riddle’s constantly overlooked birthday. Although Tiny Tom’s birthday would probably have been ignored anyway due to his charming personality, the date being so close to Christmas and the New Year did him no favors.

Lily herself had almost forgotten and had only remembered thanks to an offhand comment of Tom’s thanking god that he’d be eleven in a few days and Lily could go and take him to get that blasted wand already.

To give her some slack, though, none of the incarnation of Tom Riddle had ever made any special note of his birthday or seemed to expect anything of it. Knowing Wizard Lenin, after he became a wraith or else left Hogwarts and was effectively immortal, he probably forgot about it all together.

When you stopped aging, Lily suspected that your birthday lost some of its impact.
Either way, Lily had been dutifully reminded, and after having left Lily Riddle’s for the day had a set of particularly expensive magic quills in hand that Malfoy would have been drooling over in Hogwarts. Now, it was the kind of gift that would either make his future Slytherin dorm mates think Tom Riddle was someone’s bastard son or else that he had a pedophilic sugar daddy somewhere, but Tom Riddle liked shiny and expensive things and it was his birthday so Lily wasn’t going to argue.

And for all that he was sure to bitterly complain that he hated his birthday, and how dare Lily even think of celebrating the day his mother left him in this godforsaken hell hole without even waiting around to cut the umbilical cord, she also knew that he was sure to like it.

With that thought and a grin on her face Lily waltzed her way into Wool’s Orphanage, “Morning Dennis.”

Dennis looked up, then paled and looked as if he was going to shrivel and die right there, having likely come to the conclusion that Lily was Tom Riddle’s summoned minion from Hell. Which, Lily supposed she was Tom Riddle’s summoned minion from fifty odd years in the future, but they didn’t need to know that.

The other theory that Tom had told her was going around was that Lily was Tom Riddle’s secret cousin from the circus who only just now bothered to show up and didn’t have the decency to drag him back from whence he came.

“Morning Billy,” Lily said, cheerily waving to blonde little Billy Stubbs who immediately ran in the other direction.

Lily hadn’t pointed this out to Tiny Tom, and she suspected he knew already, but within the few months of living here she’d somehow made more of an impression than he himself had.

Taking the stairs two hops at a time she practically danced her way over to her and Tiny Tom’s shared quarters with a whistle on her lips. She just couldn’t seem to help it, it was like she’d told Uncle Death not too long ago, but this place wasn’t simply not as bad as she’d thought but it was…

She didn’t know, just that she hadn’t been this happy in a long time.

Maybe it was the spirit of Christmas still hanging in the air.
“Raindrops keep falling on my head,” Lily hummed out to herself as she put a hand on the door handle and swung it open, “And just like the guy whose feet are too big for his bed, nothing seems to fit. Those raindrops keep falling on my head, they keep falling.”

And there he was, moodily looking up from his latest and greatest book, hiding under piles and piles of blankets against the cold December chill, and glaring at her like she’d just interrupted some truly profound contemplation.

Lily just smiled back and kicked the door shut behind her, “So, I just did me some talking to the sun. And I said I didn’t like the way he got things done, sleeping on the job. Those raindrops are falling on my head, they keep falling.”

“Don’t you know any normal songs?” Tiny Tom petulantly asked, likely meaning to ask why Lily always insisted on liking songs that hadn’t been written yet and he hadn’t heard on the radio.

“But there’s one thing I know, the blues they send to meet me won’t defeat me,” Lily continued as she sauntered her way over to his bed, giftwrapped pens under her arms in enchanted wrapping paper that had cost a bloody fortune, “It won’t take long for happiness to step up and greet me.”

With that she sat next to him and passed the gift over to him with a grin, “Happy Birthday, Tom.”

He frowned, taking the package from her, and said drily, “Didn’t I tell you after Christmas that I hated my birthday too.”

“Yes, but I notice that you don’t hate collecting things,” Lily said drily, “So I bought you some more shiny things.”

Tom frowned, likely suspecting that Lily was insulting him by calling him needlessly materialistic. Which, he was, far more than she had ever been, but then he also didn’t have the resources and support that Lily had always had. By the age of five Lily had had both Death and Wizard Lenin and godlike powers besides, everything Tom Riddle had earned, he’d had to scratch out for himself.

It was a small wonder that he was a compulsive hoarder.
“Go on,” Lily prompted when he just continued to glare at her, “Open it. Honestly, even if it wasn’t your birthday, I’d probably get you something for that whole Christmas disaster.”

“You do owe me for that,” Tom said, sulking, still not quite over the fact that he apparently wasn’t nearly as violent and sadistic as he’d liked to believe. It turned out, that while Tom had thought he enjoyed other people’s pain and suffering, he really didn’t.

“Yes, well, if it makes you feel better then this is me paying my debt,” Lily said, to which he paused as he started unwrapping.

“You mean that if this is for my birthday,” he said, a greedy magpie’s glint in his pale eyes, “Then I get something else for that?”

“Just open the box,” Lily said with a now strained smile.

Tom didn’t have to be told twice as, without hesitation, he started ripping through the golden paper paying little mind to the golden snitches floating their way across (it’d taken Tom entirely too little time to grow desensitized to the wonder of magical decorations).

“You know, if I didn’t like you so much, I wouldn’t put up with you at all,” Tom said with a sniff as he tore off the last of the wrapping paper.

What he really meant to say there was that if he could in any way pose any sort of a threat to Lily he really would have thrown her severed limbs in the Thames months ago. It was a good thing for both of them that Tiny Tom was a tiny little tiger who had yet to grow into his claws.

He paused as he looked down at his gift, opening the mahogany box and frowning at its contents in confusion, “You got me… feathers.”

“I got you quills, damn expensive ones too,” Lily said with a huff, “Believe me, they might look tedious and useless, and they are, but wizards love these things and use nothing else for writing.”

“What happened to fountain pens?” he asked as he picked one up, idly stroke the ornate feather attached to the end.
“Too new fangled and muggle, I suspect,” Lily said, “Either way when they ship you off to Hogwarts you’ll be expected to use quills and if you use these you can likely pose as having a very rich uncle.”

A very rich and creepy uncle who was maybe a little too interested in his nephew, but Tom didn’t need to be told that, he’d probably figure that bit out later.

“As opposed to a very rich roommate?” Tom asked, sparing her a wry glance, as he hinted yet again that he was starting to become aware that Lily really shouldn’t have the money she had.

He still had a ways to go with that one.

Tom liked to believe he was smart, and he was, but he was also ten and very self-centered at that. It hadn’t occurred to him that it was odd that Lily would present him with so many gifts or that she’d have so much money to waste on him, to him it was his God given right that the rest of society had for some reason ignored. Only lately, as they’d gone into and out of the wizarding world, did Tom Riddle begin to realize that Lily was spending as much as those wealthy looking magical lords without anything to show for it.

No one else, who looked like Lily or Tom did, seemed capable of buying nearly as much as Lily and Tom did.

He probably suspected she was the bastard child with the incredibly guilty and loaded father.

Lily just smiled back at him, “Somehow, I have the feeling that bragging about me won’t be nearly as conducive to your position as emperor of the universe.”

He frowned then, placing the quill back in the box and closing it, “Well, that’s just short sighted, isn’t it? Unless you really are a talentless hack.”

It would take Tom Riddle a good number of years before he perfected the art of fishing for information. Though his scathing wit was well on its way to becoming something truly formidable.

“Strong words, but no not quite that. As I am from the future, I’m not someone worth knowing at the moment,” Lily reminded him none to subtly, to which he grunted, as if he’d somehow forgotten about all of that.
“Which is why you came to this place,” Tom Riddle finished for her, glaring as if was in her position, and forced to crawl to nowhere else except Wool’s Orphanage.

“Oh, I don’t know, it hasn’t been so bad,” Lily said, sparing him a meaningful glance, “I’ve met all sorts of interesting people.”

“All sorts?” he asked, trying and failing not to smile back at her, fingers lightly brushing against the box.

“One in particular comes to mind,” Lily said with a smile of her own.

Then he did something odd, instead of responding or else blowing her off he flushed, and against his pale skin it was quite the dramatic change of color. Before she could ask what that was about though he looked away from her meaningfully, setting the box aside and glaring back down at her book.

Well, it appeared they were done with their little moment then.

Before Lily could get up though and perhaps make her way back into London he interrupted, “Mrs. Cole’s up to something.”

“Mrs. Cole?” Lily asked, looking back over at him as he flipped a page and pretended, he wasn’t watching her, “Does it rhyme with shmalcohol?”

Mrs. Cole, Lily had learned, had quite the love affair going on with gin that may or may not have been fueled by having to take care of a spiteful Tom Marvolo Riddle for a decade.

“No!” He spat back, slamming his book closed and looking grossly insulted that Lily could give him such a blithe and unconcerned response, “I think she’s going to bring in a… a head doctor.”

Lily blinked once, blinked twice, “You mean a psychologist?”

“I heard her talking to one of the aids, and the others have said things, that they can come and look at you and take you into an asylum.”
Well, in this day and age they probably could. By Lily’s childhood the idea of interring children into mental hospitals had started making people squeamish but Tom Riddle lived in the era before lobotomies were considered horrific.

“You’ll do fine,” Lily said, “Trust me, I’ve dealt with psychologists, you’ll run circles over whoever she brings in.”

Tom looked as if he didn’t quite believe her, and Lily realized he really was terrified. As much as he bluffed, he wasn’t like her, to him there were grave consequences to his actions and they really could take him away to Bedlam. Even if they couldn’t, he fully believed that they could, and that this time there might not be anything he could do about it.

“And even if you can’t,” Lily promised reaching out for his hand and squeezing it in hers, “I promise, I will come for you. Wherever they take you, even if it’s to the ends of the earth, I will be there.”

“You promise?” he blurted, eyes big and shining as he leaned towards her.

Lily opened her mouth to agree but he kept talking, “Even Hogwarts?”

She closed her mouth, because he had hit the nail on the head, that thing she’d forgotten about entirely.

Slowly, carefully, Lily assured him, “You won’t need me in Hogwarts.”

His eyes darkened, he withdrew his hand from hers, “So, you’re not promising at all then.”

“Tom, I’m not on the roster, I’m too old, they won’t let me into Hogwarts—”

“Would that stop you anywhere else?” he asked, once again getting right to the heart of the matter, because if Lily really wanted to she could damn caution to the wind and attend Hogwarts a second time.
And damn everything but it probably would be better in this strange era. Even if all hell was about to break loose in Europe, here Lily wasn’t Eleanor Lily Potter, and none of the garbage that waited for her with that name waited for her here.

“I can’t go to Hogwarts,” Lily said, the words tearing against the inside of her throat, but making sure to look him straight in the eye, “Remember, I have to get back home.”

The future, after all, the Wizard Lenin she’d left behind there along with everything else would not wait forever. Hogwarts of 1938 didn’t have time or place for someone like her.

He opened his mouth, his expression suddenly far more vulnerable than she had ever seen it before, there was not just desperation in there but yearning as well as hope. He reached out for her hands again, a light flush crossing over his features, “Lily, I—”

He didn’t get to finish though as, in that pause, there was a light knock on the door.

“What the hell?” Lily said, turning from him and staring at the door.

Nobody bothered Lily and Tom, their room was the equivalent of no man’s land, a barren wasteland only the bravest and most suicidal of fools would enter. Mrs. Cole did, but she just would bang on the door and then barge in two seconds later, nobody simply knocked.

The knock sounded again and a dreadfully familiar voice sounded, “Mr. Tom Riddle, may I come in?”

“Oh, hell,” Lily said, suddenly remembering that it wasn’t simply Tom’s birthday but that it was Tom’s eleventh birthday and that as Snape had come to collect her only to be hit with a frying pan Albus Dumbledore was here to collect Tom Riddle.

An Albus Dumbledore who did not need to know that Eleanor Lily Potter had been dinking around in 1937 as Tom Riddle’s roommate.

“Lily?!” Tom hissed as Lily jerked her hands out of his, standing, and in a panicked daze forcing her own cut and belongings to disappear into an abyss like they’d never been there in the first place.
“If anyone asks,” Lily hissed back at him, diving into the wardrobe without a second’s thought, “I never existed.”

She slammed the wardrobe doors shut, ignoring Tom’s slamming fists on the exterior, “What are you doing?!”

“Just shut up and sit on the bed!” Lily hissed at him, meeting his eye through the small crack between the wardrobe doors, “I’ll explain later! Now sit and pretend I’m not here!”

He glared balefully but backed away slowly, wandlessly using magic to smooth out his rumpled blankets and sitting on the bed, glaring at the door warily and stating with far more authority than he deserved, “Yes, you can come in.”

He looked extraordinarily younger. Lily supposed she shouldn’t be surprised, fifty years aged a person, but still the change was remarkable. It was still him, but it was as if a mask had been peeled back, leaving an oddly younger version of himself beneath. His hair was now a deep auburn, his beard a manageable length, only his canary yellow suit and those sparkling blue eyes were reminiscent of the man he’d become.

And Lily suddenly remembered where she had seen him before, not simply Albus Dumbledore, but this stiff, younger, stoic Albus Dumbledore who hadn’t grown into his fashion sense yet. Years from now, in Lily’s first year of Hogwarts when Wizard Lenin was still in her head, and he’d shown her a piece of a memory in warning to never trust Albus Dumbledore.

Lily pressed lightly against the door of the wardrobe, attempting to get the best view possible as Dumbledore, with a thin ghost of a smile motioned towards the empty chair by their lone desk, “May I?”

Tom nodded curtly, warily, watching as Dumbledore with a sigh took a seat and settled across from Tom Riddle. For a moment they just looked at each other, eyes roaming up and down as they took the other in, allowing the images to settle against preconceived notions already in mind.

Yes, Lily thought with dawning dread, this was an exact replica of the memory Wizard Lenin had shown her all those years ago. Lily held her breath, hoping with a desperation she couldn’t even quite reconcile with herself, that the man wouldn’t notice her here.

“Who are you?” Tiny Tom asked, his pale eyes for a moment flickering to the wardrobe where Lily
was hiding inside, “Are you some sort of psychologist?”

Psychologist, honestly, two seconds ago he’d been referring to them as head doctors. Well, she’d give Tom Riddle something, he picked things up frighteningly quickly.

Dumbledore, from what she could see of him, blinked and looked caught off-guard. It was an expression oddly reminiscent from his dealings with Lily. However, that said, he was not the man he’d one day become yet. This was Dumbledore unpolished, though not untried, unrefined and not yet the master of his craft that had had Lily so comfortable with him in those first few meetings.

Here he was doing very little to disguise his dislike and unease, where with Lily, those first few times he had done nearly everything.

What would Tom Riddle have thought, Lily wondered, if instead of this man he’d been faced with the odd eccentric grandfather that Lily had first met?

“I’m afraid I’m not entirely certain what that means,” Dumbledore finally said, attempting and failing a smile, “So, I’ll have to say no, I am nothing like that. I am a wizard, just as you yourself are, and it is my great honor to invite you to Hogwarts Academy of Witchcraft and Wizardry this coming September.”

Dumbledore reached into his eye-wateringly yellow suit, though not quite up to the Elton John standards he’d maintain in his later years and pulled out an envelope. He held it out to Tom with a smile that tried so hard to be benign but couldn’t quite manage to make it to his eyes.

That letter, it looked just like the one Eleanor Lily Potter would receive in more than fifty years. It was that same off-white made of paper far more expensive and high quality than bleached printer paper from the muggle world. She imagined, though she couldn’t see from this angle, that Tom Riddle’s name was written out in the same artful cursive penmanship hers had been.

At the words Hogwarts Tom visibly relaxed, some of his wariness dissipating at a word he’d been hearing far too often from Lily not to recognize, that world he’d been waiting for. Now he leaned forward, giving Albus Dumbledore a second and more critical look, likely looking for a connection between all he’d seen, Lily, and this man.

However, the yellow suit may have been too off-putting or else didn’t match enough with Lily, as Tiny Tom’s brow furrowed and some of that wariness returned.
“You don’t look like a wizard,” Tom said gravely, his eyes hard as steel once again, “Color blind, yes, wizard, no.”

She imagined there was a flash in his eyes then, something cold and blue, as a sudden cold and unpalatable realization struck him, “Mrs. Cole would send someone up to screw with my head. She’s always wanted to, you know, thinks I’m not right upstairs.”

Oh, dear god, Lily couldn’t help but think as she wanted to hit her head against the back of the wardrobe in despair. He was so paranoid, so distrustful and contemptuous, it wasn’t even funny anymore.

She remembered Tom’s bitter smile towards the man, how he’d looked so much like Wizard Lenin in that memory, as he tapped a single finger against his forehead. He chuckled, and just like that, his smile was gone, “You know it’s not a half stupid idea, get some man up here in a ridiculous looking suit, have him say that he was special too.”

He leaned forward again, shouting now, as if by the force of his words alone he could wipe away Dumbledore’s thin disguise, “That he could make things happen sometimes, just by thinking it, just by wanting it enough, that he could talk to snakes and they could talk back! Because then all of Tommy’s secrets come pouring out, don’t they? Did she tell you about the rabbit or was it Dennis and Amy?”

He’d asked Lily the same thing, she thought as she held in a desperate laugh, if Mrs. Cole had told her about Billy’s rabbit or else Dennis and Amy. She wondered, suddenly, if that was the question he would ask everyone.

He stopped, leaned back, took a breath and closed his eyes, forcing himself to be calm much the way he often did with her in the beginning of their tenuous friendship, “It doesn’t matter though, even if you try to hold me in some asylum, with the junkies and the schizophrenics you can’t keep me there.”

Lily, after all, would come for him as she’d promised. And it was strange, how much the fact that he’d believed her words touched her.

“You people can’t touch me, can’t even get close, and that’s really the best part of all.”
A smile crossed his lips as he opened his eyes, giving Dumbledore a particularly smug and contemptuous look, “No, the best part is when they realize they can’t get close and that I can hurt them, that I like to make them hurt, but they can’t ever hurt me. That’s really the best part…”

All hints of a smile were gone from Dumbledore’s face, leaving something frightened and cold in its place. The hand that had preferred the letter was now resting at his side, as if he had silently retracted its offer.

In a voice too calm and collected, the same voice he’d had when he’d once told Lily that her relatives loved her, he asked, “Would it make any difference if I told you again that I am no psychogrophist?”

“Psychologist,” Tom contemptuously corrected, ignoring the irony that he literally had just called the same position a head doctor, “Anyone can say words though, correctly or incorrectly, you’ve offered me little in the form of proof.”

And there it was, this single moment of them looking at one another, daring the other to make the first move. Sitting in this overstuffed wardrobe, filled not only with clothing but with Tiny Tom’s stolen triumphs from the other orphans, Lily wondered if this was the place where it started and ended for them. Not with Voldemort, not with the Chamber of Secrets in 1952, but instead in this one single moment after which reconciliation was lost forever.

If either of them could turn back time as casually as Lily could, could alter this moment, would they?

Somehow, looking at them and knowing what they’d be later, Lily didn’t think so. They would gleefully repeat all their past actions because it was already inconceivable that it could go any other way. This, both of them would say, was fate.

Dumbledore took out his wand from his suit, pointed it not at Tom, but instead to the wardrobe. Lily watched as the dark tip of the wand settled, unwittingly, directly on Lily herself.

Tom’s expression changed from smug anticipation to horror, with wide eyes he lunged from the bed towards the wardrobe, but as Lily remembered Dumbledore was faster than he was. Before Tom could even think of reaching it the wardrobe burst into flames with Lily sitting inside.

And the only thing she could hear, as she pushed her way out of the wardrobe and towards him, was his screaming.
What had Inago said in the Princess Bride? That it was the sound of a man’s heart being torn in half, the sound his own heart had made the day his father was murdered in front of him by the six fingered man, and the sound of a man’s very soul being sucked out by an unfeeling machine.

That was the sound that eleven-year-old Tom Riddle made as he witnessed Lily being burned alive along with all of his worldly possessions.

Lily didn’t wait for Dumbledore to say anything, to take it back or else congratulate or condemn her for hiding inside, she instead with a wave of her hand knocked him out and watched as he slumped in his chair and the wand fell out of lifeless fingers.

Instead she pulled Tom to her, feeling the wind knocked out of her as he squeezed her too tightly, seemingly incapable of any rational English sentence as he buried his head in her shoulder.

“Tom,” Lily said, rubbing his back, “Tom, it’s fine, I’m fine, it wasn’t real, he just wanted to scare you. He didn’t know, I’m sure he thought it was just your things in there, it’s alright...”

Tom shuddered in her arms, fingers white knuckled as he clenched at the fabric of her sweater, but slowly but surely he seemed to come back to himself. His fingers relaxed, rested lightly against her, and he lifted his head to look her in the eyes.

His own were large, red, and stained with tears that made him look younger than Lily had ever seen him.

“I’m fine,” Lily repeated with a small smile, “He just likes to be dramatic.”

“So, he’s really—”

“Albus Dumbledore,” Lily explained with her own poor attempt at a grin, “Deputy headmaster at Hogwarts, and an unfortunate acquaintance of mine in the future.”

Tom frowned but allowed Lily to move her hand and summon Dumbledore’s letter into it, she then passed it off to Tom who warily took it, tracing his own name.
“You could have warned me,” he said, trying to sound as arrogant and confident as always, but failing miserably.

“Well,” Lily said sheepishly, “I kind of forgot they did this part, I didn’t get this kind of treatment.”

Tom huffed, but didn’t question further, which was probably for the best as Lily didn’t want to go into her fantastic second meeting with Snape and the wonderful day they’d spent together in London.

Instead, he straightened his posture and took a step back from her, brushing off his clothing as if he’d never do anything as undignified as fearing for her safety. Instead, glancing at her once or twice as if to reassure himself she was still there, he opened the letter and quickly read through the contents.

He laughed with a small shaky smile as he reached the second page, “I’ll be damned, they do want quills.”

Lily laughed in turn, she couldn’t say why as she’d told him as much herself and it wasn’t that funny, but somehow in that moment it seemed hilarious. They both laughed much too long and loud at that, Tom collapsing onto his bed, wiping tears away from his eyes, and staring at the ceiling said, “Lily, please, don’t leave.”

Lily stopped laughing, and she wondered if he was imagining her expression as she looked at him, and if he was even close to picturing how heartbroken she felt, “I can’t promise that.”

Ignoring Dumbledore’s still unconscious body she moved over towards him, kneeling before him as he sat up on the bed and looked down at her, “The future is waiting for me.”

She took his hands in hers again, for the umpteenth time that day, and promised, “But remember that the future is waiting for you too. You can wait, and I can wait, and I promise we’ll meet again.”

Lily hauled Dumbledore down the stairs and out into the yard a few minutes later, wishing that he’d done something less dramatic and ridiculous than setting the wardrobe on fire. Then, at the gates to the orphanage, she brought him back and immediately confounded the poor bastard.

At Dumbledore’s very confused and bland expression Lily rewrote reality for him, “Look, you came, you and Tom did not get on at all and he mentioned all his creepy talents and accused you of being the man. Afterwards you handed him the letter, proved to him you were a wizard, then got the hell
out of dodge when it became clear you weren’t going to get on. You got it?”

Slowly, he nodded, the false memory solidifying itself as he skipped over Lily’s existence, “Yes, I understand, Tom Riddle is…”

“Yes,” Lily said, pushing him out onto the street, “You two love each other, now go home.”

Dumbledore, blinking back at her for a moment or two, unseeing, took a few seconds to do just that. A loud crack, a hint of vapor, and just like that he was gone leaving the muggle side of London in peace.

And all Lily had to say was good riddance.

Night fell too quickly, those winter months bringing with it early and overcast evenings, and Lily found herself staring out the window at the overcast sky and contemplating the nature of her current situation. How everything except Lily herself, for better or worse, seemed to be falling into place.

Tom for his own part, seemed enraptured by his letter, stacking his first-year books into a pile along with various supplies in preparation for the school year that seemed an eternity and a half away.

Still, apparently, he wasn’t distracted enough as he called out to her, “Lily, we’ll get married someday.”

Lily looked back over her shoulder, and he looked… Not old, but like he more than meant it, like he would bend time, reality, anything that got in his way to see it happen.

Lily felt her eyebrows raise, unable to help a fond smile as she looked at him, “I doubt that.”

“Why not?” he asked, bristling as he always did whenever Lily thought to contradict him, “I can’t think you’d do any better. After all, I’m going to be king one day.”

He’d said as much to her often enough, but still, Lily hadn’t realized that ambition had started this young. Then again, as she’d often thought when she’d first met him, what was he without that ambition? He was anything but himself without that dream burning in his heart.
“You’ll be far too great and terrible to be content with anything as simple as happiness,” Lily predicted with a small laugh, seeing his future self in all his complicated facets painted across her memory, each one uniquely unhappy in his own way, “For you, to be happy is to stagnate, comrade. The moment you are happy you will effectively be dead.”

That, after all, had been Wizard Lenin’s true fear beneath everything. Contentment with his humanity and place in the world.

But that was a fear that this Tom Riddle hadn’t grown into yet, and he frowned petulantly, “That’s rather depressing.”

“I agree,” Lily said, well aware of the irony even if Tom Riddle himself wasn’t.

“I’ll prove you wrong,” Tom promised, straightening and looking her in the eye as if daring her to look away.

“Oh?”

“I’ll do both. I’ll be happy and keep moving forward and I’ll meet you in the future. But you have to wait for me.”

She threw her head back and laughed, ignoring the slight pain of hitting it against the glass, and couldn’t help but ask (even though he wouldn’t understand it now and wouldn’t appreciate it later), “Have I ever done anything less?”
The Legend of Lily Riddle

In which Lily reflects and Lily Riddle makes her first genuine appearance.

Lily, when she was five, had never felt particularly young. Death had said it, it was during one of their first meetings, when she had told him she had been more than willing to destroy herself to meet him again. No, maybe it’d been when they were discussing magic, glitches, and the decay of the universe.

Intelligent, he’d said, but terribly young.

At the time she couldn’t see it, Lily then was as she’d always been, and there’d been no distinction between raw intelligence and the refinement that came with experience and simply living.

Seated at an outside table under a small magic heater in Diagon Alley, the shopping district decorated with colorful hearts and fluttering cupids for Valentine’s Day, staring out into the streets ahead of her with her mind anywhere but in this moment of February 1938, she felt old.

She felt older than the five-year-old Lily, untampered and untried by the world, had ever felt. A girl who could rush in blind, disregarding all consequence or implications of her actions, just for the promise of something worthy of meaning.

She felt older, even, than the eleven-year-old Tom Riddle who had blown Lily off to play wizard with his newly purchased wand. Unaware, of course, that a young Eleanor Lily Potter would be picking up the brother wand in roughly fifty years.

Lily finally understood what Death had meant, when he’d called her smart, but young.

Beneath the heater it wasn’t cold, it wasn’t snowing either, and even though they should have been her hands weren’t covered in blood. Still, Lily thought as she stared out at the deceptively quiet street, she felt cold.

The day hadn’t started out like this.
It’d started out like most days since 1938 had, with an overly excited and proud Tom Riddle basking at six a.m. once again in the fact that he was a wizard and he now had his very own boom stick. Not that Tom Riddle would ever put it like that.

Lily had then done what she’d done most days since 1938 and Tom Riddle had become an unbearable morning person not only with magic but with a wand to boot. She’d left him to his own devices and staggered her way into Knockturn Alley at god knows what time in the morning, made sure Frank was sharing in the misery with her, and had some bloody coffee.

“You know,” Frank said, rubbing at his eyes in exhaustion, “Boss, you could try to keep better hours.”

Frank was starting to sound like Frank again, which was a marked improvement in Lily’s opinion, as his not sounding or looking like Frank had been… Uncomfortable, to say the least. He was thinner than he would be, the sleaze not quite taken out of him yet, but he’d put on that dweeby accountant’s suit of his and had resorted to calling her boss or any equivalent term. He’d also lost any and all ability to say no to her, but then, Lily wasn’t sure he’d had any ability to say no to start with.

When he’d first tried, when she’d made that job offer, the best he’d been able to say was, “I’ll think about it” and then after thinking about it, “yes”.

It really was amazing that no one had picked him up before all this.

“Tell that to my roommate,” Lily groaned into her coffee, she’d love to take the night shift, she did in fact often enough, but Tom Riddle just wasn’t having it. And if she had to watch him float another feather one more time, and pretend to act impressed by it lest he light her on fire, she would lose her goddamn mind.

“You have a roommate?” Frank asked, bewildered, looking like he wasn’t quite sure Lily Riddle could ever have anything so mundane as a roommate.

“… Figure of speech,” Lily responded blandly, and he nodded in confusion, but appeared to accept it.

“Right, since you’re with the living for the moment,” Lily said, ignoring the way Frank cringed as if to silently plead he’d rather not be, “How have we been doing these past few weeks.”
“Well, as you know, there are now five of us on payroll,” Frank said, “So profits aren’t quite what they were.”

“To be expected,” Lily said with a nod, and it was funny because while she’d never been quite as close to them as she had Frank, it’d been so easy to recognize them and find them all just hanging about. In fact, she hadn’t really had to do it, she’d just told Frank to get his ass into gear and find them vampires and there they all were like they’d been waiting for it.

Like they really all had just been reading from the same unfinished script. Of course, only Lily seemed to be aware of it, she was the only one reading it in order (or else out of order depending on how you looked at things).

“Those posters seem to be working,” Frank said, leaving off a tacked on “miraculously” or “unbelievably” that Wizard Lenin would have been able to help but squeeze in there. She shouldn’t expect that though, that was just one of those lingering feelings that reminded her how much she missed him.

There were days when everything seemed to remind her of Wizard Lenin.

“How on,” Lily said instead, leaning back in the chair in front of Frank’s death with a casual ease she wasn’t quite feeling. Trouble was, it was all about the presentation. It always had been, but for Lily Riddle it felt especially so.

Lily had grown up hearing so much about that name, so many dire warnings, and there’d been so many expectations of her. Creating her from nothing, rather than just slipping into the role, Lily felt as if the ghost of Lily Riddle was breathing down her neck in a way and forcing her to shape it in the right way that an unwitting future Lily could just stumble into it with none the wiser.

It wasn’t as if she was acting unnaturally, but, every once in a while, Lily did have to remind herself that there was a need for some acting here.

Enough to make her wish, sometimes, that she’d never come up with Lily Riddle in the first place.

Frank said nothing for a moment, laced his hands together, and then pinned her with a gaze that left no room to move, “The aurors are looking for you.”
Lily sat upright again, met his eyes, and felt her own smile drifting away, “I know.”

She’d heard and seen it well enough, both as Lily Riddle in Knockturn Alley and as herself loitering around Diagon Alley with Tom Riddle. A few months was all they’d given her, until 1938, and now even with the constant distractions from abroad they were starting to turn their attention to a muggle name that’d popped straight out of nowhere.

That wasn’t what kept nagging at her though.

In fact, it was quite the opposite.

When Lily had first wandered into Diagon Alley, everyone had known who Lily Riddle was, and everyone had known exactly what she could and was fully willing to do with those who crossed her path. Wizard Lenin himself had given her an entire day-filled rant on how Lily was going to get them eaten alive because she was an idiot impersonating something she couldn’t possibly understand.

For months no one had known Lily Riddle’s name, only just now, they were starting to clue into her existence.

That universal respect and fear, however, didn’t exist.

Which left a singular question: what had happened?

What was it that would cement Lily Riddle into something untouchable by law and dark wizard alike? What would leave Frank and his cohorts unmolested for decades without her presence to protect them? What had Lily Riddle done, in so short a time, that had etched itself deep into magical Britain’s history?

Lily was beginning to think she didn’t want to know the answer.

Certainly, she was starting to think that whatever the answer was, she probably wouldn’t like it.

Squirrel, the aftermath of Albania, and Wizard Trotsky had taught Lily that confrontation and violence was not all that Lily had cracked it up to be. Look at what it’d done to her, after all, the
aftermath of all of that nonsense had brought her here and all too likely thrown her out of the gates of Hogwarts.

Lily glanced out the window, towards the shuttered blinds keeping out the early morning light. It was too early to be thinking things like this. Too early to be thinking about avoiding Tom Riddle, about all those things to come, or even about how Lily was supposed to get home already.

“Que sera sera, I suppose,” Lily finally concluded.

“What was that?” Frank asked, dark eyebrows raising.

“Whatever will be will be,” Lily translated, forcing a smile back on her face, “I suppose they’ll come for us soon enough. When they do, I’ll take care of it.”

“You’ll take care of it?” Frank asked, giving her a dubious once over, taking in Lily in all her glory. Which, at this point, to him just included that cheap black dyed hair, frayed jean shorts, a rolled up frayed indigo sweater, and a pair of off-white sneakers. Not simply muggle but out of time as well, however, as much of an outlander Lily was she didn’t look like what she was either.

A thing of destruction.

“I’ll take care of it,” Lily repeated, “You won’t have to worry about the aurors.”

Frank did not look assuaged but Lily supposed she could hardly blame him. He was like the rest of them, in a way, he hadn’t heard of Lily Riddle yet for all that he was just starting to believe in her. For now, she wondered if he thought he was in some strange kind of dream, where he’d been kidnapped by an adolescent girl to become her evil secretary.

It was better, he probably thought, than being a bum.

“Good work, Frank, keep it up. In the meantime, you can take a nap or something,” Lily said, hopping out of the chair and making her way to the door, “And I’ll go get lunch.”

She didn’t leave him a chance to interject or interrupt, but continued on her way out the door, waiting
as always for something to happen. Waiting, was she really waiting? It felt like it, for all that she was starting things and pushing forward, it felt instead like she was waiting for some other unseen shoe to drop.

In the early morning Knockturn Alley was an even more desolate place than usual. Hangovers and morning light chased away whatever dark nocturnal creatures usually haunted London’s magical gutter leaving a wasteland of broken bottles on the sidewalk and glowing magical powder. As usual, Lily was the only one strolling down the street in broad daylight.

Turning the corner into Diagon Alley it was a different story though. Here, even with the early hours, wizards and witches could already be seen bustling down the decorated street to either make it to the office or else to start shopping for Valentine’s Day.

Candy shops boasted exuberant displays of chocolates including twittering chocolate doves, roaring chocolate waterfall fountains, and floating chocolate hearts. Jewelers’ windows glittered with necklaces and rings whose enchanted diamonds had been imported deep from magical African mines.

Love, or some artificial attempt at it, was in the air.

And Lily couldn’t help but stop, stare, and wonder if it was like this at Hogwarts. Lily, after all, had never made it to second semester. The furthest she’d gotten was Christmas, Valentine’s Day and the rest of it had been so very far away.

It wasn’t like she missed it, not really, but for a moment she wondered what that would have been like.

It was only a very brief moment.

The next few hours weren’t of much import. Lily did have lunch, loitered in the local bookstore again with an eye out for time travel or anything Tom might force her to buy anyway, and met with the goblins yet again (who were just as dubious as Frank but polite enough to not say it out loud or give much of a hint of it on their gnarled faces). To tell the truth, Lily barely remembered what she did in those hours.

No, it was a few hours later when the wards for proximity and hostile intent were set off at Riddle Inc. that things suddenly started to matter a great deal.
“—Oz the Great and Powerful!” the giant green head roared even as Lily teleported in behind the green curtain. There they were, standing at her entrance and looking up towards the head with confused alarm, a dozen men in proud red auror uniforms with wands in hand, one with the extra decorations marking him as their captain.

Suddenly, Lily had the sinking feeling she’d heard this story somewhere. A long time ago, someone had said something about Lily Riddle and a group of aurors who’d come to confront her.

Lily fiddled with the levers and switches, wondering why she’d made the thing so damned complicated, even as Frank and the rest of them piled out of the backroom to confront their unexpected guests.

Before they could, she stepped out, pulling the curtain away and leaving Oz the Great and Powerful with his jaw hanging unnaturally open. She smiled at the aurors, a cheerful grin at odds with the situation, and said the message one must always say in this situation, “Please ignore the man behind the curtain.”

Oh, she did know this story. She’d heard this story. For a single moment, less than a second, Lily’s smile dropped, and her eyes widened, as she realized she was staring at a group of dead men. They didn’t know it, even Frank didn’t know it yet, but not one of these aurors was going to leave alive.

Lily had wondered when Lily Riddle became Lily Riddle, this was it.

Lily stepped forward, feeling as if her mind was suddenly drifting from her body, like someone or something else was taking over for her while she went into autopilot. Perhaps it was an echo of Wizard Lenin, who’d spent so long in her soul, that with a cold sort of confidence could ask, “How may I help you fine gentlemen of law enforcement today?”

They didn’t understand. How could they? Wasn’t that the point of this story, that they didn’t understand?

This wasn’t like Squirrel, it wasn’t like the basilisk, and it wasn’t even like Albania. There was no mutual understanding here, no acknowledgement that this was a fight to the death and one of them must perish in some form or another. These men didn’t get it, were the first ones who didn’t get it, and Lily was going to have to kill them anyway.
Because that was what Wizard Lenin had once told Lily, so many years ago in a future that hadn’t happened yet, that Lily Riddle had told Frank to eat these men alive.

Still, she felt herself thinking over and over again that they didn’t understand. They were looking at her in utter bewilderment, clearly having expected someone taller, older, perhaps a Gellert Grindelwald look alike in her place. Like Frank, like everyone, none of them looked at an adolescent school girl and thought she was what they were supposed to find.

Even now, though she didn’t look, Lily could tell Frank and the rest of her employees were itching to rush out and waiting with bated breath.

The silence, before the captain found his voice, was almost deafening, “Lily Riddle, you’re under arrest for the use of the dark arts and for distribution of dangerous materials to the general public.”

Perhaps, in some other world, they would have left before this moment. Maybe Lily would have, for the moment, accepted her arrest gracefully and broken out of Azkaban later. Surely that would have made an impression as much if not more than the death of a few aurors would?

That wasn’t what happened though, not in the unfinished screenplay Lily had been handed all those years ago, and she knew it.

So, she just watched coolly, with that detached floating feeling, as they lifted their wands towards her and stepped forward for the arrest. And they looked young, Lily couldn’t help but think. Not as young as her, obviously, not Hogwarts young but somehow, they looked young all the same. They were untried and untested, like Lily probably had when she’d taken up the unused mantle of Lily Riddle in 1986.

When it’d all seemed like a grand adventure.

Frank and the others moved forward, clearly intending to fight, but Lily held up a single pale hand to stop them without once looking back.

It was strange, how she could almost hear Wizard Lenin’s voice ringing in her ears. “A lesson,” he’d say coldly, “is to be learned here.”

But for whom?
Was it the auror’s lesson, Frank’s, the world’s, or was it Lily’s?

Lily didn’t ask that, instead she flatly corrected what the auror captain said, “You mean the sale of narcotics.”

The captain stopped, just for a moment, that almost pained confusion returning. Lily barely paid it any mind as she continued in the same dull tone, “Not the dark arts, narcotics, sir. Please, they are two very different things.”

She could almost feel her eyes burning, that color that was too green, one that looked far too much like the killing curse, “If I’m going to be hauled off to Azkaban to get my soul sucked out by the nazgûl, I would at least like to be accurate about my charges.”

Before they could answer or even move, she lifted her hand and released a small trickle of that endless power stored inside her. Just like that, with that small motion, their wands clattered to the floor as each clutched at their effortlessly broken fingers while their wands rolled steadily towards Lily as if drawn by a magnet.

And wasn’t it funny? For a moment, the wands reminded her of 1991 and Slytherin, when they’d charged her en masse and she’d responded by auctioning her wands to the school. She hadn’t realized that they would have so much in common with a group of aurors in the 1930’s.

Instead, picking one up, she mused that taboo thought aloud, “I wonder what the resale price is for wands.”

She looked over her shoulder, finally, towards Frank. He looked terrified, his jaw wasn’t open, but his crimson eyes were wider than Lily had ever seen them. He looked like he couldn’t move, couldn’t dare to breathe, even if he’d wanted to.

“Yo, Frank,” she said, as casually as she might back in 1986, “Look into the used wand business and see what Ollivander’s usually go for.”

She didn’t wait for a nod or any other sign that he’d heard her, already, her attention was back on the men at the floor. Now, Lily thought, they were beginning to realize what had happened and was going to happen.
A wandless wizard, Lily had once said to Squirrel, was a dead wizard.

And an auror was sure to be well versed in that undeniable truth.

But the vampires would remember this moment, her dutiful employees, and they’d let it slip somewhere and it’d return to the auror corps’ ears. They would remember Lily Riddle’s name, after this, and these poor fools wouldn’t die in vain.

They would engrave this moment into history so that in time an unwitting Lily could stumble into a role she couldn’t begin to understand.

“Now, gentlemen, I am unfortunately rather tired today,” Lily confessed to them, and this wasn’t a lie, she was very tired. She’d been tired for years.

“It’s been a long week of marketing, dealing with the goblins, and just all sorts of shenanigans I don’t usually deal with,” she said, as if she were talking about the weather, rather than the slim chance that these men might leave here alive.

And as, so long ago, she’d slipped into this speech with Quirrell dead beneath her she found herself slipping into it now, “In all this excitement, I find myself, well, almost as exhausted as you. So, I’m not going to blast off a bunch of killing curses and send you off to kingdom come.”

A small, spark, a bright little flame of hope that Lily was going to let them return as messengers. It was small though, because they were fully aware that they weren’t the messengers, they were the message.

Lily motioned to Frank and the rest, “Instead, I’m going to let the boys have a go at you.”

You could hear the sound of a pin dropping. Their eyes, slowly, oh so slowly, moved from Lily to the vampires in the doorway behind her.

“You know how hard it is for a vampire to get fresh juice these days, I’m sure they’ll jump at the opportunity.”
None of the vampires in question moved a muscle, instead they just looked, watched their designated prey like jungle cats while also watching Lily.

“They’re a bit out of practice, though. So, maybe if you act quick enough, you’ll have a good chance. But that’s not really the point, because maybe they’re not out of practice. You don’t really know.”

And she couldn’t help it, just as she couldn’t help it in 1991, a smile tugged at her lips as she repeated a line blasphemously out of context, “So, the question is not do I feel quick, do I think she’s bluffing, or anything like that. The question is, do I feel lucky? So, do you feel lucky? Well, do you, punk?”

She didn’t wait to see if they felt lucky or not, she didn’t even wait to hear it, instead she turned on her heel and made her way towards the doorway Frank and the others were blocking. To them, pale and shaking with hunger and awed fear, she noted, “Don’t make them feel that lucky.”

And just like that she pushed past them and into the back room, slamming the door behind her, and moving swiftly away from the sound of a feast and carnage.

It hadn’t felt far enough, somehow, and then Lily had found herself in a Diagon Alley that hadn’t yet learned to fear her name or shadow though it soon would. And it was sitting there, waiting for the day to quietly drip away from her, that Lily realized she felt old.

And that, once, a long time ago in a future she was waiting for, she had felt young.
As Time Goes By

In which Lily reflects upon destiny and the future she left behind, Tom and Lily engage in a game of jenga, and once again the world keeps turning.

Lily found herself staring out the window, looking past her own reflection and down onto the street below. It was still cold out, colder even than it had been near Valentine's Day, and whatever motivation Lily might have had to brave the weather seemed to have dripped from her completely.

The motivation to do anything, in fact, was drained from her, leaving an empty shell slumped by a window wondering how time could at once move so fast and so slowly. February, 1938, hadn't it just been August of 1937?

Everything was set, everything in place, and Lily felt caught in between it all, floating in the spacetime continuum like a message in a bottle sent out to sea in desperate search of land. There was no land though, only the endless ocean and its unmarked storms.

"Lily," a voice said in annoyance, pausing for a single moment in spellcasting, "You're being an eyesore again."

Lily didn't bother to respond, almost didn't process the comment at all, but just kept staring. Waiting, perhaps, for something. What that something was, how it could fix things, she didn't know.

"Honestly," the voice continued, "You've been sitting there for days now. Don't you have somewhere to be?"

She just wished that the world were different, that she was not the root of everything, that she had moved linearly through time like anyone else and had never come to this place. That maybe she could have been weaker, more selfish, and let Wizard Lenin have what he wanted, even if it meant…

"If you're going to just sit there, you could at least bother to watch me practice"—there was a small hmph of annoyance—"Instead of staring out the bloody window all the damn time."

Without warning, Lily found herself shoved against the window by magic, face pressed against the glass. Slowly, she turned her head and found a smirking eleven-year-old Tom Riddle brandishing his wand with all the confidence of Gilderoy Lockhart. Just like Gilderoy Lockhart, the eleven-year-old Tom Riddle had earned none of that confidence.

"Good, you're finally paying attention to me," Tom said with far too much smug glee as she glared back. "It's about damn time."

Well, there was a constant; it was always about damn time somebody paid attention to Tom Marvolo Riddle. What was it like, to see the world from his warped point of view?

"I was busy being depressed," Lily spat back, shoving herself off the wall and sitting back down in her chair with an angry sigh. There, that was the word for it: depressed. She'd probably been depressed for a good while, but Lily Riddle had tipped her over an edge she hadn't seen.

Even now, she felt it crawling up her spine and dragging her down with lead weights.

"Which sounds awfully important," Tom said. "Besides, what would you have to be depressed about?"
"You wouldn't understand."

He gave her a dull, rather dry look, and with a swish of his wand closed the spellbook he'd had open on the desk. "You're right, I probably don't. The concerns of peons have always been beneath me."

Lily Riddle, fate and despair, these were not the concerns of the peons. But, again, a young Tom Riddle would hardly understand that. It would take him fifty years to put that together, and even then, he would not be the one to realize what it meant to sow what you had thoughtlessly reaped.

"Don't give me that look," Tom said to Lily's wordless response. "Honestly, you're starting to get on my nerves. Which is a pity, as you're the only decent one around here."

"My apologies," Lily responded dully. "When I cease to fall into the bottomless pit of irony and despair, I'll be sure to give you a call."

He sighed, walked over, and sat on the bed next to her. "You really are in a mood, aren't you?"

The bottomless pit of irony was proving even more bottomless than she had thought if a young Tom Riddle was complaining about Lily's sulking mood swings. True, she had been… He had a point, but when all was said and done, Lily thought she deserved at least some time for self-reflection.

No, not deserved, perhaps needed; after all, whenever she tried anything else, it just appeared to end in disaster.

Finally, the arrogance drifted from Tiny Tom's features and genuine concern appeared to take its place. He looked uncertain, an odd look for him, as well as a little afraid. He had never been in this position before, where the concerns of someone else suddenly concerned him, and knowing him, he had absolutely no idea what to do about it.

"What happened?" he finally asked. "You were fine a few days ago."

Yes, she had been, hadn't she? Or, at the very least, she'd been putting on a good enough show for them both. From his point of view, though, one day she'd walked out the door at god knew what time in the morning, tired but content, and then she'd walked back in stripped of all her facades and left with the unbearable truth of what she truly was and what she had created.

That's what it was, wasn't it?

That small glimpse at seeing Lily Riddle, not Lily pretending to be Lily Riddle, but Lily Riddle in her true origins and at her prime. Moved not by greed, by ambition, but simply by the dictations of fate and a prophecy borne through by her own memories. Lily had been Lily Riddle fifty years from now, and so Lily Riddle must exist in all her terrifying splendor. That was all, just that and nothing more, and it seemed so…

Horrible and pointless.

"I realized the horrible truth about destiny."

"Destiny?" Tom asked, blinking and then frowning in annoyance. "Since when do you have a destiny?"

"Destiny is written all over my face," Lily said, careful not to display the scar that an older Lily Evans wouldn't have.

"Truly," Tom responded, not looking impressed in the least, probably all too certain that he was the
one with the destiny and Lily was simply along for the ride. That, after all, was the lie he had always preferred and had destroyed so much to keep alive. Even when the bitter truth, that he was and had always been caught in Lily's gravitational pull, was undeniable.

"Well, what's this truth about destiny then?" Tom Riddle asked, inspecting his nails as if he was bored, as if this didn't concern him at all. The idea of showing his fears, his fears for another human being, on his face was likely an anathema to him.

"It might just be the worst thing in the world," she said calmly. "Oh, I don't mean that I've never heard that before—it was the main theme of Dune, after all—but I didn't understand it. Glorious destiny was thrust upon me from every corner, but even then, I didn't understand it. Now I do, that's all."

Eleanor Lily Potter, even in Lily's second year, felt like nothing now. Only a stepping stone as Lily trudged forward on the endless path of life. Strange, it was much worse—the Chamber had been far worse than anything that had happened here, and yet, it'd taken the overbearing burden of time travel to drive it home. Any attempt to break free, or to just end it altogether in the Chamber, ended in disaster.

"You really are shortsighted," Tom scoffed. "I have a destiny, you know, and I certainly won't be hiding from it like a coward."

"Won't you?" Lily asked, but then, after a second's thought he was right. He had hidden from the truth, yet, but he hadn't hidden from his own ambition or the place he sought in the world. He believed in the destiny he had carved out for himself, no matter where it had taken him, even though it had taken him inside her mind for over a decade.

"No, I won't," he said. "But don't worry, if you do have a destiny, it probably has to do with me."

"Right," Lily said drily, "Because you insist we're going to get married."

She'd like to see that—well, Wizard Trotsky was still probably into that, but the other two? She could just imagine Wizard Lenin's face as he bent down on one knee and tried to live up to the promises his eleven-year-old romantic self had made so long ago. Funny, wasn't it, how he'd never once brought that up?

"What, are you planning on doing anything better?"

"Well..." Lily trailed off, and for the first time in days, her mind cleared. "I don't know."

The future, the 1992 which she had left behind...she didn't know what was going to happen after that. There was a prophecy that didn't feature her, a godfather that Death had hinted at, but beyond that there was nothing. Lily had thought that the 1930's would be a chance to get away from her woes of the present, but if anything, she now realized they cemented the future.

Whatever happened back there, whatever her fragmented relationship with Wizard Lenin, her expulsion from Hogwarts, Eleanor Lily Potter in all her glory, and whatever still waited for her, at the very least she didn't know the answer. In the future, no matter the shackles or prophecy, Lily was free.

"You're right," she said, unable to help the grin growing on her face, "I'd forgotten, I really can do anything back there."

She'd convinced herself, through the expectations of others and herself, through the roles she felt she had to play, that she was just as chained there as she was here. But that wasn't true. She didn't have
to go to Hogwarts, wouldn't go to Hogwarts, and she'd patch things up with Wizard Lenin and help him behind the scenes.

If he could bend the world to his will, defy death through horcruxes, then surely, she could do no less.

"Good, you're looking better," Tom said, sliding back into his typical haughty tone now that Lily seemed to have found her footing once again.

Lily grinned back at him, then felt her smile slip away. 1938, it was late February of 1938. Tom Riddle and Lily were friends, and Lily Riddle had been established. Wasn't that all she'd come here for? Was there anything left?

By all rights, Lily suddenly realized, she had been finished here weeks ago with the future waiting for her.

Except…

"Hey," Lily said suddenly, "Sorry about moping about for the last few days, my existential despair kind of caught up with me."

Tom scoffed wordlessly, looking very unimpressed, but Lily paid no mind as she summoned a box of Jenga from the ether. "To make up for it, you want to play a game?"

"A game?" Tom asked, eyeing the box dubiously. "What kind of a game is that?"

"The best of games: Jenga," Lily said with a grin.

"Don't you mean chess?"

"Nonsense, even Death secretly prefers Jenga." Lily removed the wooden blocks from the box and carefully arrayed them into the tower. Tom watched, clearly unamused and unimpressed, but he didn't knock it down either, and when Lily motioned, he took a seat on the floor across from her with the tower between them.

"It's not hard," Lily said. "All you do is remove blocks, one at a time, until it falls over."

"And this is supposed to be better than chess?" he asked, clearly once again doubting Lily's intelligence. But then, he wouldn't understand, not now and not years from now, either. Wizard Lenin's world was one of chess boards, it was how he understood things, and you either played for Dumbledore or else for him, the white or the black with all the rest of them pawns.

He didn't understand that life wasn't the chessboard, it was the tower, where fate connived into forcing you to remove one piece at a time, working with a skeleton of what you had been previously given, and yet hoping the tower would remain standing all the same.

There were no sides, there were no winners or losers, there was only the tower and what you could build from it.

With that, Lily nudged out a piece and placed it on top, watching as Tom did the same, moving instinctively towards the loose middle pieces that didn't bear weight.

"You really do have the worst taste sometimes," Tiny Tom pouted as Lily took her turn again. "This is a waste of my time."
"I'm not sure time's a thing that can be wasted," Lily said, delicately placing the block even as the tower began its dangerous wobbling, signifying that the endgame was swiftly approaching. "At least, not like this."

"It is when I could be practicing magic instead," Tom scoffed. "You realize that I could win this game completely with magic? I could just have them float in space and they'd never fall over."

"You could also cheat at chess by moving pawns like bishops," Lily responded easily, "But that defeats the purpose."

"What purpose? This game is endless and pointless."

Yes, like Death once said, it was rather like life. More, Lily thought to herself, it was her life. She had started with a tower, removed blocks at a time from her past, and now sought to build off its wobbling foundation.

For once, perhaps for the first time since she'd started all of this, that thought didn't terrify her. The blocks, after all, were still the same. Even removed from the tower, they weren't gone, just misplaced.

She and Wizard Lenin would find each other again in the future. Suddenly, here and now, she was sure of it.

"Oh, look at that," Tom said as the tower collapsed, the ruins of wooden blocks loudly clattering against one another as they fell to the floor, "It fell over."

Tom picked up his wand, swished it with a casual, "Wingardium Leviosa," and neatly deposited the blocks back inside their container. Once again, he looked far too proud of what he himself had confessed were nothing more than parlor tricks.

Still, that was who he was right now, and to some extent who he'd be even when he divided his soul three-fold. He would be fine without her, no matter what he thought and no matter what happened to his different halves. Even if Wizard Trotsky held this forever against her, even if it poisoned Wizard Lenin, time was not over yet. They would move on.

As Lily, herself, would move on.

"You'll do great and terrible things at Hogwarts," Lily said, smiling fondly at Tom who, looking back at her in surprise, flushed something awful.

"What the hell is that supposed to mean?" he asked huffily, attempting to look as if he were not unduly flattered. He failed miserably.

"I mean that this destiny of yours, whatever it is you think you're going to do, I believe in it." Even if he didn't accomplish it in fifty years, even if he tore himself apart in attempting to reach it, she still believed in it the same way the Tom Riddle of this time did.

"Of course," Tom huffed, crossing his arms and looking pointedly away from her. "After all, I'm not like the rest of them. What I want I always end up getting eventually."

Then he paused for a moment and slowly looked back. "You really aren't coming then? To Hogwarts with me, I mean."

"Believe me," she said, "I'd only get in your way."
What a world that would have been, but if she overshadowed him in the future she would do more than that here. He needed room to grow, to become the greatest student Hogwarts had ever seen, and Lily suddenly knew that he couldn't have done that if she had been in his way. Even though he never would agree, might never see it for himself, the reason Lily had left him in 1938 was not simply because history told her to, but because he needed his own time in the sun.

That, Lily thought, was what it meant for him to become himself.

She made a decision, stood as well, and reached out a hand towards him. "You have my word: I'll be here until September, when you set foot on the Hogwarts express."

Hesitantly, he took it and gripped it too tightly. He stared deep into her eyes, that blue still so arresting even on his young face. "I will see you again."

It was both a question and a demand, Tom Riddle bending the universe through sheer force of will again, and for all that he would look for her too early and in all the wrong places, he wasn't wrong either. Of course Tom Riddle would see her again, for all that Lily was not quite as bound by the future or Eleanor Lily Potter as she thought, that, at least, would always be true.

And in September, when another summer had passed by and the Hogwarts Express rolled out, she would watch it move north out of the station long past when the billowing smoke of the engine was out of sight.

And even though Tom, so young, would not have seen it and wouldn't understand, Lily would think of the ending of Casablanca as she waited on the platform alone for this Tom Riddle before Wizard Lenin, who she would never see again.

"Last night we said a great many things," Lily might say to the departed train. "You said I was to do the thinking for both of us. Well, I've done a lot of it since then, and it all adds up to one thing: you're getting on that plane with Victor where you belong."

Only, unlike Ilsa, Tom Riddle had no idea that he was leaving Rick’s American Café or the city of Casablanca. He would have a vague notion of Lily's absence, but he wouldn't believe in it; only time itself would compound that into a sense of betrayal when in truth she had never left him at all.

"Inside of us, we both know you belong with Victor. You're part of his work, the thing that keeps him going. If that plane leaves the ground and you're not with him, you'll regret it. Maybe not today. Maybe not tomorrow, but soon and for the rest of your life."

"We'll always have Paris," Lily might say, but meaning something more than a city she'd never been to, "We didn't have, we, we lost it until you came to Casablanca. We got it back last night."

In the present moment, Tom Riddle shrugged off this touching and intense scene, instead returning to his books, and asking if Lily wouldn't please watch him this time and could she give him some pointers on Apparition already because, surely, it couldn't be that difficult.

"But I've got a job to do, too. Where I'm going, you can't follow. What I've got to do, you can't be any part of."

The world, destiny, everything Lily had feared and loathed and loved would wait for them. Someday, long after Tom Riddle had given up hope of ever finding them again, they would wait for them both.

"Ilsa, I'm no good at being noble, but it doesn't take much to see that the problems of three little people don't amount to a hill of beans in this crazy world."
She could picture what he'd become so clearly, even staring at him now, the good, the bad, and the ugly. As always, seeing as he was made her miss what he'd become, but for the first time she wondered if she'd miss what he was too.

"Someday, you'll understand that."

And the Lily on the station in September of 1938 would tip the bowler hat she'd brought for the occasion, smile fondly at the railroad tracks paving the road to Hogwarts, and bid everything he once was farewell. "Here's looking at you, kid."

End Notes

A warning that this one is also... not for everyone. Now, a clarification on what I mean by absurdism here. I'm following the classic definition of absurdism which is the attempt to find meaning in a world in which there is none. At its heart, that's what this story centers on more than anything else. So while it is certainly humorous from time to time this is more the pleasant veneer that Lily our strange narrator has painted over her world for us.

Beyond that comments, kudos, and bookmarks are greatly appreciated.

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